

AfricaLics network: enhancing learning through building innovation research capacity for Africa development



AFRICALICS

UNCTAD INNOVATION EXPERT MEETING

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www.acts.or.ke / www.africalics.org

Outline

- Background
- Overview of context that has informed AfricaLics activities
- How AfricaLics network is enhancing learning thro' innovation research capacity building

Background

- AfricaLics stands for - ***African Network for the Economics of Learning, Innovation and Competence Building Systems***
- It is the Africa chapter of *Globelics* (www.globelics.org)
- Is a network of scholars interested on how innovation and competence-building may be harnessed for development in Africa.
- Brings together established scholars, policy makers & practitioners with experience and understanding of STI in Africa – (*open to new members*)
- Aspires to become a network of scholars, policymakers and practitioners/entrepreneurs strongly rooted in African institutions
- Aim to establish meaningful collaborations becoming a **network of networks** that harnesses and consolidates the minimum base for STI research and policy making identified in the region.
 - create synergies with other regional networks or ongoing partnerships thus promotes South-South and North-South-North collaborations.

Context

STI training in Africa

- Disciplinary based with traditional S&T/ R&D
- Limited university training that isn't sector specific
- Questions regarding the form and level STI training should take (schools vs. universities)

STI in business in Africa

- Informal vs. formal sector
- Entrepreneurship vs. sustainability
- Economic growth vs. community poverty alleviation

STI in policy in Africa

- Systems thinking often missing
- Renewed interest in industrial policy
- Attempts to interrogate economic growth from poverty alleviation perspective

What this means for innovation capacity building initiatives pursued by policy networks

- We note that formal training at Universities extremely important for proper understanding of concepts, theories & methodologies so as to interrogate and adapt existing theories to African context.

But

- There is inadequacy of understanding of what is 'innovation' and training in 'innovation' in universities
 - The increasing examples of innovation hubs located in or linked to universities BUT predominately focused on traditional S&T/ R&D
 - A very small number of universities trying to mainstream innovation across all faculties – e.g. Univ of Dar es Salaam
- Poor/weak opportunities to analyze STI to support STI policy / analysis
 - There is need to think beyond innovation management training
 - Focus more on 'innovation and development' and how to make innovation socially inclusive and directed towards solving the problems facing Africa – especially the role of informal sector, youth and gender
 - Focus more on studies to ask questions about the power, politics, values and cultures behind decisions of scientists, engineers, academics, policymakers and communities with regards the promotion, development and use of 'technologies' and scientific knowledge.

Evidence from ongoing Africalics baseline survey

Lack or inadequate training and research in STI

- Nearly 40% of self-defined ‘innovation researchers’ have NO programmes at their institutions to teach innovation related subjects
- Over 70% of these researchers hold NO active research grants in the area of STI
- Nearly 60% of these researchers provide NO Masters or PhD supervision support
- Nearly 40% of respondents had received their highest level of education OUTSIDE Africa

Results

- Pervasive market and system failures for innovation in Africa
- Inadequacy of expertise for STI policy research/ analysis
 - Leads to advice and expertise from the more developed countries sometimes with little knowledge of African contexts
 - This can be unsustainable and expensive
- The research community around STI in Africa remains scattered and community social capital is still very low
- The analytical frameworks traditionally used to study STI usually do not take account of African unique context/realities
 - existing frameworks have missed the performance of economic structures characterized by a specialization in agriculture, mining and services sectors etc
 - a strong intertwining of formal and informal economic activities

These context specific challenges impact STI potential to harness Africa's economic development – Africalics was formed to respond to these challenges

AfricaLics network promoting learning through: building innovation research capacity in Africa

- Africalics launched in March 2012 in Dar, Tanzania
- A Model for low-cost Capacity Building – platform.
- Major objective: To promote the development of science technology and Innovation (STI) research capacity in Africa with strong links to users
 - Goal: enable African countries to develop the capacity to study, monitor and evaluate their innovation systems and to develop evidence-based policies for the betterment of society.

