CONCEPT NOTE

ON THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE AFRICA VIRTUAL AND E-UNIVERSITY
1. Introduction

The African Union has adopted its Agenda 2063, which is the continent’s collective vision and roadmap for the next 50 years. The Agenda 2063 recognizes Science, Technology and Innovation as one of the major drivers and enablers for achieving development goals of the African Union and its Member States. The Agenda articulates that Africa’s sustained growth, competitiveness and economic transformation will require investments in new technologies and innovations including in the areas of education, health and bio-sciences, agriculture, and clean energy.

One of the aspirations of Agenda 2063 is the need to catalyse an Education and Skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation, with the ultimate aim of building knowledge, human resources, capabilities and skills for Africa’s future. The Agenda envisages developing a world class human capital to drive Africa’s economic and technological transformation through universal access to quality education. From early childhood education to primary, secondary, technical, vocational and higher education, Africa is expected to witness a true renaissance, through investments made, by governments and the private sector, in education, science, technology, research and innovation. In the Africa of 2063, at least 70% of all high school graduates will have access to tertiary education with 70% of them graduating in the sciences, technology and innovation programmes. With the high growth rate of Africa’s population and its relative youthfulness, the challenges of achieving the education and skills development goals of Agenda 2063 are immense.

The Africa Virtual and E-University is one of AU’s flagship projects that has been proposed for addressing the Agenda 2063 need for accelerating development of human capital, science and technology and innovation through increasing access to tertiary and continuing education in Africa by capitalizing on the digital revolution and global knowledge; reaching large numbers of students and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously- anywhere, anytime; and by consolidating African initiatives and strategies on accelerated development of human capital; science, technology and innovation.
The objectives of the Africa Virtual and E-University are as follows:

1. Increase access to quality tertiary and continuing education in Africa by reaching large numbers of students and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously and developing relevant and high quality Open, Distance and e-learning (ODeL) resources;
2. Ensure the prospective African student a guaranteed access to the University from anywhere in the world and anytime (24 hours a day, 7 days a week), and countries of their choice;
3. Develop infrastructure, human and financial support systems to facilitate the effective use of ODeL in rural and disadvantaged urban areas;
4. Enhance the pedagogical and research capacity of African tertiary educational institutions;
5. Raise the global standing of the Pan African University as well as build and sustain partnerships with institutions that can support the AU Agenda 2063 mission; and
6. Promote development and delivery of responsive, demand-driven education programs.

2. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The African Union aspiration is for a well-educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society. In this respect, the primary purpose of Africa Virtual and E-University is to maximize student access to quality, relevant and credible degree programs through the use of a variety of digital technologies as follows:

i. Aspire to provide every qualified candidate within the continent particularly women the opportunity to access tertiary and continuing education in Africa, and earn degrees and certificates that prepare them for employment, knowledge generation, innovation and entrepreneurship;
ii. Ensure that support services are available to distant learners and faculty to assist in providing research-driven and evidence-based quality education that are conveniently accessed;
iii. Encourage and optimize the use of emerging, new and adaptive technologies for pedagogy, content delivery, research and management;
iv. Offer the African Diaspora and the international academic community an innovative continental framework to contribute towards the development of higher education and research in Africa;
v. Promote inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary academic and research programs integrated into development policy at continental, regional and national levels;
vi. Ensure sustained systematic assessment of courses, programs, and services to improve the university’s mission;
vii. Enhance Africa’s scientific productivity and contribution to the global knowledge economy;
viii. Work to link the Pan African e-Network (another agenda 2063 Priority project) and the Africa Virtual and E-University initiative.

3. Recommended Business Model for the African Virtual and e-University

The Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST) established a task force comprising of the African Virtual University (AVU), University of South Africa (UNISA), the African Centre for Distance Education (ACDE), the Department of HRST and Department of Infrastructure and Energy. The aim of the Task force was to conceptualise and make recommendations towards the development of the Africa Virtual and E-University, a flagship initiative of the AU to support the realisation of Agenda 2063.

The Task Force held its first meeting on 17th and 18th March 2015 at the AUC Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and recommended for a technical study to explore three possible business models for the Africa Virtual and E-University, as follows:

- **OPTION 1**: Africa Virtual and E-University as the Open and Distance-learning (ODL) arm of the PAU
- **OPTION 2**: Transforming the AVU into the Africa Virtual and E-University
- **OPTION 3**: The Africa Virtual and E-University as an independent University

The Department of HRST held a meeting on the 1st of April 2016 to discuss the ODeL model for Africa Virtual and E-University. Considering that decision making should be based on a clear and informed understanding of each of the proposed models, the department examined the merits and demerits of each of the options, whereupon, the Department unanimously recommended the first option; -the Africa Virtual and E- University as the Open and Distance e-Learning arm of the African Union’s Pan African University. This choice has a number of obvious advantages over the other options, which can lead to much faster implementation and operationalization, such as:

1. Does not require major political decisions for establishment
2. Has in place administrative and governance structures including Council, Senate and Rectorate
3. Clear visibility of ownership by AU
4. No need for new Statutes
5. Could be hosted at the PAU Rectorate
6. Covers cross-cutting academic programs that do not need be to defined by any thematic area
It was proposed that the Africa Virtual and E-University be appropriately renamed in consistence with other PAU institutes. Further, it was proposed that the Institute be located at the Impending PAU Rectorate Headquarters in Yaoundé, Cameroon and also modalities shall be sought on how to link Institute with the Pan African E-Network, another Agenda 2063 flagship project within the Department of Infrastructure and Energy. In addition, the Pan African University Network (PAUNET) shall be operationalized within the Africa Virtual and E-University. It is important to note that the Africa Virtual and E-University is a member of the CESA ICT in Education Cluster, where it benefits from and contributes to strategic partnerships in this area.