

Influential university collaborations launched

Hope@Africa and Hope International, two related international networks set on jointly promoting human development and tackling major societal challenges in Africa and in the rest of the world, were recently launched in Stellenbosch.

Through the efforts of Hope@Africa, a collaboration between seven leading African universities, and Hope International, a collaboration between Stellenbosch University (SU) and four Swedish universities, the lives of potentially millions can be improved.

At the launch event at Stellenbosch University, Professor Russel Botman, SU rector and vice-chancellor, said that if there was ever an argument against the notion of "the university as ivory tower" this is it. "The partners in our networks - Hope@Africa and Hope International - share a strong conviction that universities should work together to change the world."

He added that Africa has seen good economic growth of late, but this must be translated into broad-based human development.

Africa needs 2 million new teachers

"Teachers are key in this process. According to UNESCO, Africa needs 2 million new teachers by 2015. There is also an urgent need to provide training for millions of current teachers who are either under- or unqualified. Clearly, universities should play a key role in improving the training and ongoing professional development of teachers. But conventional brick-and-mortar approaches are not good enough anymore. We need to use technology to extend the reach and richness of learning and teaching beyond the physical classroom. This is exactly the kind of challenge that Hope@Africa will be tackling."

Hope@Africa springs from a high-level summit held in Stellenbosch in October last year to discuss increasing collaboration between higher-education partners on the continent. This culminated in a Letter of Intent signed by the University of Botswana, the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Makerere University (Uganda), the University of Nairobi (Kenya), the University of Namibia, and Stellenbosch University. The University of Malawi is also part of the initiative.

We can give hope for Africa



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Also speaking at the event Professor Thabo Fako, vice-chancellor of the University of Botswana, said that humanity received the gifts of life, health and friendship (and fellowship). This brought us together, he said: "We believe we can make a difference in our own lives and in the lives of others. We believe we can make an impact in our immediate communities - we can do so if we join the gifts of friendship, collaboration and fellowship that enables us to focus on how we can work together to promote human development."

He also said that telematic platforms can be used to extend the 'reach and richness of all we know'. "We have skills, we have competencies, we have talents, we have professions - this we can use in the community for its benefit. We believe we can give hope for Africa and hope for the world."

Earlier, Professor Barnabas Nawangwe, deputy vice-chancellor: finance and administration of Makerere University in Uganda said that Hope@Africa and Hope International "realise the need for harnessing synergies of the north and the south in addressing global development goals for the common good of humanity".

Collaborating via a network model in contrast with a hub-and-spokes model, the Hope@Africa partners intend using 21st-century Internet and Communication Technology (ICT) to build African expertise, facilitate sustainable networks and promote lifelong learning.

Likewise, Hope International developed out of the notion that institutions of higher education should promote human development and tackle societal challenges through academic and research excellence.

The founding members are Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and Dalarna University, Gothenburg University, Linnaeus University and Malmö University in Sweden.

At the event, Professor Marita Hilliges, vice-chancellor of Dalarna University, said that the deliberations between the universities confirmed "how similar our concerns are even though we have very different starting points. We all have major climate issues, problems with unemployment and we need to realise that we live in the same global village. We need to understand it and change it for the better.

"As academics we know a lot about our society. What we want to do through Hope International is to use that knowledge to actively develop our societies. Our knowledge and our learning are increasing, now we want to make it increasingly significant."

An increase in knowledge and awareness

The overall objective of the Hope International network is to increase collaboration within higher education towards an increase in knowledge and awareness of the major challenges facing the global community. The Hope International network will bring together higher-education institutions to collaborate on ways to contribute to the long-term achievement of global development goals.

Professor Botman also said that it is particularly pleasing that Hope@Africa and Hope International are launched together. "We took a firm decision to harness the synergies between the two to gain more traction. So, this is an historic occasion - universities in the global south and north taking hands for human development everywhere. Our mission is one of hope because we refuse to accept the reality at hand as the beginning and end of everything. We refuse to abandon the next generation to despair. Many of them face the bleak prospect of a future that is no different to their past or present. We can make a difference - using our work in unlocking and sharing and applying knowledge. Now that is a goal enriching our work with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose."

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