

In October 2019, the 9<sup>th</sup> ICA Rectors and Deans Forum looked ahead to 2030 and explored opportunities for collaboration between European and African agricultural and life science universities to strengthen their collaboration for mutual gain, and to address the challenges of developing a sustainable future against the backdrop of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Forum was attended by leaders who are responsible for strategic decision making in universities and faculties of Agricultural and Life Sciences (Rectors, Deans, senior management) and comprised 58 participants from 23 European and 6 African countries.

The Forum was jointly organized by the Association for European Life Science Universities ([www.ica-europe.info](http://www.ica-europe.info)) and the European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development (AGRINATURA; [agrinatura-eu.eu](http://agrinatura-eu.eu)) and with the support of CIRAD (the French agricultural research and international cooperation organization working for the sustainable development of tropical and Mediterranean regions, [www.cirad.fr/en](http://www.cirad.fr/en)).

The Forum was organized into three sessions that considered (i) the challenges and the role of agricultural and life science universities in Europe and Africa in addressing sustainability challenges; (ii) current and future initiatives for collaboration/engagement between European and African universities; (iii) experiences and needs to develop a new agenda for engagement/collaboration between European and African universities.

From the expert presentations (see [www.ica-europe.info](http://www.ica-europe.info)), panel and round table discussions, the following was concluded.

## 1. Shared challenges

The presentations from both European and African participants highlighted in detail the challenges and needs of their universities, and the agricultural, environmental and food sectors that they serve. These were considered against the backdrop of the 2019 report of the EU Task Force for Rural Africa (TRFA) that made a number of recommendations on how to contribute to sustainable development and job creation in Africa's agriculture, food sectors and rural economy ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/report-tfra\\_mar2019\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/report-tfra_mar2019_en.pdf)).

Rather than focusing on the challenges of individual countries or regions, the Forum recognised that we share many common challenges for a sustainable future with the need for:

- basic research coupled to applied research delivering outcomes that impact in addressing locally identified issues
- sustainable rural communities developed through rural innovation capacity and strong rural economies
- robust sustainable agricultural systems and food chains, including both local food markets (outlets) and extended food chains nationally and internationally
- a greater understanding of the intrinsic value of natural resources for delivering ecosystem services and other benefits in addition to their value for agriculture
- amelioration of the effects of climate change on agriculture, rural communities and food chains
- minimising the effect of decreasing land availability for agriculture
- food security, balanced nutrition and health
- minimising the effect of the rise of pests and diseases of plants and animals
- gender equality and opportunities for all

- addressing the increasing demand for education and more flexible modes of delivery.

## 2. What success will require (challenges for ICA Universities)

Participants discussed their experiences from past and present collaborative efforts, and considered existing calls, programmes and opportunities for future collaborative efforts. Participants were encouraged to “develop clear visions and to raise the profile of partnerships”. In considering what needs to be achieved to develop successful long-lasting collaborations with impact, the following were recognised and are highlighted (see also the presentations at [www.ica-europe.info](http://www.ica-europe.info) for specific exemplar case studies).

- 2.1 The benefits of partnership include mutuality of opportunity, critical mass, respect, commitment and an honest assessment of the partners to build on their strengths and not weaknesses
- 2.2 A move away from the mind-set of North aiding South, and instead the development of mutual partnerships to address the grand challenges above
- 2.3 Develop partnerships that include stakeholders at many levels including people, organisations, businesses and governments. In doing so develop networks of excellence.
- 2.4 Recognise the necessity of good governance, good administration and leadership in building and maintaining long-term sustainable relationships, including the need to keep all partners engaged.
- 2.5 Develop outside-the-box thinking to solve problems using non-traditional approaches
- 2.6 The need for political will and the acquisition of funding and other supports from local, national and international decision makers
- 2.7 The need for increased mobility, greater contact between partners, appropriate exchange, and collaborative programmes for both students (e.g. build on the

experience of Erasmus, sandwich programs, joint summer schools) and staff (i.e. sabbaticals) to recognise and embrace diverse cultures and contexts

- 2.8 Develop graduates who are highly skilled for a variety of career prospects but who have the skillset to work effectively in partnerships in a cross-cultural context

## 3. Conclusions

The relationships between European and African institutions have evolved and are now deeper and more structured than ever before. The ICA Forum was an opportunity to reflect on this continuum and shared engagement in education, research, innovation and outreach between our European and African universities. While momentum is underway, much remains to be achieved. The Forum resulted in four main conclusions:

- 3.1 Europe and African each benefit by our universities aligning their efforts to address our shared grand challenges
- 3.2 There is a need for innovative university funding models, including the need for greater public and industry (private sector) contributions, to support European – African university engagement
- 3.3 We acknowledge that the most relevant research questions, and solutions, arise through interactions of people with different experiences and perspectives. Such partnerships solve problems and are best built on collaborations with mutuality and respect. AGRINATURA has a vital role to play in developing and maintaining such partnerships between proactive African and European universities.
- 3.4 ICA and AGRINATURA have an opportunity at the European and African levels, resulting from our universities evidence-based knowledge, to influence regional and international policy priorities to address the grand challenges for our sustainable future.