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CAPACITY FOR POLICY ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE REGIONAL EXPERIENCE

By Prof. Benno J. Ndulu

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**Capacity for Policy Analysis and Economic Management in a Changing Environment:
A Perspective from the Regional Experience**

by

**Prof. Benno J. Ndulu
African Economic Research Consortium
P.O. Box 62882
NAIROBI**

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1. **Introduction**

Over the last decade and a half the demands on a more informed, more participatory and more precise policy making have increased significantly. During the 1990s these demands have been further intensified as policy issues have come increasingly into the public domain. One has observed a significant shift in the latter period towards a more localized public scrutiny of policy action to supplement policy pressures from donor agencies. This is not to down play, the latent grassroot pressures on policy making process which earlier were channelled through patron-client networks or through exercising exit options e.g. through parallel markets to evade policy-based controls deemed inimical to the interests of the various groups. A more open expression of pressure on policy making is in fact taking root in countries pursuing economic and political reforms.

It can also be surmised from the experience of the 1980s and 1990s that there is increased awareness and acceptance of the crucial role appropriate policies and competent economic management play in fostering sustained development. While big push for investment and resource mobilization remain fundamental for achieving sustained growth, these are being supplemented by policy measures aimed at raising the efficacy and productivity of resource use. Thus the domain of economic management has considerably expanded de facto to encompass more vigorously those finer and more intricate aspects for ensuring continued macroeconomic stability, foster increased supply response and improved efficiency more generally.

It is instructive to note that the process of transition from a more deterministic and controlled management to a more open and liberalized policy making process has raised

many anxieties as to the appropriate timing sequencing and nurturing of required measures. Indeed many of the countries in Africa which are pursuing reforms in earnest have had to deal with unprecedented dual transition of economic and political liberalization. While each of these two processes have generated their own large demands for changes in the way of doing business, this is further complicated by the interaction of the two processes. Examples here are the handling of electoral budget cycles, balancing fiscal pressures from a variety of interest groups and insulating technocratic performance from political pressure.

The above changes in turn place increasing demands on the size, quality and efficient utilization of capacities for economic management, policy analysis and policy-oriented research. The delicate balancing needed between responsiveness and pro active charting of new course of action calls for a more adaptive character of these capacities and increased depth of basic skills and competence. Moreover, strategies for generating and disseminating necessary information and advice for policy use require increased attention to coordination for better utilization of the scarce capacity available. This latter point assumes particular importance in view of the increased number of active participants in the policy process who need information to effectively contribute to policy choice and implementation. Prospectively the policy process will cease to be the sole domain of governmental entities and will more actively involve various private sector, community and other non-governmental entities.

Based on the premises spelt out above, this paper proceeds to briefly highlight the following issues focusing on capacity for economic management, policy analysis and policy-oriented research. The next section highlights those changing conditions of significant consequence to capacity building and utilization in support of economic policy process. This is followed by a section drawing out the implications arising from these changes based on a consolidation of experiences from the region. Section 4 highlights the responses and initiatives currently in place or in formative stages to address the emerging needs. It also

outlines the key strategic features for strengthening capacity building and utilization at both regional and national level bearing in mind that ultimately policy making is first and foremost a national concern. An appendix describing the AERC experience with capacity building is attached.

2. **The Changing Policy Environment in the Region**

The impulse for changes in the conduct of economic policy formulation and implementation derives from four main recent developments in the region. First is the ongoing transition from controlled and interventionist to a more open and market oriented economies. Second and more recent is the transition from closed political regimes operating largely along patron-client networks to more open and liberalized political systems which enlarge the potential for more direct and organized active participation of a variety of interest groups in the policy process. Third is the growing donor disposition towards promoting ownership of policies and development strategies by recipient countries in order to enhance effectiveness of their support and elicit broad-based accountability and transparency of policy action. Fourth is the very significant increase in the media involvement in bringing policy issues to the public domain and enhancing public scrutiny of policy performance.

The transition to a market oriented economy is changing profoundly the regime of policy influence from the previous direct controls to eliciting responses more indirectly via incentive instruments. It requires more information on behaviour of various entities in the economy and a more sound knowledge of the efficacy of the variety of policy instruments in inducing favourable voluntary responses from a wide range of actors. In depth knowledge of how markets function and what measures for ensuring their efficient operation has become more critical. The economies are profoundly changing from a directive-based to an

incentive-based piloting for development. These changes also considerably alter the balance of power between the state and other actors in the economy in determining the course of development a country will pursue and in determining results. A more intricate and market-friendly behaviour of governments is a reflection of this shift. Under the new regime policy makers have to contend with both government failures and market failures, vastly widening their tasks. The system is more information-based generating large demands on the capacity to make it available in a wide variety of formats.

