

CONCEPT NOTE

Continental Forum on Diaspora, Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Africa

2019

Background:

The African Diaspora is an integral constituency of the African Union and their participation in the Union is a fundamental institutional imperative. Article 3(q) of The Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2003) expressly invites the African Diaspora to participate as an important part to the building of the Union. Furthermore, the Declaration of the Global Diaspora Summit (2012) recognized the need to build sustainable partnerships between the African continent and the African diaspora through sustainable dialogue and effective collaboration with the governments and peoples of different regions of the world where the diaspora are located.

The African Union Designation of the African Diaspora as the 6th Region of Africa

The African Union Commission through its Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) has instituted a program of Regional Consultative Conferences (RCCs) as a vehicle to enable the African Union to consult with the various Diaspora stakeholders around the world to give practical meaning to the designation of the African Diaspora as the 6th Region of the continent.

Through this mechanism, CIDO has established and/or supported a growing number of AU-affiliated diaspora professional networks around the world, including in the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and Europe.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025

In the bid to create a new African citizen who will be an effective change agent for the continent's sustainable development as envisioned by the African Union and its Agenda 2063, the African Union Commission has developed a comprehensive ten-year Continental Education Strategy for Africa for the period 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25).

This strategy is driven by the desire to set up a "qualitative system of education and training to provide the African continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values and therefore capable of achieving the vision and ambitions of the African Union.

Those responsible for the implementation of the CESA 16-25 are mandated to “reorient Africa’s education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels”.

At the operational level, the CESA draws on seven (7) pillars supporting twelve (12) strategic objectives.

The seven foundation pillars of the CESA 16-25 are as follows:

1. Strong political will to reform and boost the education and training sector.
2. Peaceful and secure environment
3. Gender equity, equality and sensitivity throughout the education and training systems
4. Resource mobilization with emphasis on domestic resources
5. Strengthen institutional capacity building through
 - i. Good governance, transparency, and accountability
 - ii. A coalition of actors to enable a credible participatory and solid partnership between government, civil society and the private sector.
6. Orientation and support at different levels and types of training
7. The creation and continuous development of a conducive learning environment.

The pillars support twelve strategic objectives as follows:

- ✓ Strategic Objective 1: Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education
- ✓ Strategic Objective 2: Build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, so as to expand access to quality education
- ✓ Strategic Objective 3: Harness the capacity of ICT to improve access, quality and management of education and training systems
- ✓ Strategic Objective 4: Ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonization processes across all levels for national and regional integration
- ✓ Strategic Objective 5: Accelerate processes leading to gender parity and equity
- ✓ Strategic Objective 6: Launch comprehensive and effective literacy programmes across the continent to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy
- ✓ Strategic Objective 7: Strengthen the science and math curricula in youth training and disseminate scientific knowledge and culture in society

- ✓ Strategic Objective 8: Expand TVET opportunities at both secondary and tertiary levels and strengthen linkages between the world of work and education and training systems
- ✓ ***Strategic Objective 9: Revitalize and expand tertiary education, research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness***
- ✓ Strategic Objective 10: Promote peace education and conflict prevention and resolution at all levels of education and for all age groups
- ✓ Strategic Objective 11: Improve management of education system as well build and enhance capacity for data collection, management, analysis, communication, and use
- ✓ ***Strategic Objective 12: Set up a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate and support activities resulting from the implementation of CESA 16-25.***

The CESA 16-25, therefore, provides the overarching continental framework for all education stakeholders, including educators, scientists and researchers in the African diaspora, to channel efforts, resources and networks towards the achievement of improved education outcomes on the continent. The proposed continental workshop is designed to support the operationalization of the following strategic objectives of the CESA 16-25:

- ✓ **Strategic Objective 9:** Revitalize and expand tertiary education, research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness
- ✓ **Strategic Objective 12:** Set up a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate and support activities resulting from the implementation of CESA 16-25.

Higher Education and Scientific Research in Africa: Statement of the Problem

Higher education and scientific research are identified within the CESA 16-25 as two of the three most critical gaps identified by the member states of the African Union in the education sector, alongside Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET).

Despite this expressed need, higher education and scientific research on the continent are hampered at several key levels, of which the following three are highlighted with respect to the present proposal: access, quality/equity, and structural factors.

Access:

Access to tertiary education in Africa stands at about 7%, according to the African Union; ranking the continent among the least-performing regions of the world. This is in spite of significant progress recorded in this area over recent decades. Of this number, 25% of students are enrolled in private institutions, in a reflection of the increasingly important role of private sector actors in the education sector on the continent.

In addition to the limited access, the CESA 16-25 identifies a correlated problem of market relevance with regard to the education received at this level. Specifically, the enrollment

landscape continues to be dominated by the humanities and social sciences at the expense of science and technology, resulting in an over-supply of skills and qualifications that do not necessarily correspond to the requirements of the modern-day economy.

