Circular 11, 2014

Dear Member Vice Chancellors,

We are pleased to announce that we have finalised the dates for both of our promised Leadership Dialogues for 2015. This Circular will provide details of the first one and shortly you will receive Circular 12 which will provide you with details of the second.

'Universities and Innovation for Inclusive Development'

Date: **2015 June 8th & 9th**
Venue: Spier Conference Centre, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa
Programme Partner: HSRC – The Human Sciences Research Council
Funding Partner: IDRC – The International Development Research Centre

This Leadership Dialogue will centre on examining how Southern African universities can work within a new paradigm, as knowledge generators and disseminators contributing to innovation for inclusive development. At the core will be presentations of the results of a large-scale research project in six African countries: the 'Universities and Innovation for Inclusive Development in Africa' (UNIID-Africa) study. The study addresses how African universities interact with firms, government and communities, and specifically focuses on their role in innovation activities that generate livelihoods for the excluded and disadvantaged.

Broadening the scope of the Innovation Systems approach

The emphasis in current higher education debates in Africa is on how universities support national economic development and growth through interaction with large businesses. There is growing recognition that this dominant discourse obscures a more inclusive and developmental form of university-community engagement.

In emerging economies, there are growing claims that science, technology and innovation-led growth can in fact result in higher levels of poverty and inequality within a country. In African contexts particularly, there is evidence that the rapid growth of recent years is accompanied by growing inequality, poverty and unemployment.

Challenges to African Universities

In developing contexts such as those in southern Africa, universities are increasingly challenged to become agents for inclusive social and economic development. The knowledge work of university academics can play a key role in poverty reduction and the ability of all social groups to create opportunities, share the benefits of development and participate in decision-making.

Civil society, Governments, and the Market increasingly expect universities to fulfil a multiple of new roles. The UNIID study explored how each of the main types of university in each country has responded to these

expectations. The researchers have conducted empirical research in African universities, to make the nature of university-community interactions explicit. They address issues of accountability to social needs, and promote more socially and economically engaged scholarship that is responsive to local contexts. They emphasise 'Doing, Using and Interacting' modes, rather than the conventional science and technology-led modes of innovation. Comparing case studies within and across country contexts will provide an evidence base of the enablers and constraints in sectors critical to the informal livelihoods of marginalised communities.

Expected outcomes of this Leadership Dialogue

Presentations from international, regional and local perspectives will help SARUA member universities to aid informal sector innovations that generate income, provide employment for poor people, and contribute to socially inclusive development. This evidence can be used to inform new teaching, research, and community service agendas.

Such analysis allows for national higher education and innovation policies to be informed by evidence and insights from Southern African contexts, from the local level and by the priorities of the poor. On this basis, universities can design more context-appropriate interventions.

Critical questions explored include:

1. What constitutes innovation?
2. How are university–community innovation interactions initiated and sustained?
3. Who benefits from university–community innovation interaction, and how? How long-term and how widespread are the benefits of university–community innovation interaction?
4. What differences are there between the diverse types of higher education institutions in their interactions with community income generation projects? What is the distinctiveness of universities in rural settings?
5. What enhances or constrains university participation in community income generation contexts? What incentivises systems conducive to promoting university-community innovation interaction?
6. What is the role of the university and its academics in community innovation? Should the university be involved in livelihood-oriented projects?
7. How is innovation knowledge disseminated and applied?

The SARUA Leadership Dialogue is likely to make a significant conceptual and methodological contribution to this research.

a. The UNIID-Africa Research challenges the hitherto narrow focus of innovation studies, which has tended to focus on science and technology, radical innovation and formal economic development - and extends this to include incremental innovation that is integrated with social development.
b. The tendency of development studies to focus on top-down development is also challenged in favour of inclusive development that focuses on the marginalised as active agents.
c. Additionally this project seeks to overcome the conceptual myopia towards the knowledge generating role of universities by linking the democratic imperatives of universities in relation to the public good and social justice, with those of innovation and technology transfer.

Please diarise the dates of this important Leadership Dialogue, and immediately let us know whether you will be coming.

Catherine Hunter,
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