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## **UCT to co-lead four Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence**

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has been announced as co-lead of four of the 17 Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE), conceptualised and led by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of Research-Intensive European Universities (Guild), launched to pioneer new approaches to equitable collaboration to address societal challenges through research driving scientific and societal impact.

The four clusters co-led by UCT will address issues relating to food and public health; non-communicable diseases and associated multi-morbidities; climate change; and inequality and poverty. UCT has also been announced as partner in a further three clusters centred on water resources; pandemic response; and infectious diseases.

The announcement was officially made on Monday, 19 June 2023, following the ARUA-Guild summit held in Brussels, Belgium on Thursday, 8 June 2023.

The research clusters aim to transform the nature of collaborative research, foregrounding equity as a precondition for excellent and impactful research to address our common societal challenges.

The CoRE bring together distinguished researchers from universities and research institutes across both continents, from ARUA, The Guild and beyond the two networks. Each addresses a key societal challenge, framed by the Global Gateway's AU-EU Innovation Agenda, in the context of local perspectives to ensure maximum scientific and societal impact.

UCT Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, Professor Sue Harrison, said: "We are pleased that these teams of UCT academics have been part of conceptualising the challenge-driven research clusters ground-up with colleagues from across Africa and Europe. These crucial research clusters are set to make a meaningful contribution towards tackling key issues affecting our continent, through capacity building, generating new

knowledge and informing policy and practice. These are important platforms through which our researchers can contribute to societal impact in both Africa and Europe.”

The four clusters to be co-led by UCT are:

- Food environment actions for the Promotion of Public Health – co-led at UCT by Dr Jane Battersby (Department of Environmental & Geographical Science), with the Guild co-lead university being Uppsala University (Sweden).
- Non-communicable diseases and multi-morbidity – co-led at UCT by Professor Ntobeko Ntusi (Department of Medicine), with Université Paris Cité (France), University of Glasgow (Scotland), Jagiellonian University (Poland), Université Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal), University of Ibadan (Nigeria) and University of Nairobi (Kenya).
- Nature-based solutions for climate change – co-led by Professor Mark New (African Climate and Development Initiative) at UCT and Professor Guy Midgely at Stellenbosch University, and the Guild co-lead university is Università di Bologna (Italy).
- Collaborative excellence for equity: Promoting impactful research and education on inequalities, poverty and deprivation across Africa – co-led by Professor Murray Leibbrant (Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit) at UCT with University of Groningen (Netherlands) as the Guild co-lead university.

UCT is partner in the following three clusters:

- Pandemic preparedness and response – with Professor Lucy Gilson (School of Public Health and Family Medicine) leading UCT’s involvement.
- Water resources management - with Associate Professor Kirsty Carden (Future Water Research Institute) leading UCT’s involvement.
- Advanced infectious diseases – with Professor Nicola Mulder (Computational Biology Division) as UCT’s lead in the partnership.

The clusters are formed in the context of a clear and unequivocal support in the research and innovation sector, in Europe and Africa, to develop science collaboration equitably and sustainably, and the urgent demand to funders like the European Union to develop a more integrated approach that focuses on excellence and capacity-building. To this end, the clusters are aimed to open up new dialogues with policy-makers and funders in both continents and beyond, to identify ground-breaking solutions and create opportunities for investment in societal transformation.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **Comment by ARUA and the Guild**

Ernest Aryeetey, Secretary-General of ARUA, said: “The prevailing obstacles to effective and equitable partnerships between African and European researchers will diminish in significance as the Africa-Europe Clusters of Excellence do what they are expected to do. The Clusters have been developed on the basis of trust and shared values between African and European researchers, and this is going to be the reason for their success in the years

ahead. I am very optimistic that we will see a significant improvement in the quality of research and in the number of high-quality and impactful graduate students coming out of our universities.”

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild, said: “The leaders of the African Union and the European Union have identified research and education as a key part of the strategic relationship between both continents. The Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence will make a major contribution to this vision becoming a reality. We hope they will act as an inspiration to other researchers and institutions, just as they inspired our researchers, to address our pressing societal challenges collaboratively and equitably, in a deeply unequal world.”

### **More about the Africa-Europe CoRE**

The Africa-Europe CoRE, led by ARUA and The Guild, address head-on the inequity that has characterised research in relation to Africa, to the detriment of global science. In particular, they are distinguished by:

- Equity, as a precondition for producing outstanding research with maximum societal impact.
- A commitment to societal transformation, as each cluster focuses on acute societal needs that require the urgent focus of research and innovation.
- Inclusiveness, as the clusters bring together researchers from universities and research institutes from across Europe and Africa, far beyond ARUA and the Guild.
- Long-term commitment from researchers, underwritten by long-term institutional support.
- Commitment to transforming Africa’s capacity for knowledge production, with a particular focus on young researchers (including Masters and PhD students), ensuring they are embedded in global scientific networks, and giving them the best possible opportunities to contribute to global science in Africa.
- Commitment to capacity-building in high-level research infrastructures open to all who need it, and to seek a coalition of funders to achieve this aim.

The Africa-Europe CoRE will thus develop new research paradigms and transform joint capacities to overcome major health challenges, address climate change, strengthen technological transformations, and sustain societies facing conflict and change. They will help ensure that a common research agenda is at the heart of the African Union’s Africa 2063 strategy which envisages Africa’s transformation to a knowledge society. The clusters also strengthen the capacity of research and innovation to make a major contribution to each priority of the European Union’s Global Gateway.

Over the past six months, each cluster was developed through bottom-up, as researchers identified and formulated interdisciplinary visions in response to the pressing needs of societies.

***ENDS***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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