

Pre-NSW and CHOGM Science and Technology Symposium for Uganda

Science, Technology & Innovation: Key Drivers for Socio-Economic Transformation, Wealth Creation and Improved Livelihoods

(www.uncst.go.ug, www.east-sym.org – under construction)

From 13 to 15 September, 2007, Uganda will be holding a national science and technology symposium at the Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST).

Context:

As African countries seek to develop their national S&T policies and R&D capacity the international community can provide support in helping countries build STI capacity which has become a major priority for G8 countries. At the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, leaders agreed to substantial increases in support for research and development, and at the recent G8 summit in Germany, there were calls for those commitments to be reiterated. In 2006 the World Bank announced a \$30 million loan to support scientific development in Uganda. The project is the latest effort from the Millennium Science Initiative¹, which promotes the development of world-class scientific talent in developing nations. The credit will help increase the number and quality of scientists produced by Uganda's universities and research centres, and will boost the country's scientific and technological productivity in industrial, agricultural and other sectors². And in the coming years, the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) is doubling its support to African research and development.

In parallel to the international attention, there is an ongoing debate within the African S&T community itself of the role of S&T, the constraints, the priority areas and the key issues to be addressed, in addition to calls for Africa to increasingly invest in R&D. In 2006, the African Union (AU) and NEPAD published the Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA) for Science and Technology, and the 2007 African Union (AU) meeting of Heads of State in Addis Ababa dedicated a large part of its agenda to S&T capacity issues in Africa. This is just one of many on-going pan-Africa, regional and national initiatives that aim to build Africa's indigenous S&T capacity. On-line forums too, such as the Discussion List on Science, Technology and Innovation for Development in Africa (sti4d)³, and the Innovation Policy group⁴ are informal yet powerful forums that are uniting the African S&T community with the Diaspora for wide ranging discussions that stimulate creativity and action.

One of the strands to the discussions that are taking place concerns the disarticulation between the needs of society, particularly in the private sector and in industry on the one hand, and the provision of scientific knowledge and human resources from the education sector (from primary to tertiary) on the other. There is a widely held perception that Africa's needs are not being fully addressed by the education sector. One of the symptoms is a severe skills

¹ Millennium Science Initiative: <http://www.msi-sig.org/msi.html>

² SciDev.Net: <http://www.scidev.net/content/news/eng/us30m-millennium-science-initiative-for-uganda.cfm>

³ <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/sti4d-africa>

⁴ InnovationPolicy@yahoogroups.com

shortage, and the reasons cited are multiple, ranging from inadequate capacity in the classroom to the predominance of a sustainable development and northern research agenda driven by donors that fails to take account of Africa's domestic requirements.

As Uganda seeks to accelerate its economic growth and social-well being, the central role of science and technology in this process is being emphasised. This comes at a time of greatly heightened attention by the global community to the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in economic and social development. The Commission for Africa report⁵ and the UN Millennium Development Goals report⁶ are just two of the more prominent international calls to action, both arguing that building STI capacity should be an essential element of every country's strategy for poverty reduction, for achieving the MDGs and producing a more knowledge-intensive economy.

A recent international forum on STI for development⁷ held in Washington responded to the calls for action in the CfA and UN MDG reports and one of the outcomes of that forum included a call for regional forums of a similar nature. The proposed symposium is a response to that call for Uganda, and for the immediate region.

CHOGM

The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) takes place in Kampala, Uganda from 23-25 November 2007 with the theme of 'Transforming Commonwealth societies to achieve political, economic and human development'. In preparation for CHOGM, the Commonwealth Foundation is organising the Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF), from 19 to 22 November, 2007, with the theme "Realising People's Potential". This forum will provide civil society and all non-state actors with an opportunity to debate issues relating to the CHOGM theme, and to present statements to Commonwealth Foreign Ministers and Heads of Government. Recognising the need to extend opportunities for peoples' participation beyond Kampala, a series of local and regional meetings on substantive subjects is underway. A successful workshop on the impacts of climate change in Uganda took place on 10 November 2006. This same framework provides an excellent opportunity for Uganda to showcase its engagement in promoting scientific and technological capacity to Commonwealth leaders.

Symposium Goal:

The goal is to facilitate the process of evidence-based policy making in favour of policies that create an enabling environment for the education sector, and for HE particularly to increase its relevance by meeting the needs of society in addressing the S&T skills and knowledge agendas. The symposium will address the role, needs and opportunities of African businesses, and the changes required in [tertiary] education institutions if they are to develop effective synergies with the science and technology sector.

