

LAUNCH OF THE PAN AFRICA CHEMISTRY NETWORK - PACN KENYA

The Pan Africa Chemistry Network, PACN Kenya hub was successfully launched on the 27th May, 2008 at the University of Nairobi, Chiromo Campus, Chemistry Department, with several high ranking officers from the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), Syngenta International, the British High Commissioner to Kenya, the Assistant Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology, the VC's representative and the Principal CBPS gracing the occasion. Many representatives from African countries, senior academics from the University of Nairobi and many students were also in attendance.

PACN presents an innovative approach to working with universities, schools, scientists, teachers, and students in Africa. With a special focus on the Millennium Development Goals and the countries of Eastern Africa the Network will ultimately span the entire Continent. Through a grant of GBP 1 million, Syngenta, an internationally known agricultural company has joined forces with the Royal Society of Chemistry (UK) to promote chemical sciences in the continent. This is a unique opportunity for the University of Nairobi to join forces with a leading chemical society in Europe and a leading private sector using chemical sciences in order to build strong chemistry society in Africa.

PACN prioritizes quality interaction and develops sustainable relationships with school scientists, universities and governments that build science and technology capacities all the time. The hub has planned a series of activities which include support for conference attendance, short time training of scientists at the Syngenta UK laboratory, support for the existing chemistry networks in the continent and creation of research and collaboration facilities to increasing the numbers of scientists coming from the continent.

The hub aspires to a high level of measurable activity, placing premium on leadership. Already the schools science competition launched this year will attract some of our best schools in developing the thinking capacities of our students in finding solutions to society problems. A second premium activity scheduled for this year is a review of Africa's biodiversity in order to transform the African socio-economic development using this source.

Prof. Shem Wandiga, the Chair of PACN Kenya hub made the following remarks during the launch, "To be a successful chemist requires more than passion. It involves hard work, critical thinking skills, and productivity. In addition, being a chemist means working with others, having networks and team skills. It requires continuous improvement and delivery of new knowledge. The Pan Africa Chemistry Network aims to evoke a spring of activities in the young and old chemical scientists in the continent in order to fulfill their passion for the subject."

Dr. Kilemi Mwiria who represented the government said, "As a government, our science and technology policy puts emphasis on the same challenges the Network has identified. The government therefore appreciates this assistance given and will work very closely with the Hub in providing whatever needed assistance."

The Vice Chancellor in a speech read on his behalf by the DVC, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi took note that, "Africa is less endowed in sufficient scientific knowledge and digital technology that drive the present globalized economy. The challenge to make Africa self sufficient in areas of weakness is so great that we cannot pretend to correct it with one effort as noble as this one. However, the efforts that PACN will make towards achievement of alleviation of poverty, improved food security, industrialization, and protection of the environment will be the yardstick for judging the success of our action today."

Dr. Richard Pike, the CEO of the Royal Society of Chemistry and who declared the Network officially inaugurated and established also noted that, "If we step back, and look at the key issues facing the world, they are dominated by, energy, water, health, food and new materials within the wider context of sustainability and chemistry underpins all these. Experience throughout the world shows that the most creative environment for nurturing science and its applications is based on numerate and literate population, inspirational teachers, good information flow drawn from conferences, seminars, workshops, journals, internet (e-mail and web-based materials), television, radio, open-mindedness, and a preparedness and willingness to challenge and be challenged, competitions and international exchange programmes between students and research workers. All this leads to good interaction, better solutions and the driver for innovation. This is the back-drop to the PACN framework"

After the launch, there was a scoping workshop where leading scientists from across Africa and worldwide were invited to discuss how PACN should work with the existing Networks and also be able to promote research, innovation and facilitate education in the following key areas: Health, food & agriculture, chemical science & education and energy, environment & sustainable water.