

## **Speech of the Vice-Chancellor in the Opening of the Research Training Workshop of the Project on Innovative Application of ICTs in Addressing Water-related Impacts of Climate Change for the African Region Held in Nairobi from 18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2015**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to make this opening speech to the training programme for Grantees to the IDRC-supported programme on the Innovative Application of ICTs in Addressing Water-related Impacts of Climate Change.

You may be aware that African universities are still emerging from the difficulties they faced in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The quality of university teaching and research is still a challenge due to drastic budget cuts, growing enrolments, student and staff unrests, poor infrastructure, and a migration of the most talented professors to developed countries. In research, Africa ranks very low in research productivity in terms of publications. According to the *American Chronicle of Higher Education*, Africa accounts for less than 2% of the world's publications. Even then, this research productivity is concentrated in a few countries, led by South Africa, followed by Nigeria, with Kenya in a distant third place.

Investment in research and development as a percentage of GDP is very low. Despite an African Union commitment to allocate at least 1% of GDP to R&D, very few countries have complied. Kenya has only recently complied by allocating 2% of GDP to research through a science, technology and innovation policy and legislation that were approved at the end of 2012. We are still waiting to see whether the next national budget will reflect this commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now turning to the theme of this workshop, I am informed that the main objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of registered Masters and PhD students in universities in Africa, Asia and Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) to more effectively engage in research on application of ICTs for water management under changing climatic conditions and the attendant policy formulation. I believe this project will go along way in addressing the problems highlighted earlier by increasing the research capacity in Africa and growing the number of researchers and publications in Africa.

I want to acknowledge the role played by IDRC in pushing forward capacity building activities within HEIs in climate change research and ensuring that students from developing countries have an opportunity to enhance southern voice and leadership in national, regional and international conferences, dialogues and policy discussions on Climate

Change. While research capacity on Climate Change issues is growing stronger in our developing countries, we need innovative research themes from this region such as those supported under this initiative in order to gain international recognition and support resilience in this continent.

We are very proud that the University of Nairobi is the host of this very important project. In this connection, I would like to congratulate Prof. Timothy Waema and Prof. Laban MacOpiyo for conceptualizing, initiating and leading this project. I further wish to acknowledge the good work and strong partnership of University of Nairobi's School of Computing & Informatics, Department of Land Resources Management & Agricultural Technology (LARMAT), and our partners in Asia (AMDI) and Latin America (CATIE) in organizing these training workshops and likewise the upcoming Workshops in Hanoi Vietnam in the coming week and Costa Rica thereafter. Climate change presents the possibility of a dramatic alteration in the natural balance of local and global ecosystems and infringement on human livelihoods.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite various efforts to develop scientific information on climate change adaptation and mitigation, these have failed to seriously consider the role of ICT. Further, ICT issues are yet to feature visibly in the wider climate change discourses and initiatives in Africa, such as those of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and yet this is the continent undergoing a technological boom. Increasingly, efforts by IDRC, our universities and others have brought the ICT related capacity building efforts to the fore, especially in developing countries.

I am informed that a total of 83 candidates from Africa, Asia and Latin America applied for the research grants in this project and only 31 were selected. In Africa, 11 candidates were selected from South Africa and Mozambique in Southern Africa; Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya in Eastern Africa; and Cameroon in Western Africa. I would therefore like to congratulate you for writing a quality proposal that led to your selection. I am confident that this strong team of African researchers will be able to make both academic and practical contributions on the role of ICT in mitigating the effects of climate change, especially in our poor communities, who tend to be more vulnerable to environmental changes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I understand that at the end of the research training, you will be expected to have tackled the critical dimensions of climate change related impacts

such as food security and agriculture, health, water supply, human settlement and displacement, socio-political issues, and livelihoods and come up with options on what role ICTs can have on the key vulnerability dimensions impacted by climate change specifically food security and water supply. The intensive training you will be going through for the next eight days will largely equip you with the skills to conduct your research in a competent manner and share the outcomes of your research with the world. I therefore kindly urge you take this training session very seriously. We also expect this training to provide a communication and cooperation platform among you the students and also the many other scientists involved in this project. There are opportunities, for example, to learn from others working in related areas, writing papers together, as well as collaborating in writing grant proposals at the end of your research.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that every one of us has a role to play, at the individual, community, institutional, national, regional and global levels. Each and every one of us is responsible for ensuring that key issues on climate change strategies and mechanisms do not go unchecked any more and measures to reduce disaster risks and vulnerabilities are implemented. We expect your research to produce solutions that enhance the coping abilities of our people and enable them to withstand, recover from, and adapt to climate change – and achieve development outcomes; those are the answers we are looking forward to come out of your research.

With these remarks, I thank you for listening to me and declare the training workshop officially opened. May you have a productive and successful training workshop and may God abundantly bless you.

Prof. Peter M.F. Mbithi

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