More recently political liberalization is gaining ground. More than a fifth (arguably) of the countries in SSA are now pursuing democratization of their political regimes albeit at different speeds and with different levels of success. The main anticipated implications of these changes are that the policy process becomes more open and participatory; and policy makers become more accountable for the results and means engaged in economic management. The widening of the range of players in the policy process calls for an overhaul not only of the institutional structures to allow a greater scope for participation but also a change in the culture (attitudes) for decision-making processes. Policy making has to contend with mechanisms for arriving at concensus for implementable policies while at the same time leaving enough room to proceed with implementation without unproductive interference. What is perhaps more daunting in the new dispensation is coping with fiscal pressures arising from the various demands of electorates and pressures for blocking or reversing reform measures arising from self-interests. A delicate balance needs to be struck between an all inclusive stance in policy decision and a strong political will of those in power to pursue resolute action irrespective of strong representations by individual interest groups. The need for a credible and competent capacity for managing the economy is a necessary complement to the political will.

Although concerns with increased local ownership of policy making and development initiatives have now been on the donors' agenda for almost a decade, serious efforts aimed at implementation is a more recent phenomenon. This turn of events appears to have been prompted by increased concerns with raising aid effectiveness and reducing the unsustainable aid dependency of many countries in the region. The current pressures on political liberalization has also changed the ownership concept to encompass wider participation and accountability as an anchor for sustained development effort instead of the previous dominance of donor-conditionality to elicit government compliance to externally driven reform programmes. The implications of this shift are that policy making has now to rest squarely in the hands of recipient countries, which have to take a lead role in designing and executing programmes. Donor support will only play a complementary role and remain consistent with own developed strategies and programmes. The broadening of the channels of donor support augurs well with the enlarged number of players involved under the new political dispensation and a more liberalized economic regime. What is clear from this development is that there is an enhanced need for strengthening own capacity for policy analysis, designing strategies and programmes, as well as improving skills, competence and institutional framework for implementing policies.

With political liberalization, a freer press is emerging in the region. This has considerably enhanced the role of media in widening public debate on policy issues - enhancing the role of media in widening public debate on policy issues - enhancing public awareness, and in keeping the system honest. It has become politically more costly to commit policy mistakes and performance is increasingly coming under public scrutiny. The media is increasingly playing the role of the society's conscience, fosters more informed participation by a large variety of interest group in self determination, encourages disclosure and transparency in policy action. It is thus an important component of the capacity for strengthening the transparency and effectiveness of policy formulation and implementation.

It also can play a crucial role in disseminating more widely the results of policy research for a better informed participation in the policy process by the variety of interested parties.

3. Implications of the Changing Environment for Capacity of Policy Analysis

The foregoing changes raise many concerns related to the dearth of capacity for meeting increasing demands for policy analysis. Our focus here will be on identifying emerging human capacity gaps and institutional weaknesses to cope with the changing environment.

The dearth in capacity for coping with the rapid change in the sphere of policy making and implementation manifests itself in all the levels of the policy process. In policy making institutions, policy analysis and advice is the task of those professionals retained for digesting the massive amount of information generated by implementing agencies and research organizations and reorganizing it for policy briefs and recommendations to decision makers. A few of these institutions such as central banks and planning ministries conduct their own research on specific issues. Prior to changes towards market-orientation the plethora of parastatals acted not only as implementors of specific policy tasks but also as a source of information for reviewing performance in productive sectors and charting action for the future. With their disappearance this source of information has also vanished without immediate replacement. Reliance on indirect sources of information has gained more prominence. The skill profile for basing policy advice on indirect sources is quite different even if new market-based sources of information emerge. This in fact happens to be a concern not only for those professionals in policy making institutions but also those outside them engaged in policy oriented research.