Africalics network - building innovation capacity & learning opportunities through targeted activities

Under current Sida grant - three main lines of action and activities aiming at research capacity building

I. Graduate and Research training

II. Incubating project organised research

III. Network formation

• Note - specific activities aimed at linking research in STI to public policies, the business community and other agents such as NGOs are to be covered by other leveraging funds e.g. from other donor organisations or respective governments

I. Graduate and research training–activities

Aim -develop community of STI practitioners, researchers and policy makers through:

- PhD Academies

- Africalics Academy events 2014 and 2015

- Annual conferences (bringing innovation scholars together)

- Globelics Conference in Addis in Oct 2014

- PhD supervisors training

- Seminar (training) for PhD supervisors in Africa to exchange experience on PhD supervision in the field of innovation and development

- Aim is to contribute to improved supervision of PhD students in Africa in the field of innovation studies

- Working with universities in Africa to strengthen existing and enable the creation of new:

- Model courses for Masters and PhD programmes in ‘innovation management’ *‘innovation and development’ / science and technology studies/ science studies*

- Different models being explored

- Supervision support (co-supervision)

II. Incubating project organised research

- Mapping the research landscape

- on-going and preliminary results are available

- Research partnership building

activities (e.g. Maputo workshop)

- Innovation research based projects/book projects through seed funds

- 17 applications from different Consortia have been received by AfricaLics Secretariat

- Building sustainable partnerships through these projects.

Research themes for Africalics

These were informed by stakeholders workshop in Dar es salaam in March 2012 -

1. The role of **gender**/women in Africa's innovation systems.
 2. The role of the **state** in promoting innovation and development
 3. **Work organization** and innovation in formal and **informal sector**.
 4. Overcoming **natural resource** curse through expanding manufacturing and **service** activities.
 5. National strategies to stimulate spill overs from **BRICS-presence** in Africa.
 6. **Engineering and design** capacity building and economic development in Africa.
 7. Building **Low-carbon** Innovation Systems.
 8. **Agroindustrial innovation** systems and food security.
 9. The role of **financial institutions** in relation to innovation including investment banks and microfinance
- ***Currently these are the themes supported under the Sida grant and informed the seed funding call. This implies that the immediate research projects will focus on these themes.***

III. Network formation

- Establishment and managing the Africalics website (www.africalics.org) linked to Globelics and other *Lics* websites (e.g. Lalics)
- online materials
- knowledge banks

AfricaLics related outputs

- Journals linked to Globelics/AfricaLics focusing on Africa:
 - African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development (**AJSTID**) www.ajstid.com
 - Ethiopian e-Journal for Research and Innovation Foresight (**Ee-JRIF**) www.nesglobal.org/eejrif4
 - Others....
- Link to other networks e.g. African Network for Solar Energy- www.ansole.org
- There is room for linking Africalics with other on-going initiatives (AU, Nepad, EAC, Ecowas, SADEC etc)
 - These need to re-enforce each other while drawing synergies

Summing up questions

For STI networks to enhance learning through STI research capacity in Africa:

- How can learning platforms like Africalics become organic sources of knowledge for innovation and development?
- How can we tap productively from global & regional research/policy networks?
- How can we make positive use of the presence of global/regional STI experts as a source of capacity building?
- How can we use engineers as entrepreneurs and engineering as bridge between science and business?
- How can we combine social inclusion and sustainability with innovation driven development?

Summing up questions

- How can Africalics stimulate a vibrant/robust STI research community as well as capacity building?
- How can we avoid the danger of Africalics becoming a normative platform for experimentation as opposed to being a source of multiple types of knowledge commensurate with levels of expertise & demand for knowledge?
- In addition to building research capacity and competence building; how can we go further to translate the accruing knowledge into impact (economic, social & environment etc)?

End

- **Thank you for your attention**
 - For more information about Africalics, visit;
 - www.globelics.org and www.africalics.org
 - Be on the look out for calls for upcoming Africalics activities like academies, conferences etc