

COLLABORATION BETWEEN NEMRA AND UNCST TO PROMOTE RESEARCH MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR RESEARCH UPTAKE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Purpose

This paper is a guide for the collaboration between NEMRA and UNCST. It is motivated by the fact that: firstly, the vision of NEMRA as an interuniversity network of researchers in Uganda and abroad as well as the mission of the UNCST as a regulator and promoter of Science and Technology can be achieved by creating synergetic actions. Secondly, improvement in quality of research in Uganda will depend not only on how much researchers are equipped with subject knowledge, but also how they manage the research process and align research objectives to national issues for societal transformation/community impact.

In this case, NEMRA considers UNCST's mission as one that relates to that of the network and therefore identifies various avenues for partnerships. NEMRA is specially well positioned to partner with UNCST in the efforts to get scientists and innovators acquitted with the activities that the council is involved in to promote and develop indigenous Science and Technology.

On the 26/06/2021, NEMRA and UNCST held a special joint discussion on their potential for collaboration. This discussion concluded with a consensus that a document elaborating areas of potential collaboration is drafted and possible steps of formalising the collaboration between NEMRA and UNCST are take henceforth.

NEMRA's mission/vision

NEMRA envisages a wide and well-resourced network of academic researchers and practitioners advancing a culture of intellectually generated evidence-based policy and practice in Africa. Its mission is to demystify the issues around doing academic research, develop insights across a wide array of disciplines, share ideas and develop networks in the process of providing solutions to societal problems through research and postgraduate education.

UNCST mission/vision

The vision of UNCS is a prosperous Science and Technology led Ugandan society. Its mission is to provide efficient and innovative leadership in the development, promotion and application of Science and Technology and its integration in sustainable national development.

The areas of partnership

Five areas of partnership have been identified as summarised in the table below:

	AREA OF COLLABORATION	ACTION POINTS	TIMEFRAME Start by:
1	Enhancement of mutual understanding, and creation of a cordial relationship between researchers/research organisations and the UNCST	An online survey/inquiry on researcher-regulator interface. Organise dialogues, retreats and round table discussion for UNCST and researchers	April 2022
2	Research capacity building for research management and administration.	Conduct an inquiry/survey on the status of Research and Innovation Management in Uganda and consequently base on the results of the survey to design a researcher training programme about the same.	April 2022
3	Collaboration and knowledge sharing between research institutes, HEIs and the private sector	Organise periodic academia/industry challenges/ exhibition. And, an online platform	June 2022
4	Quality assurance and auditing of field activities for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.	Survey on Quality Assurance for approved Humanities and Social Sciences research	June 2022
5	Dissemination of research through technical and/or policy briefs, newsletter series, a peer reviewed journal and other publication outlets.	Set up a joint team to oversee carrying out of technical reviews of the various research projects that have been completed in different disciplines.	June 2022

Establish periodic research outputs dissemination mechanisms through a Journal and NEMRA-UNCST conference

The action points

1. Enhancement of mutual understanding, and creation of a cordial relationship between researchers/research organisations and the UNCST. **Dr. Juliet Kyayesimira**

NEMRA will work with UNCST to conduct an inquiry into the researcher-regulator interface. The aim of the inquiry is to get feedback of researchers and research organisations on their experiences of UNCST operation and vice versa. This will enhance mutual understanding, and create a cordial relationship between researchers/research organisations and the UNCST.

Issues

The researchers' perception of the UNCST is of interest to both organisations. While the UNCST's task is to provide support to the researchers through leadership and regulation of the research process, it is not clear whether the researchers understand and/or appreciate this role. The stakeholders' meetings and workshops organized by NEMRA where participants have raised various issues including clearance fees, duration of the process, etc. seem to suggest that there is need for a systematic inquiry into the current research regulatory mechanism in Uganda. The need for mutual understanding and development of a cordial relationship between the researchers and the UNCST is yet to be given attention.

Objectives

The objectives of this area of collaboration are:

- To carry out an empirical study on the researchers' perception of UNCST's research regulatory mechanism, existing support information for researchers and challenges thereof.
- To investigate the researchers' expectations and understanding of the of the role, activities and operation mechanisms of UNCST
- To bridge the gap between UNCST and researchers through regular dialogues, retreats and round table discussion

Strategic approach:

The following will be done to achieve the above objectives:

- A joint team of investigators will be set up to conduct a survey involving postgraduate students and academics who are planning to obtain or have previously obtained research authorisation from the UNCST as well as staff of the council.

- Dialogues, retreats and round table discussion: a joint team of NEMRA and UNCST shall use dialogues, retreats and round table discussions to address expectations and take up suggestions of researchers and/or the council

Outcomes

- The activities are expected to facilitate promotion of the council's activities and create awareness among the scientists.
- The information generated will enhance the council's mandate while creating a positive attitude about research regulation among researchers.

2. Research Management capacity building initiatives. Dr. Loice Natukunda

NEMRA focuses on research management as one of the core areas in its research capacity building initiatives. As such, the collaboration will initially focus on this specific area of capacity building as the priority. Other areas of research capacity building including turning research into an enterprise, developing personal abilities for an effective researcher, etc. will be given consideration along the way.

Issues

While HEIs ably provide intellectual skills and subject knowledge abilities to carryout research projects for an award, rarely do research students obtain training relating to research governance, personal effectiveness, engagement and impact. As such, institutions lack the much-needed skills and expertise for research management. This results in varied challenges including low research output, a failure to demonstrate/track the impact of research, duplication of research and limited patents.

