



# The Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016

## FoodAfrica II WP7 Training sessions on Linking research to Business

### Concept Note

#### Background & Introduction

Biosciences research and innovation landscape in Africa is wide and diversified with an objective of enhancing agricultural productivity, to strengthen technological development and adaptability to ecological changes. Amongst these valuable efforts, however, it is not always recognized that the research and science produce more opportunities for development than the pure results. Already the research process is valuable in itself when it is done in cooperation with various stakeholders. When correctly supported, the process itself can provide ideas and open possibilities for innovations as well as lead to new avenues for development. Therefore the research process should be very open, participatory and discursive. In a cooperative research process the partners and various stakeholders are able to pick the “low-hanging” fruits of the process immediately.

On the other hand, validation of the research results happens not only through the science community but also through the adaption of the results in real life. Some results can provide opportunity to be directly put into changed practices, for example certain technology innovations. However, a large number of results require development of new methodologies or technologies, before being transformed into new products. To utilize all these opportunities, it is crucial to link the private sector and entrepreneurship community with researchers, for the successful utilization of the research findings.

To date this potential is underutilized and consequently, despite relatively significant research and science investment in Africa, the impacts and practical applications drawn from the results and the process remain fragmented, scattered and only partly fulfilling the requirements of cost-efficiency. This emphasizes the need to develop appropriate and coordinated ways of better utilizing research results and research process findings to provide business incentives for all possible stakeholders. There

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is also a need for a shift from viewing research as the main actor of the bio-innovation ecosystem, to focusing on end-users of knowledge as central actors of the adaptation process.

### **Bioscience and Research Landscape in Africa for Development and Growth**

Africa is considered the world's fastest growing region. While the economies are in transition to middle-income nations, the key to development in many countries is linked to increased agricultural productivity accompanied by a shift from primary production to value addition. New structures and work methods will be required to utilize the knowledge of scientific research in supporting these processes. When utilized innovatively bioresearch can be a powerful engine for increasing food production, and for developing a wide range of agro-industrial and value added products with potential applications in many sectors.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA), Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) all prioritize inclusive growth; science, technology and innovation; people centered development and financing and partnership. However, progress towards realizing these objectives has been slow. One reason for this is that the critical role of private sector has not been adequately recognized in the research process. More generally the information flow in the science and research process is not serving the research stakeholder networks in effective ways. The numerous players in the agricultural bioscience arena are all making good contributions at national, regional and international level, but at the same time the transformation and adaptation of research findings could be more effective with more intense knowledge transfer from science to the stakeholder network. Especially the potential of private sector, entrepreneurs and education sector with agribusiness incubation are not fully utilized even though they are among the most critical actors in turning the research outputs into impactful outcomes.

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Entrepreneurship and innovation are both among the key pathways to economic and social wealth and prosperity of the societies. Educational institutions are strategically located to promote both of these. Education can act as bridging link that increases entrepreneurial understanding of the bio-resource landscape and in the production of graduates with entrepreneurial competencies. This can lead to the utilization of the untapped business opportunities of the sector. Business incubation is one of the ways that higher education institutions have used to encourage students into entrepreneurship thinking. The training session discusses bio-resource based business incubation and the role of teachers and mentors and the requisite ecosystem needed to bolster the intra and extra curricula business incubation. The training also discusses the pathways that need consideration in the mapping and framing of the knowledge and learning environment within the incubation process.

### FoodAfrica Programme leading the way in Linking research to Business

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) has support a 5 year Programme called FoodAfrica ([https://portal.mtt.fi/portal/page/portal/mtt\\_en/projects/foodafrica](https://portal.mtt.fi/portal/page/portal/mtt_en/projects/foodafrica)) which is a research and development Programme enhancing food security in West and East Africa. The objective of the Programme is to provide new knowledge and tools for researchers, decision makers and local farmers to improve local food security. The FoodAfrica Programme has been implemented in six countries: Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal, and Uganda. The current phase of FoodAfrica ended in June 2016, resulting in a large amount of research results central to improving food security and nutrition from a range of different perspectives. The end users of the results will range from policy makers to development organizations and local NGO and extension organization, to researcher and education institutions to farm organizations as well as individual farmers themselves. A final important category will be the agribusiness community.

The second phase of FoodAfrica is a two-year programme focusing on communicating and disseminating the results of the first phase to all these different user groups. As part of its objective, FoodAfrica II will emphasize

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the importance and challenges relating to knowledge transfer and the central role of cooperation between the different stakeholders of the research process, in order to achieve sustainable utilization of the research findings. One way of doing this is through building links between the research and the entrepreneurship community, and by contributing to the discourse on how a transparent research process best can serve the development objectives. Special emphasis is put on linking the private community to the research process to find ways to facilitate research based entrepreneurship building.

### Theory and Practice in Linking research to Business - training session

As part of FoodAfrica II we are planning a training concept that can be brought to different conferences and events, which focuses on innovative ways to link research results to new business ideas, through local business incubators and incubation networks. The goal of the training is to give students and potential start-ups in the agribusiness sector tools and ideas for turning research results into products through participatory research and innovative business concepts. For the education sector the workshop showcases an innovative way of stimulating the thinking process of potential entrepreneurs in utilizing the research process in entrepreneurship development and setting up learning environment to support sustainable learning results. For the research community the session highlights the potential of partnership based research processes in increasing, initiating and intensifying the research and research process for sustainable utilization, transformation and integration for growth and development. For entrepreneurs in the agribusiness sector, the session offers a hand-on introduction into the world of research results and how they can benefit from making use of these results in an innovative way. The training is envisioned as an approximately three hour session with fifty participants, including theory, practical examples as well as exercises. The first part is focused on theory around innovation processes from a pedagogic and higher education perspective. Then practical examples of research results from the FoodAfrica Programme will be presented and groups work sessions to brainstorm around these results will be facilitated.