Quality and Equity:

Quality and relevance of tertiary education continue to present some of the most pervasive challenges in the education sector in Africa. The African Union assesses that post-graduate education on the continent remains underdeveloped and its contribution to research and innovation remains minuscule. According to the CESA 16-25, Africa contributes around 1% of global knowledge, the lowest in the world by some distance, and yet remains an exclusive consumer which further marginalizes it as a producer of knowledge. In addition, whatever growth has been recorded in recent decades in terms of access to higher education continues to grapple with considerable inequities in gender, social class, geographic location, minority groups, disability and other exclusionary conditions.

Structural Constraints:

The first of these relate to a lack of physical capacity to absorb the ever-increasing number of graduates of the secondary education systems on the continent. This challenge requires not only the expansion of physical infrastructure but also, critically, concerted investment in innovative modes of delivery, with a particular focus on distance and open/virtual learning employing modern ICT and other technological solutions. Secondly, and with particular relevance to the present proposal, tertiary education in Africa is confronted with an aging population of professors, educators and researchers. The African Union estimates that a sizeable proportion of the most experienced and most highly-trained faculty members in higher education institutions across the continent will reach retirement age in the coming years. There is therefore an urgent need for renewal of the faculty pool in institutions across Africa, an imperative that is complicated by sub-optimal working and living conditions of faculty and staff on the continent.

Objectives and Outcomes of the Symposium:

The Continental Forum on Diaspora, Higher Education, Research and Innovation will consolidate multiple goals set forth within the Continental Education Strategy for Africa relating to higher education, scientific research and innovation. It is designed to provide practical implementation of the operational targets set forth within Objectives 9 and 12 of the CESA 16-25, relating to the improvement of higher education and the building of stakeholder coalitions on education, respectively.

The Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union Commission, in its capacity as the technical unit responsible for diaspora engagement, and Carleton University's Institute of African Studies will convene a multi-stakeholder coalition consisting of: educators; policy makers; regional and continental institutions; and industry groups around a process to develop a road map for national, regional, continental, and trans-national action towards the achievement of the strategic objectives of the CESA 16-25 (Objectives 9 and 12).

The Forum aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improved situational understanding of the higher education sector in Africa through detailed distillations of lessons learned from previous interventionist initiatives, existing gaps, challenges and opportunities in interventions of diaspora stakeholders in the various disciplines of higher education and research with strategic importance to the continent, including STEM, health, technology, the humanities and the social sciences.
- Enhanced awareness of current diaspora-led interventions in higher education and research in Africa through the mapping of diaspora engagement in these areas. The consolidated map will provide a unified overview of who is doing what, where, and with whom; and will enable the development of case studies to highlight successful initiatives and to identify opportunities for scaling-up. Diaspora interventions will be highlighted from the regions below and consolidated into one map:
 1. Australia and the Pacific
 2. Asia (without China)
 3. China
 4. South America
 5. Europe
 6. North America and the Caribbean
- Enhanced participation of the African diaspora in the implementation of the CESA-16-25 through the development of operational mechanisms to convert existing adhoc initiatives into permanent, structured diaspora-led knowledge exchange programs.
- Improved coordination between higher education and research professionals in Africa and their counterparts in the diaspora through the creation and operationalization of trans-spatial networks of academics and researchers in the various disciplines of strategic importance to the continent.
- Improved outcomes in diaspora-led knowledge exchange programs in Africa through the development of operational frameworks on intercultural competencies in diaspora engagement.
- Increased innovation in the African education sector through a definition of the possible role of the African academic diaspora in the realization of the AU's Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA 20-24) with a view to mapping deliverable agendas for the diaspora towards transforming the idea of innovation universities in Africa to reality.

Structure and Format:

The Forum will take place over a 3-day period. The technical program will combine a multi-dimensional methodology including individual and panel presentations from existing diaspora networks in higher education and research, small technical working groups and expert panels designed to promote knowledge exchanges.

Participation

The Forum will constitute the first major continental activity from an African Union institutional framework to provide operational follow-up to the Dakar Summit of 2015 and the CESA 16-25 from the specific context of African diaspora engagement.

The Forum will elaborate a continental platform for the achievement of targets set forth in the strategic objectives of the CESA 16-25 with respect to the promotion of tertiary education and the establishment and operationalization of stakeholder coalitions in support of the implementation of the continental strategy.

Accordingly, the symposium will bring together participants from all relevant stakeholder groups, including the African Union Commission, AU member state focal agencies for education, Regional Economic Communities, African diaspora representatives from all regions, and strategic industry partners including the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Pan-African Doctoral Academy (PADA), the Pan African University (PAU), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the Federation of African Women Educators (FAWE).

The African Union delegation will be led by the Commissioner of Human Resources Science and Technology (HRST), the Director of the Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (CIDO), Institute of African Studies and serviced by technical staff from these departments.

The anticipated total number of participants is 40.