

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY PRESIDENT NANA AKUFO-ADDO AT THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE AFRICAN RESEARCH
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(Delivered by Professor Kwesi Yankah, Minister of State for Tertiary Education)

Secretary General, African Research Universities Alliance
The Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana, Legon
Vice Chancellor of Sister Universities
Deputy Vice Chancellors
Secretary General, Association of African Universities
The Keynote Speaker
University Lecturers and Researchers, Provosts, Deans, Directors
Distinguished Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to address you at this launch conference of the African Research Universities Alliance here in Accra. On behalf of the Government and people of Ghana, I welcome our distinguished professors, lecturers and researchers from various parts of the world to this country.

You have come to Ghana at a time Ghana has accomplished a smooth political transition process, and has quietly settled into a new era of hope and high expectations: high expectations about national development, high expectations for a vibrant economy.

But as you are all aware, Ladies and Gentlemen, no nation can boast of sustained development without considerable investment in its human capital. Indeed, that is what all Universities seek to accomplish: constructing knowledge to train middle-to-high-level human capital that will be at the pivot of Africa's development. I therefore feel proud to be associated with today's gathering, which seeks to focus on strategies by which Africa's intellectual capital can be enriched through research.

And I commend ARUA for this exemplary initiative of pooling together the research capacities, strengths and visions of leading African universities in the name of Africa's development and beyond. In unity lies strength, and uniting energies and resources in an era of resource constraints, is clearly the best way of coping and thriving in a highly competitive global arena.

It is lamentable that the issue of research, and knowledge construction is one of Africa's weakest points, and this can be gleaned from several empty slots observed in various global data bases within the Human Development Index, under African countries. In a continent that is often perceived as war torn and wrapped in poverty and illiteracy, one would need considerable research skills and output to diagnose Africa's development challenges, and prescribe solutions towards a brighter future.

Research in Africa only accounts for 1% of the world's research output. Even so, most of such research efforts can be traced to South Africa.

Our relatively negligible research output can be partly traced to a certain level of inertia towards research by governments and other stakeholders here in Africa.

Whereas countries like South Korea spend 3.74% of their GOP, and Israel spends 4.2% of GOP on research, most African countries spend less than 0.5% on research, even while the benchmark recommended by AU is 1% of GOP.

It is not surprising that there is a perception of huge disparities in quality between universities in Africa on one hand, and those in other parts of the world.

Even though the worldwide rankings are not necessarily the most reliable in measuring academic standards, the geographical distribution of universities in the top, middle, and bottom brackets, in most world rankings of universities should give one a sense of considerable inequality between universities in Africa, and the rest of the world.

Within Africa itself there is a sharp schism in perceived standards, between universities in South Africa and Northern Africa on one hand, and those in the typical sub-Saharan Africa, described as North of the Limpopo river. The latter are poorly perceived in terms of infrastructure, human resources, and academic output.

Education and National Priorities

But the grim situation also indexes differential levels of participation in higher education. While the higher education participation rates in many high income countries are well over 50%, in sub-Saharan Africa, they are in most cases below 5%. The low level of participation in tertiary education, should naturally have adverse effects on development, for there is increasing evidence that high levels of education in general and of higher education in particular, are essential for the design and optimum uses of new and innovative technologies, as well as the development of civil society.

Where research has been prosecuted for planning purposes in Africa, one often laments defective and unreliable data bases that cannot be utilized for any meaningful planning, and sustainable development. Issues of inaccurate statistics and lack of analytical tools have been the bane of research in Africa, and have posed major problems for planning.

This is not to talk of limited research output in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, which account for only 29% of Africa's total research output, whereas scientific research output for Malaysia is 68%. Clearly, in research generally and science and technology in particular, there is a lot of catching up to do.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the world today is moving at a remarkably fast pace. In areas like technology, health, food security, energy, water conservation, mobility and migration, revolutionary changes are taking place from day to day. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of human life, and increase our life expectancy.

Indeed, the quality of life has changed dramatically over the past few decades in almost every way imaginable. These changes could not have been possible without research and innovation.

In Africa, the need to invest in research is even more imperative. As a continent, we lag behind the rest of the world in many aspects of the human development index. Too many of our people lack access to potable water,

basic health care, and education. We cannot continue this way, and we must not continue this way.

The only way we can forge ahead to improve the lives of our people, is for governments to invest heavily in research. We cannot continue to be only consumers of research from other parts of the world, and neither can we rely perpetually on research findings about ourselves from research scientists who have limited knowledge and understanding about the local terrain. Sustainable solutions in Africa should come from Africa and from African themselves.

But before meaningful solutions can be found we need to resolve the perennial issue of a lack convergence between research and policy. Indeed, the disconnect between research findings and policy is a malaise that needs to be cured. While findings of research sit on dusty shelves of universities and research institutes, policy makers operate either with zero data, or grope in darkness for evidence based research which could otherwise drive policy, and move the continent forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must work hard to bring this to an end, and I urge fellow African governments to rise to this challenge and recognize research as central to our growth and development.

I believe in the potential of this continent, blessed with abundant resources, both natural and human. We have no excuse to be in our present dire circumstances. I have always insisted that God did not put us on this continent to be poor. It is bad leadership that has been the bane of Africa. We need a renaissance at all levels of leadership to elevate Africa to its deserved place in the comity of nations.

And this is why I am particularly pleased, that you have shown true leadership by coming together as African universities to harness your respective research energies for the ultimate good of the continent. I hope that in other aspects of human endeavor, African institutions and governments will continue to find common ground to bring growth, development and stability to our people. We all have a role to play in pursuing these noble goals.

I am glad that universities represented here today are highly rated research universities in Africa, but I trust that best practices noted at your

meeting here in Ghana, will not circulate among yourselves only, but will be shared among all universities and research institutions in Africa.

I trust that you will have fruitful deliberations during this conference, and that as an alliance, this organization will grow from strength to strength.

I wish you a warm and pleasant stay, and I can assure you of the legendary Ghanaian hospitality anywhere you go.

On this note, allow me to formally declare open this maiden conference of the African Research Universities Alliance.

Thank you.