As pointed out earlier, knowledge of how different markets function in the African context still remains very scarce. The shift to incentive-based policy operation without such knowledge has proved to be daunting. Guesswork on responsiveness of various economic agents has made projections and targets very elusive undermining credibility of enacted policies. Appropriate regulatory action can not be designed to stem market failures without this knowledge. In several seminars organized region-wide this weakness was raised particularly in relation to the operation of the very sensitive financial market. Moreover setting up of new institutions for the market economy in the cases of no previous experience has made the tasks very difficult and such ventures are imbued with uncertainties as far as outcomes are concerned. For most cases the new state regulatory functions have suffered from a lack of requisite skills and information on the entities they try to regulate.

Outside the policy making institutions, capacity for policy analysis resides in universities, research institutes and more recently in national policy institutes. In a study on the policy process conducted by the AERC (1993-94) in 8 countries of the region, it was evident that civic communities, parliaments and NGOs hardly have their own inhouse capacity for policy analysis. They rely to a large extent on tapping the limited capacity of the institutions mentioned above. As their demands under the new dispensation increase, the pressure on this limited capacity will tremendously build up. What is more worrying perhaps is that research and analysis done in academic institutions is hardly accessible to these non-governmental users due to poor dissemination channels and inaccessible formats of presentation. Until very recently no intermediate institutions (e.g. national policy institutes including EASRF) existed to facilitate tapping the more complex research reports and presenting it in accessible formats to the variety of audiences. Economic journalism is still very nascent but could play a key complementary role to the task performed by these institutions. Again requisite skills need to be developed for this purpose.

It is clear from the above that a concerted effort needs to be made to augment the pool of policy analysts and researchers, sharpen and adapt their skills to service new demands, and to enhance the utilization of the limited capacity. In the latter case, better utilization could be enhanced through eliminating wasteful duplication of research and fostering coordination across institutions engaged in economic research and policy analysis. We return to these issues later in the paper.

4. Emerging Responses to the Capacity Gaps in Policy Analysis

A large range of initiatives are emerging in response to the weakness in the capacity for economic policy analysis in relation to the growing demand for it. Some of these are regional in nature but designed to service national demands and others are within-nation initiatives. They all aim to augment the pool of analysts through formal training as well as learning by doing research; enhance and sharpen skills and professional ethos; and promote retention *in situ* for use on a continuing basis.

At the regional level the initiatives are mainly in the form of professional networks. These include among others the network of economists engaged in policy-oriented macroeconomic research coordinated and supported by the AERC; a network of environmental economists again aimed at supporting policy-oriented research; and a network of technology policy analysts. Professional associations add to these initiatives region-wide. These networks and associations serve three main purposes vis a vis the issue at hand. They provide professional peer review to enhance quality of research done, raise professional confidence and broaden the range of skills for analysis. A professional critical mass is often not available at the national level to engender the required level of peer pressure. These networks also offer opportunities for professional interaction, exchange of experiences and cultivating *esprit de corps* to sustain professional interest and engagement. The networks also

provide a window for continued contact with the frontier of the profession world-wide. These initiatives over time have also added formal training programmes which exploit complementarities across national institutions engaged in training in a collaborative approach.

The results achieved to date are in the form of augmentation of the pool of researchers; enhanced skills more flexibly available for tapping on demand; and research results for use in policy. A non-tangible impact has been a rise in the professional stature of the participants and enhanced credibility of their competence. It is important to underscore that this improved capacity is retained within their national boundaries and hence available for servicing policy analytical requirements. The results of their research are widely disseminated in a variety of formats to ensure accessibility and efforts are made to enhance interaction between researchers and policy makers through seminars at regional and national level.

At the national front, the setting up of national policy institutes is a very worthwhile innovation. These are now in place in 7 countries in the region with prospects for more. The institutes are designed to complement traditional research and training institutions on the one hand and professional capacity in the policy making institutions on the other. They could play an important intermediary role in fostering a stronger link between the research and policy communities and play a central role in disseminating research results to the wider range of audiences. In Ghana and Kenya private policy institutes catering more exclusively for non-governmental demands for policy analysis exist. These respond to short term analytical demands from the private sector. Unlike the national policy institutes they do not involve government participation in their ownership. Other initiatives in a few countries (e.g. Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia) are specialized training programmes for policy analysts and implementors in the government entities. These add to the more ubiquitous specialized training programmes for financial institutions and ad hoc short term training largely under technical assistance related to specific policy issues.

