Opportunities for Partnership between African Academic Institutions and CGIAR in Africa

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The African academia is a repository of knowledge, a ‘think tank’ for governments, and a space from where the African society at large, derives its resources. African academic institutions are key in the process of increasing human capacity to promote comprehensive and sustainable economic development. Increased knowledge derived from African academic institutions empowers young people to engage in Agriculture, the most important economic development sector in Africa, which contributes to about 35% of the gross domestic product and occupies 60% of the population. Building capacity, therefore, that empowers young people in Africa to engage in the development of the agriculture sector is an imperative for African academic institutions.

For decades, African governments have initiated the implementation of several policies and models aimed at transforming the African academia, and thus rendering it more effective and efficient in developing Africa’s human capital to positively respond to Africa’s challenges, especially in the agriculture sector. In the face of all these efforts, however, a significant gap still exists between the African academia and the agricultural development of Africa.

In an effort to contribute to closing this gap, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Development (RUFORUM) has, over the years, developed and deployed a successful and attractive cost-effective model for transforming higher agricultural education in Africa. This model has proven to reliably reach the poor and disadvantaged, and retains a very significant number of its alumni in the agricultural industries of their home countries.

The CGIAR, for a little over 5 decades of its existence, has also, in an effort to contribute to closing this gap, played a pivotal role, through partnerships, in improving the stature and quality of the African academia to respond to the challenges of the agriculture sector in Africa. These partnerships have, mainly fostered the traditional unidirectional transfer of knowledge and skills, which is proving to be insufficient as a way of responding to merging challenges in the agriculture sector.

Africa, like the rest of the world, is indeed facing unprecedented and interconnected challenges including food and nutritional insecurity, increasing poverty, gender and inclusion inequality, natural resource degradation, biodiversity loss, and uneven repercussions from climate change. Addressing these challenges requires a more coordinated and coherent effort amongst various institutions working to improve the agriculture sector in Africa, including research and academic institutions.
The CGIAR, recognizing this huge challenge, has recently undertaken the most ambitious reform in its 50+-year history, which has resulted in the formulation of a mission to deliver science and innovation to advance the transformation of food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis. This will be achieved by responding more thoughtfully to stakeholder needs and demand, especially in the Global South, and establishing greater country-level presence, demand-responsive programming, evidence-based advocacy, and effective partnerships.

These reforms present, therefore, an opportunity to consolidate the existing partnership with African academic institutions, to develop and build the necessary capacity to deploy new and/or improved knowledge around the following major axis: (i) demand-driven, downstream research that meets immediate, in-country development needs including the adaptation, translation, and adoption of innovations for country or region-specific circumstances; (ii) systems approach to research for development that stretches beyond commodity crops, livestock, or fisheries to encompass agri-food systems, and (iii) agriculture as an enabler of higher-level objectives to address global challenges of population, nutrition, natural resource management, climate change mitigation, social equity, and migration (both rural-urban and transnational/transcontinental).

The CGIAR is, therefore, poised to consolidate its existing partnership with RUFORUM that presents a unique network of 170 partner universities in 40 countries in Africa, to enrich and deploy a new approach to capacity development at the individual, institutional, and system-level, based on mutual learning and the co-development, sharing and exchange of evidence, innovations, and technologies with partners. This approach, which also resides more on a bidirectional transfer of knowledge and skills, is one of the critical impact pathways identified by CGIAR to scale research and innovation, and to accelerate global progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It also fits perfectly within the theme of RUFORUM’s Annual General Meeting of “Transforming Higher Education to Sustainably Feed and Create prosperity for Africa”.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Harold Roy-Macauley is the Managing Director, Regions and Partnership in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). He has more than 30 years of experience in agricultural research for development with extensive leadership and management expertise. Before joining CGIAR, he was the Director General of AfricaRice. Prior, he was the Executive Director of the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD), a leading sub-regional organization that coordinates and facilitates agricultural research and development activities in 22 countries in the region. He served previously as the Regional Director for World Agroforestry (ICRAF) in West and Central Africa. He has consulted for numerous international and bilateral organizations on the application of biosafety and biotechnology to agriculture. He was the Managing Director for the Regional Center for Improving Adaptation to Drought (CERAAS) in Senegal, a research and training center of CORAF/WECARD that worked mainly on food crops grown in dry regions. He hold a PhD in tropical plant biology from the Université Denis Diderot in France, an MSc in tropical plant biology from the Université de Pierre et Marie Curie in France, and a BSc with honors in botany from the University of Sierra Leone.

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