Purpose:

⁵ Our Common Interest: <http://www.commissionforafrica.org/english/report/introduction.html>

⁶ UN Millennium Development Goals report: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

⁷ STI Global Forum, February 13-15, 2007: <http://web.worldbank.org>

The symposium provides a forum to examine the centrality of S&T to economic development, the need for Higher Education reform and engagement between academia and enterprise, to examine the relationship with the AU and NEPAD HE and S&T processes, the impact of science and technology on social and economic transformation, and particularly to continue the debate on the disarticulation between supply and demand of scientific skills and knowledge by bringing together, under a single roof, senior Ugandan and regional speakers from academia, industry, government and civil society.

- articulation of the need for HE reform and engagement between academia and enterprise;
- careful assessment of the relationship with the AU and NEPAD agenda and S&T, HE, and S&T processes
- examining the impact of science and technology on social and economic transformation,
- continued debate on the disarticulation between supply and demand of scientific skills and knowledge by bringing together, under a single roof, senior Ugandan and regional speakers from academia, industry, government, and civil society.

For the host country, Uganda, the symposium is well timed:

- Coming shortly ahead of CHOGM, the symposium provides an excellent platform for Uganda to showcase its engagement and achievements in S&T to the region and to Commonwealth Heads of State.
- Close alignment between the objectives of Uganda's MSI project and those of the symposium presents an opportunity for synergy and close cooperation with local and international stakeholders.
- Timed to immediately precede Uganda's National Science Week (NSW), a significant component of the MSI project, the symposium and NSW organisers have agreed to collaborate to use the symposium as a mechanism for promoting NSW activities.
- Coming shortly after this years' G8 meeting in Heiligendamm at which the world will be looking to leaders to fulfil their promises made at the 2005 summit in Gleneagles, the symposium is well timed to allow delegates to reflect on the outcomes of that summit.

Specific objectives:

- To provide a launch platform for Uganda's National Science Week and promote the objectives of Uganda's Millennium Science Initiative project;
- To raise the profile of science and technology in Uganda;
- To identify and discuss areas where Universities and other tertiary institutions can enhance the role of Science and Technology for social transformation & development;
- To share and exchange experiences of success stories / models and devise strategies for replication;
- To suggest innovative approaches of linking scientific research with technological advancement to support industry, commerce and improve service delivery;
- To facilitate partnerships and stimulate evidence-based project proposals to respond to the increasing availability of competitive research grants for S&T.

Outcomes:

- A contribution to the body of evidence available to decision makers on the links between STI and economic development, increasing the success rate in the formulation and implementation of informed S&T and HE policy.
- The profile of the MSI Project and the entire science and technology sector in Uganda is raised.
- A communiqué to Commonwealth Heads of State at their November meeting in Kampala on the centrality of STI to economic and social development.
- Outputs of this symposium will feed into and help to frame discussions at the COVIDSET 2007 meeting taking place in South Africa⁸ and will also animate the CPF workshop on Knowledge and Innovation for Development.
- Symposium proceedings, including a synthesis report will be made available on the symposium website.

Symposium Sub-Themes

1. The centrality of science, technology and innovation to societal and economic transformation: examples from the local and international community.
2. Best practices in Technology Transfer for Social Transformations.
3. The science and technology continuum. From school to university.
4. Institutional arrangements for science, technology, and innovation: The Uganda Millennium Science Initiative (MSI) project
5. Community service & outreach (local, regional, international): how universities serve communities and communicate S&T.
6. Engagement between the tertiary education sector and the private sector in S&T: articulation of supply and demand – an industry perspective.
7. Creating functional linkages among STI, wealth creation and improved livelihoods.

Target audience

A total participation of 150 persons is anticipated. The organisers are keen to engage with as wide an audience as is feasible and to that end, the following constituencies are invited to provide delegates: the secondary and tertiary education sectors, private enterprise, policy makers, researchers, youth (young professionals and students), ST & HE ministries, parliaments, civil society, government agencies and parastatals.

Symposium partners

The symposium is being held under the auspices of the Commonwealth People's Forum, hosted by MUST and organised as a partnership between the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, MUST, the University of Makerere, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the Commonwealth Foundation (CF), The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) and The British Council (BC) (Uganda office).

⁸ www.ansticonference.org

Symposium format

The symposium will take place from 13 to 15 September, 2007. The event will begin with an early registration and a cocktail reception. The morning of day one is dedicated to introductions and words of welcome from hosts and guests of honour, and a keynote presentation from a distinguished national/international speaker. During the afternoon of day one and the morning of day two there will be six to seven consecutive themed panels with Q&A sessions. Themes follow the subjects outlined above. The afternoon of day two will be taken up with preparation of a symposium communiqué to be carried forward to UNCST, CPF and CHOGM, a keynote speech and final presentations by organisers.