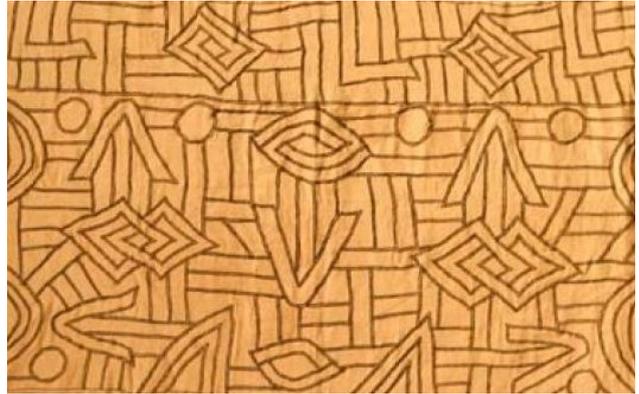


African-German Network of Excellence in Science

AGNES

**Report on the Kickoff-Workshop in
Addis Ababa, 16-18 November 2011**

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Background

Since the 1990s, a profound change has taken place almost all over Africa: no other continent has seen such rapid growth, as measured by its previous situation, in political participation, freedom of speech, civic spirit, individual responsibility and its people's confidence in their own abilities. Over the same period, the number of students at African universities has also tripled – making the issue of quality assurance (excellence) in academia increasingly urgent.

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has to date funded 1100 scientists from Africa. Particularly in many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, where statistically there is only one academic to every ten thousand inhabitants, this group of people have a prominent part to play – not only for research into and development of solution strategies, but also in civil society, politics and business. Social change and community structures in Africa are today allowing excellence to take effect. Excellence is becoming a societally recognised criterion for career development: numerous higher education institutes are now managed by highly qualified young academics rather than by persons selected primarily according to the seniority principle.

Against this background it makes sense to bring the existing expertise within the African Humboldt Network together in an outwardly visible manner. The foundation of an “African-German Network of Excellence in Science” (AGNES) will create a supra-regional contact structure to strengthen academic excellence in Sub-Saharan Africa that is able to reach out beyond the Humboldt Network in its narrower sense.

Kickoff-Workshop

The workshop to initialise AGNES took place from 16 to 18 November in Addis Ababa. The participants from twelve countries included:

- 8 Ambassador Scientists
- 3 presidents of Humboldt Alumni Associations
- 6 other alumni (including one Feodor Lynen alumnus) and (two) award winners representing various countries
- 4 members of AvH selection committees and hosts
- 3 representatives of German Federal Ministries (Federal Foreign Office, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
- 3 representatives of other German institutions (DAAD, Goethe-Institut, German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina)
- 4 representatives of the Foundation headquarters



The programme was divided into blocks relating to the following three objectives:

- Promoting regional networking and professional exchange between excellent scientists and scholars in Sub-Saharan Africa and their cooperation partners from Germany
- Introducing young researchers to the Humboldt Network and to Germany as a location for research
- Participating in the ongoing discourse on the expansion of scientific and academic capacities – also regarding the role of research and innovation for sustainable development in Sub-Sahara-Africa.

These main objectives were derived from recommendations made by several Humboldtians and developed during an annual meeting of the “Association of African Universities”.

Each participant was invited to contribute his or her ideas and suggestions for AGNES against the background of his or her specific cooperation experience (as Ambassador Scientist, President of an Alumni Association, etc. – see above) in brief “flash talks”. These ideas and suggestions (ultimately: sub-objectives) were then jointly discussed, amended and finally prioritised using meta planning cards.

Results

Strengthening cooperation and scientific exchange: How can AGNES promote regional interaction and initiate new research collaborations?

- AGNES will acquire funding through its access to international networks in order to expand the research infrastructure in Africa and promote international scientific collaboration.
- AGNES will promote the visibility of Humboldtians in their home countries.
- AGNES will support multi-lateral (tri-, quadrilateral ...) cooperations and “south-south mobility”.
- AGNES will identify centres of excellence and network with these (“building bridges”).
- AGNES will participate in the debate on the prioritisation of key research areas (also research agendas), focusing on their specific relevance for African interests.
- AGNES will promote exchange between academia and practice (knowledge transfer).
- AGNES could play the part of an “African Academy of Sciences and Humanities”

Recruiting high potential researchers for international scientific cooperation: How can AGNES introduce excellent junior researchers to the Humboldt network and to Germany/Africa as a location for research?