Objectives

This area of collaboration will take research management as a priority. It aims at improving the members' knowledge and skills around research governance and organisation i.e., the knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do and manage research.

The objective is to equip researchers and practitioners with knowledge and skills around key areas of research governance and administration e.g., an understanding of national and international standards, research funding & management, intellectual property rights, and frameworks for research and development.

Strategic action:

- NEMRA-UNCST will undertake an inquiry/survey on the status of Research and Innovation Management in Uganda and consequently base on the results of the survey to design a researcher training programme about the same.
- In addition, NEMRA –UNCST will design a Certificate training programme on Technology Transfer and Commercialisation.

Outcome

- Evidence of effectively implemented research projects and better research project reporting for individual researchers and institutions
- Increase in highly replicable research, accessible research protocols and re-usable research data sets
- Increase in number of researchers who are highly skilled and equipped with research management skills and abilities

Accredited courses in research management and technology transfer. Consequently, the role of research as a key driver for social and economic development will be realised as the research process is managed and governed appropriately.

3. Collaboration between research institutes, HEIs and the private sector **Dr. Norman Mukasa**

A platform will be developed to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing between research institutes, HEIs, the Government and the private sector including SMEs, civil society, and local authorities. The main focus of the platform will be to enable academics to interact with industry and SMEs, as well as promoting the use of research in policy making and industry.

Issues

Communicating research results can go a long way in inspiring entrepreneurial innovation and economic growth in line with the National Development plans. In fact, the motivation of research should be informed by addressing the developmental needs of society. In Uganda, the research potential is yet to be fully utilised through knowledge transfer and commercialisation of research ideas to solve societal problems and accelerate economic growth. There are currently limited and uncoordinated research and innovation-based solutions.

Furthermore, research gets duplicated because of a lack of system to track and share works among the stakeholders.

Objectives

The objective of this area of collaboration is to strengthen the contribution of science to private sector development, industrialisation and job creation and better livelihoods including skilling of youth and alike.

Strategic approach

- A joint team will be established to steer development of a working committee to develop strategies for translating research into usable commodities.
- The team will organise monthly academia/industry challenge/exhibition.
- NEMRA will join UNCST on the ongoing preparations for developing an online forum bringing together researchers and businesses to show case and foster discussions among the parties.

Outcomes

- Development of a committee to draw strategies for translation of research into usable commodities for solving national issues for example creation of jobs.
- Boosted Innovations and entrepreneurship to tackle youth unemployment. This is also expected to accelerate economic growth.
- commercialisation of research and innovation to solve societal problems including poverty.
- An online research/researcher database which will enable the government, private sector, academics and nonprofits utilize and monitor the outputs of Ugandan research carried out in Uganda.

4. Survey on Quality assurance for approved Humanities and Social Sciences research. Mr. Arthur Makara

NEMRA is in position to work with the UNCST to ensure quality assurance and assessing of field activities for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Issues

While, it may be convenient to monitor and audit compliance of laboratory-based research, following up the Humanities and Social Science projects which are carried out in communities with direct or indirect participation of the population may be challenging.

Objectives

The objectives of this activity are:

- To generate field reports from communities and participants concerning the authorised Social Science researchers' conduct in the field
- To enhance UNCST's regulatory role, increase her presence, visibility and appreciation among researchers and other stakeholders of research carried out in communities.

Strategic action

A survey will be designed to collect and analyse data on the researchers' compliance, conduct and community engagement during the Humanities and Social Sciences research projects

Outcome

The outcome of this activity will be:

- Baseline data on quality assurance for approved Humanities and Social Sciences research
- effective management of field activities Social Science and Humanities for approved Humanities and Social Sciences research
- Research input to the UNCST guidelines and field-supported recommendation for Humanities and Social Sciences research.

5. Review of Research outputs and dissemination **Dr. Norman Mukasa**

The fifth area of collaboration will be that of reviewing research outputs in Uganda and enhancing research dissemination to avail such outputs to a wider audience (community, policy makers, industry) beyond the academic walls.

Issues

While a lot of investment is made to carry out research, most research results end up in university libraries and other academic publishing houses with minimal input into the policy formulation processes. As a result, the decision-making process is sometimes haphazard and rarely based on empirical findings. Such decisions have a limited ability to address underlying societal issues and therefore yield very little returns on investments made in policy formulation and implementation.

Objectives

The objectives of this area of collaboration are:

- To take stock of the research projects that have been carried out in the past decade, and continuing with bi-annual reviews
- To identify and review the most relevant projects from the stock of research projects taking into consideration the most pressing contemporary societal problems.
- To develop technical and/or policy briefs, newsletter series, publication outlets, such as a peer reviewed journal
- To establish period research outputs dissemination mechanisms through a periodic journal and NEMRA-UNCST conference.

Strategic action

NEMRA-UNCST will set up a joint team to:

- Oversee carrying out of technical reviews of the various research projects that have been completed in different disciplines.
- Spearhead establishment of a journal and a periodic newsletter
- organize a NEMRA/UNCST periodic conference

Outcome

This will result in:

- Increased contribution of researchers in policy formulation, enhancement of informed policy and practice,
- Acceleration of interventions that address the underlying issues in societal problems and consequently transformation of individuals and communities.