These national responses are nascent and lack both comprehensiveness and the necessary coordination to rationalize the utilization of scarce human capacity available. There is yet to emerge an institution to pursue a strategic rationalization of both capacity building initiatives and foster rationalization of utilization at the national level. The African Capacity Building Foundation through its multi-pronged programmes has begun to provide a strategic perspective for such an endeavour on a regional scale but national strategies need to be drawn up.

A strategy for strengthening capacity for policy analysis at the national level therefore needs to consider five main elements. First is to augment the pool of analysts through appropriate formal training programmes. In addition to imparting skills for appropriate policy-oriented research, capabilities for disseminating research results to a wide variety of audiences form an important component of a training strategy. It is thus important to incorporate economic journalism in such a strategy. Second is to impart professional confidence for rigorous and credible analysis. This is a long term process which typically entails learning by doing under professional peer review. It calls for professional engagement under peer pressure, cultivation of professional ethics and augmentation of opportunities for such engagement. Third is an appropriate incentive structure for encouraging utilization and retention of capacity. A conducive institutional environment is important for active professional engagement in analytical work. Fourth is the need to enhance interaction across professionals in various institutions engaged in policy analysis to enable professional exchange and interaction between researchers and policy makers. Fifth is to set up a coordination mechanism to enable maintain an up to date data base of existing capacity; previous ongoing and prospective research; arrangements for sharing data bases for research; and avoiding wasteful duplication of effort.

**A Regional Approach to Capacity Building in Economic Management
The African Economic Research Consortium's Contribution**

by

**Prof Benno J Ndulu
African Economic Research Consortium
P O Box 62882
NAIROBI**

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A Regional Approach to Capacity Building in Economic Management - The African Economic Research Consortium's Contribution

1. Objectives and Strategic Thrusts in the Regional Context.

The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) was established in July 1988 with the principal objective of strengthening local capacity for economic policy research in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This is a limited response to the observed dearth of capacity for economic research in the region to support policy formulation and implementation, the two key aspects of economic management. AERC's mission rests on two basic premises. First, development is more likely to occur where there is sustained sound management of the economy. Second, such management is more likely to happen where there exists an active, well informed group of locally-based professional economists to conduct policy-relevant research and provide policy advice on a continuing basis. Hence AERC's limited intervention is more specifically aimed at enhancing the capacity of locally based researchers to conduct policy-relevant economic enquiry, enlarge the pool of such researchers, promote the retention of such capacity and encourage its application in the policy context.

The AERC's strategic focus involves four thrusts . First is to enhance skills and impart professional confidence for rigorous and credible analysis. These include basic skills through formal training and those acquired through the process of doing research. Second is to ensure relevance of research pursued to policy in order to promote the usefulness of such research to policy makers and enhance the probability of uptake of research results for policy purposes. Third is to make the results of such research accessible to the target audiences by adopting presentational formats that are user-friendly. Fourth is to foster interactions among policy makers and researchers with the view to ensuring that research undertaken is sensitive to policy needs while at the same time subjecting it to the rigorous analysis drawing from frontier knowledge.

AERC has adopted a networking approach as its main strategic feature for implementing its activities. This allows a critical mass of professional and

institutional peer review for enhancing quality and professional ethos. Such a mass is often not available at national level. Networking also allows exploiting complementarities in maldistributed professional strength across countries and institutions for mutual benefits. A regional approach further allows a rationalized use of limited available professional capacity at a regional level and limited resources for supporting capacity building activities. Networking permits regional exchange of experience and information sharing. Through this the Consortium has also come to play an important information clearing role matching needs and available capacity for professional tasks at the regional level.

Indeed the Consortium's current networking of 15 funders to support a commonly agreed programme of activities allows achieving a critical mass of support for a set of coordinated activities with shared overheads. The research program networks individual researchers in the region supported by resource persons to carry out research on selected themes designated by the AERC's Advisory Committee to be most pertinent to policy needs. This alleviates professional isolation, encourages exchange of experiences and creates peer pressure for enhancing quality.

The training program features the Anglophone Collaborative MA Program which currently brings together a network of 18 universities in 13 countries. This collaboration rationalizes the use of limited teaching capacity, attains a critical mass of students, offers a larger menu of electives and jointly enforces high standards for graduate training in economics. Other similar initiatives in the francophone countries and in Nigeria, both originating from AERC studies, are based on the same concept.

Below follows a more detailed description of the individual AERC programmes, their strategic thrusts and current as well as prospective activities under each. We conclude by highlighting some achievements to date.