- AGNES will promote the transfer of experience and competencies to younger academics through mentoring initiatives (e.g. “proposal writing”).
- AGNES will encourage young academics to publish their work internationally, and support them in doing so.
- AGNES members will seek to gain one qualified scientist for an application every two years, and support him or her in making that application.
- AGNES will provide information on funding opportunities at universities and research institutions.
- AGNES will make its member data available online.
- AGNES will promote a sustainable “academic culture”.
- AGNES will offer awards for outstanding academic achievements (“best thesis”, “women’s award”, etc.).
- AGNES will increase the visibility of academic excellence in Africa.

Providing an expert service engaging in the political discourse on promoting scientific excellence in Africa: How can AGNES bundle existing expertise and establish a supra-regional platform for facilitating contacts to promote scientific excellence?

- AGNES will provide a contact structure for “policy makers”: AGNES as a trademark for excellence in academia.
- AGNES will cooperate with academies of sciences and humanities.
- AGNES will take part in conferences, but also hold its own conventions.
- AGNES will publicly highlight the role of science and research for sustainable development.
- AGNES will advocate the creation/expansion of research (funding) institutions.
- AGNES will advocate strengthening high-quality doctorate programmes.
- AGNES will advocate providing scientists and scholars with sufficient freedom to conduct research in addition to their teaching duties.
- AGNES will support the “gender-sensitive” creation of knowledge.



In addition to the three outlined subject blocks, on the final afternoon structural issues regarding AGNES (membership structure, management etc.) were discussed¹:

Input into the discussion arose from members present, as well as from notes received from attendees who had to leave early.

- The Founding Group of AGNES should be listed as the Humboldtians that were present (by invitation from AvH) at the meeting in Addis Ababa (16 – 18 November 2011). The Founding Group will approach other African Humboldtians to join AGNES once a proper structure is in place.
- Governance of AGNES will be by African and German Humboldtians, with the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation involved in an advisory capacity.
- “AGNES should start small and grow big.” Membership should be open to all African Humboldtians and German Humboldtians who have done research in Africa. An advisory committee should nominate and invite membership from other excellent African-German research alumni (i.e. Africans who have done research in Germany, and Germans who have done research in Africa, but not under the auspices of AvH. For example, excellent DAAD scholars).
- The organisation (i.e. the structure) of AGNES should be “light” and be comprised of a Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary. These office-bearers will be elected at the first official meeting and launch of AGNES (envisaged for 2013 in Kenya).
- Until the official launch, the preparation for the organisation (such as compiling a potential member database, list of skills, know-how, project details, drawing up a Constitution, etc.) will be carried out in the interim by an elected Acting Steering Committee, with input from AvH and Founder Group members present at the meeting in Addis Ababa. It is envisaged that a draft Constitution will be presented for adoption at the official meeting and launch of AGNES in 2013. The Humboldt Foundation shall report on the process (press release, newsletter or the like) as soon as there are first presentable results.
- An Acting Steering Committee was elected by the Founder Group members to do the groundwork of AGNES. These office bearers are listed below:

Acting Chair = Prof. Dr. Ernst Uken (South Africa)
 Acting Vice-Chair = Prof. Dr. Jens Gebauer (Germany)
 Acting Secretary = Dr. Heather G. Marco (South Africa)

The German – South African Year of Science 2012/2013 (if it takes place ...) might serve as an opportunity to bring together other stakeholders in South Africa prior to the official launch in Kenya.

- Details for the Humboldt Colloquium in Kenya were not discussed. There is, however, a standard format for Humboldt Colloquia which will be communicated by the Foundation – the AGNES-related content shall be proposed by the Acting Steering Committee.

¹ The majority of this page was drawn up by Dr. Heather Marco and then revised.

Social programme

- Reception/dinner at the German ambassador's residence (Wednesday evening)
- Visit of Ethiopian Orthodox Holy Trinity Cathedral with guided tour (Thursday afternoon)
- Meal at Yode Abyssinia restaurant with cultural programme (Thursday evening)
- Visit of ethnological museum at the Institute for Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University with guided tour (Friday afternoon)

Summary

The response to the workshop was very positive. This was not only due to the pleasant "atmosphere". Many attendees commended the structure of the workshop: it was also thanks to the disciplined approach of moderators and speakers that the almost 30 five-minute talks were held on schedule and according to plan. This allowed each attendee to contribute his or her position in a well-prepared manner, while at the same time making it possible to form a clear impression of the specific experience and background of each individual participant. Despite the large number of talks, 70% of the time was dedicated to structured (plenary and open space) discussions. The results summarised above were arrived at by mutual agreement and represent a basis for the further development of AGNES. Like any other Humboldt Alumni Association, AGNES should be a self-supporting network that will in future be independent from support of the Foundation headquarters. The workshop already saw the creation of new nodes in the African network.