



Role of African HEIs and National Research and Educational Networks in African Union Continental Education Strategy for African, CESA 16-25

The African higher Education space is faced with many challenges in its quest to improve access to education, deliver relevant education, collaborate to carry out research, and make meaningful input into the continental growth. One major challenge has been the high cost of internet bandwidth and its accompanying infrastructure. This makes using the internet in any sphere of education a prohibitive venture. The AAU through the Research and Education Unit (RENU) has pushed and supported the setting up of National Research and Education Networks (NREN) with a view to helping HEIs get the support to have such services at a far reduced cost and to increase access to education, improve the quality of delivery and enhance collaboration between researchers across the continent. This opportunity has largely not been taken up by the HEIs.

When the COVID19 pandemic struck, Africa HEIs were forced to find ways of delivering education online or shut down. The challenge of high-cost Internet connectivity could no longer be an excuse for non-delivery of education. A year and more beyond the pandemic, some institutions are still struggling to adapt to the new trends in delivering education largely because of the prohibitive cost of ICT infrastructure and Internet cost.

National Research and Education Network (NREN)

The purpose of the National Research and Education Network (NREN) is to set up autonomous bodies that will offer reliable, and very affordable fast internet connectivity to the HEIs in a country. This will also support connecting the HEIs in a country to each other. This comes in two phases

1. Building the physical infrastructure and connecting it to the undersea network cable (Main One), and
2. Sensitizing the human component (researchers) and encouraging them to make use of the facilities.

Related to these two objectives is one of the goals of the African Union Commission's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25) which seeks to improve quality and access to higher Education and to produce critical mass of qualified manpower to drive the development of the continent.

Continental Education Strategy for Africa 1026-2025

Initiated by the African Union commission, the purpose of the education strategy is to improve the training systems characterized by low quality of teaching and learning, inequalities and exclusion at all levels and bring coherence to the various sub-sectors. The goal is creating a system that addresses the needs of imparting knowledge, skills and values to respond to the socioeconomic demands of a dynamic 21st Century. The focus of this strategy to build capacities of Stakeholders in education and training in terms of their ability to formulate policy, plan and implement reforms. Under the CESA 16-25 is a sub-cluster for ICT, Libraries and **Universities network** and has the following goals;

- ✓ *Harness the capacity of ICT to improve access, quality and management of education and training systems by promoting the development of online contents considering African and local specificities. To also capitalize on existing and successful ICT-driven initiatives that enhance*



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access ... and create mobile and online education and training platforms and accessibility to all students regardless of their circumstances

- ✓ *Promote the collaboration among African Researchers and help create and embed contextualised knowledge in curricula. Furthermore, help build win-win partnerships among faculty across the continent and create a store bank of expertise and consolidate institutional linkages on the continent.*

Objectives of this Initiative

Some of the objectives sought under this initiative are to

- (a) create the enabling environment where access to research findings is key,
- (b) provide a means of disseminating new research and promote collaborative research by bring together the HEI communities through the following action points among others
 1. Advocacy to inform the HEIs about the existing ICT infrastructure
 2. Sensitise about the existence of the NRENs and the services they have for the universities
 3. Encourage tertiary institutions to join their NRENs
 4. Elicit active participation of VCs, presidents and rectors in governance of their NRENs
 5. Encourage VCs, presidents and rectors without NRENs to begin talking among their member with the objective of forming NRENs

Reason for Attending

The AfricaConnect 1-3 project sponsored by the European Union has extended the undersea cable to the doorsteps of many African countries thus reducing considerably the overhead cost of infrastructure. However, Universities are failing to tap into these gains.

I am inviting you as Rectors, VCs and Presidents to a meeting to discuss the theme: **Africa Union's Continental Educational Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) and the role of the HEIs and National Research and Educational Networks in Africa**. The discussion will also focus on how the Higher Education and Research Community in Africa should work to strengthen their NRENs, so they (NRENs) can provide critical ICT infrastructure and services to support research, teaching and learning towards attaining the mission of CESA 16-25 and consequently Agenda 2063.

As CEOs and main implementors of the CESA 16-25 agenda and major players of your National Research and Educational Networks (NRENs), I kindly urge you all to find time within your busy schedules to attend this important meeting that will take place on **21-22 February 2022, at the Long View Suites, Nairobi**

The AAU will continue to focus on building capacity and providing technical support to promote knowledge creation, dissemination, and management. We will focus on building capacity and pushing for cutting edge technical solutions that support and promote innovative research and bring them to all our members so you can deliver on your core mandate. We will work to bring researchers together and support the NRENs to provide value-added services for African HEIs.

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