

PAN AFRICA CHEMISTRY NETWORK LAUNCH
TUESDAY, 27TH MAY 2008, NAIROBI, KENYA

SPEECH NOTES
DR RICHARD PIKE, ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

Introduction

- Deputy Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen
- Delighted that the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) is partnering Syngenta, and collaborating with the University of Nairobi and many other organisations, to build on numerous existing networks which you all represent
- I would also like to thank Simon Campbell for his enthusiasm and drive in progressing this project, and forging the links with Michael Pragnell, the former Chief Executive of Syngenta, and to David Lawrence in continuing this support.

Setting the Scene

- I'd like, now, to add to the RSC perspective you have heard already
- 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 – chemistry underpins all these
- Africa is extraordinarily well-placed to play a key role with a vast range of
 - Minerals
 - Flora and fauna to provide the basis for natural products
 - World's sunniest continent that raises the prospect for applying sunlight to renewable energy processes, and
 - Increasing optimism for further developing education and the science base

What I am painting is a picture not of problems, but great opportunities for individual careers, in both business and academia

- 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, drawing on 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
- 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 Pan-Africa Chemistry Network (PACN), and provides the framework our plans for the future. Success will be marked by more and more wanting to belong to the network, because it will be seen to make a difference and to add value.

Context of RSC

- You've heard a little about the RSC – let me add some more context
- RSC is the largest learned society in Europe promoting the chemical sciences, with almost 45,000 members worldwide, 350 staff, and publishes 23 journals, as well as organising numerous scientific events and delivering educational materials and supporting skills development for teachers
- The RSC 's 83 specialist interest groups include many that are of particular relevance to Africa, and today some of these, the groups for Analytical Chemistry and Organic Chemistry are represented here, today. The PACN will enable African chemists to participate in these groups in the most effective way.
- We also support the European Union (EU) decision to expand collaborations between Europe and Africa via the "Euro-African" networks involving universities and centres of excellence".
- For many years, RSC has had various links with countries and organisations in Africa, including the running of joint scientific events, and most latterly a Collaboration Agreement with the South African Chemical Society
- PACN gives us all the framework to add further value in a more coordinated way, that avoids unnecessary duplication and helps identify collaborative opportunities, not only in chemistry, but across the interfaces with related sciences

Archive for Africa

- Simon Campbell spoke about the Archive for Africa – it is worth reiterating
- RSC is providing free access to its scientific journal archives to developing countries in Africa and Latin America and is the first learned and professional organisation to do so.
- This archive, dating back to 1841, contains more than 250,000 research papers – that's more than 1.5million pages - and has already been accessed by more than 70 institutions across Africa.
- The Archive for Africa project was launched in February 2006 in London at the House of Commons.

Specific Background Activities

- What is taking place right now?
- 16,000 RSC tutorial books donated by the RSC to Ethiopia and Kenya will arrive shortly for distribution to sixth form colleges and universities in both countries.
- The RSC and the PACN will also sponsor a weekly radio programme to be broadcast on Channel Africa. The presenters of the show will attempt to answer questions on science raised by the public and we hope that it will play some part in inspiring the next generation of scientists.
- 13 countries are represented here---11 from Africa (Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana, Tanzania, Egypt, Burundi, Kenya, UK, Switzerland) on behalf of their respective chemical societies and also the Federation of African Chemical Societies (FASC). These leading scientists from across Africa will participate in this afternoon's scoping workshop with the objective of setting the agenda for the PACN hub.
- Thus, PACN is bringing together both the English-speaking and French-speaking parts of the continent
- Acknowledge support of the Royal Society and the Institute of Physics, and three universities from the UK (London, Nottingham, Southampton), who have sent representatives demonstrating their support of this enterprise, and seek new joint ventures with PACN. A number of other companies from the UK who have links with Africa are also here – GSK, Unilever, Mass Spec Ltd and Bridgeworks Africa Ltd. Also more globally, I want to convey our thanks for support from SETAC (Society Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry and the United Nations Environmental Programme, SAICM (Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management)

Pan Africa Chemistry Network Set-Up

- How has the PACN been set up?
- Any activity has to be adapted to the requirements of the community that it is serving. So we have set out to establish, with the assistance of partners, a series of "hubs", with local experts who understand local and regional issues.
- These hubs will also enable chemical scientists from other African countries and from further afield to share ideas and best practice in research and education – fostering innovation and supporting the emergence of centres of scientific excellence.
- In practice, this will entail the coordination of conferences, workshops and other scientific activities and creating new avenues for research collaborations.
- The first hub, which is being launched today, is based in Nairobi and has been made possible thanks to the generous support of Syngenta. Already, a dedicated member of staff is in place at this university.
- The Kenya hub's major inaugural event will take place in September: an international conference on "Enhancing Biodiversity".
- This hub will be followed later this year by a satellite-hub in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, where the university excels in green chemistry.

- Addis Ababa is also home to the *Federation of African Societies of Chemistry* (FASC), which the RSC is delighted to support.
- We hope that these will be the first of many hubs – the nodes in a network which will include all African countries, connecting chemical scientists across the entire continent.

Pan Africa Chemistry Network Inauguration

- Delighted to declare formally the inauguration of the Pan Africa Chemistry Network and the establishment of the Nairobi Hub. I want to thank you all.
- invite Professor Shem Wandiga (chair of the local management committee in Kenya) to say a few words—on what the PACN will mean to African scientists.