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Real life agribusiness incubation processes will then be presented as well as successful case-examples.

We will offer such a session during the RUFORUM Biennial Conference. Our session is very much in line with the first specific objective of the conference, to “Identify appropriate models and approaches to strengthen engagement between the private sector, policy and Higher Education Institutions“. Our work will specifically be related to the conference theme on Public private partnership: a driver for higher education for market pathways and product uptake. Our goal is to support students (and teachers) to find new ways to identify business opportunities through new research and using research results in innovative ways.

### Specific objectives of the training session

The objective of the training session is to create understanding and to encourage discussion on how research results and research process can be utilized as a resource in agri-value chain development. The session will also provide information and inspiration on the existing agribusiness development mechanisms.

The purpose of the training session **Linking research to Business** is to showcase and promote bio-research innovation systems for sustainable utilization and integration of research into socio-economic development process. Strong and well-structured cooperation between research and education as well as private sector will stimulate the innovation culture through academia-industry-education collaboration which in turn promotes research. The cooperation enhances technology transfer and creates adaption models or technological innovations by allowing every partner to use their best knowledge, aspiration and resources to stimulate sustainable transformation, utilization and productivity of the existing knowledge and resources.

### Approach and Methodology

The half day (3 hours) session will combine theory and practice of research based business incubation. The concepts and theory of network-based support for students entrepreneurial understanding and entrepreneurship building will be presented by Dr Eija Laitinen from the

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HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland. To connect this theory to practice FoodAfrica Programme Manager, Ms Mila Sell will present FoodAfrica research results as examples that can offer entrepreneurial possibilities<sup>1</sup>. During the group work and discussion the participants are invited to develop business ideas based on the research findings presented.

The programme will continue, by presenting actual examples of AAIN supported agribusinesses and how these can be developed by AAIN Board Member, CEO of Timbali, Ms Louise de Klerk, a South African incubator engaged to horticultural business development. Finally Dr Alex Ariho, AAIN CEO will highlight the AAIN methodology in Agribusiness Incubation support, and Technology Commercialization and how new innovative start-ups can tap into this process.

### Expected outcomes

It is expected that through this training session, participants will have improved understanding on how research results and the entire research process can be a source of knowledge and inspiration to entrepreneurship. Secondly, participants will be equipped with concrete results of FoodAfrica research programme to be used in possible entrepreneurial activities. Thirdly, participants will be equipped with knowledge on how African wide Agribusiness Incubation Network (AAIN) can support incubates and institutions interested in establishing and/or improving their agribusiness incubation processes.

### Venue and Participants

The session is a cooperation between Natural Resource Institute Finland (Luke), coordinating FoodAfrica I and II Programmes, Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), a partner in FoodAfrica I and II Programmes and

<sup>1</sup> Examples/concepts that can be included in the groups work session:

- Business models for mobile maize dryers
- Business models for cross-breeds of dairy cattle and AI. Fodder production and dairy value chain development
- Toolkits for measuring micronutrient deficiencies in farmer's soils – guidelines for fertilizer use etc.
- Nutritional information as basis for new product development
- new mobile technologies/Apps for sharing market and extension information and linking different stakeholders of the value chain

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African Agribusiness Incubation Network (AAIN). Luke is a research and expert organisation that works to advance the bioeconomy and the sustainable use of natural resources. HAMK has up-to date modern knowledge and experience on how to integrate research and business development. AAIN is a continental network of institutions working on agribusiness incubation spanning 54 countries. AAIN has set up incubators in 7 African countries and works with research institutions across Africa (4 Sub-Regional Organisations (SROs), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and ICRISAT among other partners) who develop technologies and innovations. AAIN off-takes the innovations and technologies for commercialization and has so far managed to profile and commercialize over 110 technologies.

**Venue:** Century City Conference Centre, Meeting Room 7

**Date & Time:** Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016, from 1430-1730

**Side Event Organizers and Contact**

Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), Finland  
 Natural Resource Center (Luke), Finland  
 African Agribusiness Incubation Network (AAIN), Ghana  
 Dr Eija Laitinen, HAMK  
 Email [eija.laitinen@hamk.fi](mailto:eija.laitinen@hamk.fi)  
 Tel. +358 50 5853933  
 Ms Mila Sell, Luke  
 Email [mila.sell@luke.fi](mailto:mila.sell@luke.fi)  
 Tel. +358 29 5326737

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## Side Event Programme

Time allocation	Activity	Responsible
10 min	Introductions - Welcome and Objectives of the session	Luke/Mila Sell
30 min	Theory: From Research to Practice & Business	HAMK/Dr Eija Laitinen
20 min	What research results can a programme like FoodAfrica provide us?	Luke/Mila Sell
75 min	Group work + reporting	Luke/Mila Sell & HAMK/Dr Eija Laitinen
20 min	Research & Entrepreneurship for Jobs and Wealth - Practical Examples	AAIN/Louise de Klerk
15 min	AAIN Support for agribusiness incubation	AAIN/Dr Alex Ariho/ MaryNjeri
10 min	Summary Discussion	Luke/Mila Sell

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