2. The Programs:

Research

The research program, the oldest of the three components of the AERC program has achieved significant success in building a credible local capacity for policy-oriented economic research, promoting retention and self confidence of professionals in the region. It has also raised the potential for utilization of the researchers' skills in support of development by expanding professional opportunities through the exposure of their work locally and internationally, and building links with policy makers. The success of this program is also demonstrated by the increased adoption of the networking concept in other disciplines as a cost effective approach for attaining a critical mass of professional activity in the region and application of peer review for professional excellence. A spin-off of sub-networks, often in collaboration with professionals outside the region, has further widened research opportunities and firmed up interest in African research. This has helped create a potential for sustainable funding of such research outside of the AERC itself. AERC has also adopted a flexible but cautious approach to expanding its own thematic coverage in research. Longer term sustainable development issues are currently gaining ground in terms of research interest in the network.

The AERC research program has four principal objectives: to build a credible local capacity for policy oriented research, to generate research results for use by policy makers, to promote links between research and policy, and to promote retention of high quality researchers. It emphasizes quality and relevance of research to policy, so as to ensure credibility and encourage utilization of its results.

The key elements of AERC's research strategy are threefold. The first is to offer small grants to groups of individuals drawn from both academia and policy institutions to conduct research on a limited number of pertinent themes. The current thematic areas are **External Balance and Macroeconomic Management; Trade, Trade Policy and Regional Integration; External and Internal Debt**

Management; and Financial Management and Domestic Resource Mobilization.

While maintaining a focus on the selected themes, the current three-year phase will see an evolutionary expansion and deepening of thematic coverage. This is aimed at a better understanding of how markets function in the African context, institutional structures affecting economic behaviour and performance, and the link between policy and growth.

Second is the establishment of the support system for research in the forms of peer review, methodological workshops and literature. The Consortium has a solid library and is linked to several other resource centres worldwide. Resource persons drawn worldwide enrich the technical base and the variety of relevant experiences. Methodological workshops are organized to sharpen research skills and expose the network to the relevant methodological developments.

Third, the biannual thematic research workshops provide a way to monitor the quality of research on a continuous basis, create effective peer pressure, foster interaction among the researchers themselves and with the resource persons and enforce scheduled delivery of reports. The workshops have been central in building and maintaining a sense of ownership of AERC activities by participating researchers and institutions through providing opportunities for a feedback on the design and implementation of the AERC's programs.

To date, AERC has supported 211 research projects, and the number of participating researchers has grown from 40 in 1988 to the current 115. The geographic coverage expanded from 7 countries to the current 21 involving three linguistic groups – Anglophone, francophone and lusophone. Up to 72 researchers have participated in workshops featuring the most recent developments in time series econometrics and in workshops on survey methodology. Further workshops in economic modelling are planned.

Over the last two years other modalities for research have been adopted. Comparative research provides for a cross-country synthesis of completed research

on specific issues and for research on issues of regional/sub-regional relevance. Collaborative research teams up a group of African researchers and their counterparts elsewhere on a mutually agreed theme. This has helped to sustain interest in African research outside the region, build competence through interaction and create self-sustaining arrangements for financing research outside of the AERC. Support for attachments to better research environments outside the region has been arranged in conjunction with the implementation of the AERC-supported research.

Training

The AERC Training program was designed to augment the pool of potential researchers and policy makers. The focus up to 1992/93 was on support for PhD thesis research to speed up completion of degrees and on commissioned studies which led to the design of interventions to strengthen graduate training in economics for Africans at the masters level. To date a total of 83 grants for thesis research have been awarded. Thirty-five of the grantees have already completed their studies and twenty-two of them have begun participating in the AERC research program.

The AERC studies on graduate training in economics have led to three initiatives in collaborative sub-regional masters programs. The collaborative MA program for Anglophone Africa (outside of Nigeria) is being executed by the AERC. The other two programs for francophone Africa and Nigeria are at various stages of implementation or of preparations for implementation. AERC continues to provide for cross-program interactions.

