



The Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016

Collaboration in the Area of Soil Science

Concept Note

Background

The Eurasian Center for Food Security is a think-tank affiliated with the Lomonosov Moscow State University and funded through the Russian Agricultural Development Aid Cooperation mechanism. Ensuring food security and agricultural development is one of the priority areas of international development assistance of the Russian Federation.

Since 2011, there has been an ongoing collaborative partnership between the World Bank and the Government of the Russian Federation, whereby the Bank has been assisting the Lomonosov Moscow State University in developing the Eurasian Center for Food Security. This Center is housed in the University's Soil Sciences and Economics Faculties with the objective of promoting inter-disciplinary research and analytical knowledge in Food Security issues in the Eurasian region and beyond.

The Center builds on the strong educational and research reputation of Lomonosov Moscow State University, specifically in the area of soil science. The University houses one of the unique soil science faculties in the world, and is known for its scientific and educational resources.

For several decades, a gradual but steady deterioration of the fertility of soils in Africa has posed a challenge to economic development on that Continent and to the livelihoods and food security of rural people. Even so, this situation has not had significant profile nor has it received the attention it requires. Further, agricultural research and training programs at universities and at dedicated research organizations (including at the CGIAR) have gradually diminished their attention to soils per se, while turning their focus to more holistic issues around crop production. While this latter focus has value and merit, the diminishment of attention to soil science threatens to become a constraint to the agricultural on the Continent. After several decades on this trend line, Africa has limited human

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and institutional capital with which to address the profound soil challenges that it faces.

Given the above, the Center has expressed interest in expanding its focus beyond Eastern Europe and Central Asia to include Africa. In particular, the Center is interested to explore the possibility of developing a program of support to help to address the soil situation in Africa. Initially, this would likely be through the development of collaboration in capacity building with African universities and other agricultural research institutions in the area of soil science. More specifically, the Center has expressed interest in making its resources available to African students, researchers and professors.

The RUFORUM in Cape Town provides a unique opportunity to begin exploring the possibility of developing a program of support and collaboration for soil science in Africa.

Aims and Objectives of the side Event

The session objectives will be (a) to discuss the soils situation in Africa, and the current state of affairs with respect to soil science training and research in Africa; (b) to initiate a discussion on whether the Center can become a partner with the selected African Universities and to help identify ways on how to build partnership; and (c) to explore the interest of selected African Universities and the Center in developing joint education programs or in supporting African students' or practitioners' participation in the Center's educational courses.

Approach and Methodology

It is envisaged that a discussion session will be organized as a side meeting to the RUFORUM biennial meetings in Cape Town on 20 October 2016. The session would involve participants from African agricultural universities, desirably with background in soil or related sciences, experts from the CGIAR Centers, other research centers or universities, the Eurasian Center for Food Security and the World Bank.

The session would be a three hour event - organized by the Center, RUFORUM and the World Bank as roundtable discussion. It is anticipated that it would have an attendance of roughly 20 invited participants. The desired outcome will be an

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action plan or an agreement to move forward with agreed activities. This would likely involve further discussion and the development of a concept note over the course of November, with a follow-up discussion in Moscow during early December. It is expected that at the first stage educational courses that would be available in the Center in 2017 would serve as the first step for the partnership, followed-up with exchange of students and practitioners.

**Outputs/
outcomes**

A collaboration framework between Africa Universities and Eurasian Center for Food Security agreed upon

A Plan for strengthening training and research in Soil Science in RUFORUM Universities developed

**Venue and
Participants**

A total of 20 participants are expected for this side event which will be held at Crystal Towers 1430-1730 on 20th October 2016

**Side Event
Organizers
and Contact**

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