AFRICA UNIVERSITIES' DAY CONCEPT NOTE

8-12 NOVEMBER 2021

THEME: BUILDING TECHNOLOGY BASED RESILIENT UNIVERSITIES NOW!

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the 2021 Africa Universities' Day is "***Building Technology Based Resilient Universities Now***". This theme is inspired by the fact that nineteen (19) months after the COVID-19 was declared a public pandemic, most African Universities seem to still be in a predicament about how to move towards a sustainable process of technology-supported teaching, learning, research, collaboration, and administrative operations.

When the COVID-19 broke out, most higher education institutions in African closed their operations and were unable to provide continuity to learning for their students in an equitable manner. During the mandatory closures directed by African Governments as part of measures to curb the spread of the virus, it was evident that African Universities were having difficulty in planning and implementing their long terms responses to the pandemic.

The roadmap towards a technology based resilient African University requires a multi-dimensional approach that considers visionary leadership with the right culture to drive institution-wide commitment; a well-defined digital transformation strategy; funding for technological infrastructure; solutions for internet connectivity; technology literacy for staff and students; skilled technical human resources (including e-pedagogical experts); quality open educational resources and interactive digital content, among others.

A technology based resilient university can be characterized as one that has developed and implements a sustainable digital transformation plan for all its processes. Digital transformation necessitates the change of a university's core business processes to meet its stakeholders' needs by taking advantage of technology and data. These key stakeholders in African Universities, are the students, academic faculty, administrative and support staff, alumni, partners, and others.

A typical example of a digital transformation process for improved students' experiences might encompass: (1) digital recruitment of students through effective use of social media; (2) cloud-hosted students' information management systems that are accessible via their mobile phones; (3) flexible digitally driven learning options and engagement of faculty to convert programs to blended models; (4) use of analytics to monitor and evaluate students' progress and (5) use of digital badges and certificates to boost career opportunities.

Some African Universities have gone back to face to face delivery, and others are substituting the face-to-face delivery with the use of PowerPoint presentations via zoom as their form of online learning management system. African Universities need support to address their inadequacies and rethink their strategies. Resources are required to support their adaptation to the changing digital world. Salient questions, such as - How are African Universities leveraging partnerships to share resources so that the costs to individual institutions are minimized? How are African

Universities evaluating technological innovations to enhance the achievement of their core mandates and improve their outreach initiatives? What can African Universities do to promote equitable access and inclusion of all indigenes on the continent irrespective of their residential locations or station in life? need to be discussed and solutions/roadmaps provided.

The 2021 Africa Universities Day will provide the right platform for deliberation on these questions, as they form a key part of the discussion points. We will focus on advocacy towards the support that is required to move our universities a step closer towards digital transformation and the sustainable implementation of their technology projects. Robust and resilient strategies are needed to ensure the survival of our institutions.

THE PROPOSED INITIATIVES TO SUPORT AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

1. Research studies in the areas of digital transformation of African Universities, transitioning to online learning, academic mobilities during pandemic situations, equity and online learning in Africa, among several other topics.
2. Regular calls for experts to write well researched guidance notes for use by African Universities as they transition their teaching and learning activities to online mode.
3. Developing and sharing generic plans and policies for digitizing teaching and learning activities. Such plans and policies could then be customized by African Universities to form part of their institutional strategies for moving online and using alternative methods of delivering their courses.
4. Facilitating online trainings for individual universities to support their faculty and students to be successful in online teaching and learning. These would be continental level capacity building and experience sharing programs among African Universities and other global Universities.
5. Collaborating with selected African Universities to federate around a pilot project to share digital resources, pertinent information, and open courses to building their capacities in e-learning implementation.
6. Leveraging the mandate and voice of AAU in African Higher Education to lobby and support African Universities to work with their National Research and Education Networks to strengthen their campus networks so that they provide virtual services to their academic and administration communities.
7. Lobbying African Vice Chancellors to make commitments regarding institutional budgets to sustain the costs of connectivity, e-resources, and digital literacy trainings.
8. Establishing an ***African eLearning Expert Group*** that can be mobilized to assist any African university that requires remote support in the areas of eLearning strategy development, teaching and learning online, online assessments, quality content, effective engagement of students, resource mobilization and other areas of support.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE AFRICA UNIVERSITIES' DAY

The Africa Universities' Day has been held on November 12 every year since 2006 when it was established as a day to celebrate the contributions of the Higher Education Sector to the development of the continent. Over the years, events in the form of exhibitions and lectures have been organized by the AAU Secretariat and AAU-member Institutions to observe the day.

OBJECTIVES OF THE AFRICA UNIVERSITIES' DAY CELEBRATIONS
1. Create awareness on the importance of higher education in Africa

2. Promote dialogue on how to improve higher education in Africa

3. Celebrate the success stories of higher education in Africa

CELEBRATION OF AFRICA UNIVERSITIES' DAY BY AAU MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

It is obligatory for all AAU member universities to commemorate the Africa Universities' Day with various activities. Each AAU member institution is invited to celebrate the Day by organizing a suitable forum for public dialogue as a means of raising awareness of the critical issues surrounding the selected theme. Alternatively, members can join the virtual events being organized by the AAU Secretariat and the Regional Offices (North Africa Regional Office and East Africa Regional Office).

We also encourage universities to arrange joint celebrations on this day. AAU recommends universities get involved by planning activities around the theme and inviting Ministries of Education, University Councils, Committees of Vice-Chancellors, other public and private universities in each country that are non-members of this Association, research institutions, the media and the general public, to join in the celebration to give visibility to the Day and to promote the higher education activities in each country.

After the event all institutions are requested to send reports to the AAU, including photographs on the celebration. These will be published on the AAU e-Newsletter and website.

ABOUT THE AAU
The Association of African Universities (AAU) is the apex organization and forum for consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa.

It represents the voice of Higher Education in Africa and supports networking by institutions of Higher Education across the five regions of Africa. The AAU has its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, and was founded in Rabat, Morocco, on November 12, 1967 – following initial planning and discussions held at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. The AAU has a current membership of over 400 members, and still counting. The AAU provides a platform for collaboration, networking, joint research, co-reflection, consultation, debates, and co-operation on diverse issues pertaining to higher education.