A major part of the AERC training program is the execution of the Anglophone Collaborative MA Program. This program currently involves 18 universities from 13 countries which collaborate to offer a high quality Master's degree in economics. The collaboration features joint enforcement of standards through annual evaluation and assessment by external examiners, common curriculum and its development, joint facility for teaching electives, and development of teaching materials. An Academic Board with membership drawn from the participating universities is responsible for

the substance of the program. Currently six of these universities are deemed to have adequate capacity to offer core courses which meet jointly determined and enforced standards. The rest send their students to these. Current enrollment for the 2-year program is 144 and it is set to expand to 190 by next year. Provisions for expanding or contracting the number of qualified departments based on performance and evaluation are in place. The universities collaborate also in offering electives at a joint facility in Nairobi. A staff development program and studies towards strengthening PhD programs in African universities are geared towards strengthening the teaching capacity and to enlarge the pool of policy analysts in the region.

In addition to mobilizing finance for the program, the AERC provides logistical support and facilitates curriculum development, joint enforcement of standards, student and teacher movements. It also provides support for improved teaching facilities and library services and manages the joint facility for electives. As an executing agency it is responsible for all grant making and contractual arrangements among the collaborators.

Publication and Dissemination

Activities under this heading are aimed at ensuring a timely and cost-effective dissemination of AERC research and commissioned studies. AERC publishes a series of edited and externally reviewed research reports. Less technical executive summaries and abstracts from these papers facilitate access and citation of the papers. AERC also publishes a Special Papers series of commissioned studies and books on specific issues or synthesis of research to motivate new areas for research or new activities. A total of 30 Research Papers and 17 Special Papers have been published to date. The pipeline currently stands at 50 papers in various stages of publication.

Of late, AERC has directed more effort towards assisting researchers to effectively disseminate their research results and therefore to maximize impact. This effort includes workshops for assisting researchers to access professional journal outlets; support for national economic policy workshops at which research is utilized to

inform issues of national policy concerns; a study of the policy process to inform researchers on the potential links between research and policy, and support for regional journals and economic associations as professional outlets for research results.

3. Impact of Research, Training and Dissemination Activities

Publication and dissemination of research results has received more attention recently as a critical mass of research is completed and the professional stature of the network grows both locally and internationally. Apart from the highly regarded AERC series of refereed and non-refereed publications mentioned earlier, the assistance given to the network of researchers to disseminate their results in professional and policy fora is already bearing fruit. The professional stature of African researchers has been given considerable boost through publication of AERC research results in international journals including a recent (August 1994) special issue of *World Development* which exclusively carried papers drawn from AERC-supported research. This recognition is further shown by the large number of requests through AERC and directly for involvement of the researchers in various professional undertakings internationally and locally including a recent meeting to consider the research agenda on Africa by the OECD Development Center.

On the policy front, national economic policy workshops, where initiated, have become very useful fora for policy dialogues. In some of the countries these have become permanent annual national events and are largely self-financed. Involvement of some of the senior researchers in policy advisory roles has increased considerably as confirmed by a recent questionnaire administered to the network. Internationally the network has increasingly been used as a sounding board for major policy considerations by the multilateral financial institutions, e.g. the World Bank. AERC researchers have to date been invited as witnesses to four testimonies to the US Congress on matters pertaining to African development and the operations of the international financial institutions affecting it.

Senior policy seminars are planned for the future to provide a forum for the discussion of policy-oriented syntheses of AERC research and to obtain feedback from policy makers on the AERC research agenda. The first such seminar is scheduled for March 1995.

Although the implementation of the collaborative MA programs is still at an early stage several positive results are already being achieved. The program has considerably enlarged the enrollment of graduate students in economics. The enrollment in the collaborating universities has already more than doubled in two years. The quality of the program has already made significant improvements as evident from very positive reports from external examiners and high grade achievements in the courses taught. Skill formation is on the rise as emphasis on modern techniques and knowledge of a variety of computer software is acquired. The range of electives offered is considerably higher under collaboration. The regional interaction among students and teachers at the Joint Facility for Electives sets a stage for future collaboration not only among the participating universities but more importantly among future policy makers. The latter point is due to the fact that the majority of students return to their positions in policy making institutions upon graduation. Finally the program contributes to the retention (regionally) of scarce capacity of teaching staff as professional opportunities for excellence have been enlarged.

AERC has also embarked on building an electronic network among the universities participating in the collaborative MA programme. This is aimed at facilitating information sharing and improved access to world resource centres.

It is needless to emphasize that the impact of the AERC network of researchers and institutions crucially depends on the continued strengthening of its professional stature, enhanced credibility with policy makers and their retention as well as continued active professional involvement in their respective countries.