
AFRICA: Call for problem-solving research proposals

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The African Union Commission is seeking proposals for research focusing on a number of areas, with the aim of solving the continent's problems using African scientists.

In a **statement** the AU Commission said its Human Resources, Science and Technology department would spearhead the initiative for the next three years. The deadline of the call for proposals is 30 April.

The commission is seeking proposals for research focusing on thematic priorities articulated in Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action and its Lighthouse Projects: post-harvest and agriculture; renewable and sustainable energy; and water and sanitation.

The programme is funded through an agreement between the European Commission and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, under the ACP Research for Sustainable Development Programme of the 10th EDF Intra-ACP Envelop.

"It is now compulsory to strengthen the capacities of African researchers and scientists by facilitating the integration of their efforts for the sustainable development of the African continent," said the commission in a press release.

"Cooperation on specific scientific topics, sharing data and scientific knowledge, at national, continental and international level will create the conditions for better understanding [of] and solving African problems via African scientists."

The continent's science and technology plan, being implemented in conjunction with the New Partnership for Africa's Development, Nepad, was approved by African heads of States in 2006. Its main programmes are ICTs and space sciences, mathematical sciences, biosciences, energy and water, and laser technology.

The plan is grounded in three inter-related objectives that are capacity building, knowledge production and technological innovation.

A Nepad **report** on the progress of the plan, released last year, said it had given birth to research and development programmes at a number of universities under the banner of the Southern Africa Network for Biosciences, SANBio.

These included: capacity building in bioinformatics, coordinated by the University of Mauritius; microbicides for HIV infection control and scientific validation of traditional remedies for HIV-Aids, under South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; and fish biodiversity in inland rivers in Southern Africa, coordinated by the University of Malawi.

Further, the report said, the African Institute of Mathematical Sciences in South Africa had been recruiting outstanding African graduates for an intensive postgraduate diploma course preparing them for research and lecturing careers. Between 2003 and 2009, AIMS graduated 264 African students from all regions of the continent.

There is also capacity building in applied and basic sciences that will result in 40 postgraduates between 2010-12, trained at the University of Mauritius, University of Zambia, Bunda College of Agriculture and the University of Cape Town in bioinformatics, fisheries and medicinal chemistry, besides other previous graduations, the Nepad report said.