

## **RESNET REPORT ON VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS ON AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION**

Following the initial RESNET hybrid meeting on 27 February, the virtual workshops scheduled for May and June 2024 reflect the themes identified by ACU members as key priorities for the network.

The workshops were designed to probe into the ways in which the ACU can support the efforts of its members and potential RESNET collaborators by leveraging its experience in delivering projects and programmes to strengthen individual and institutional capacity by facilitating researcher activity in areas including networking, professional development, teaching, support across the research lifecycle, including funding awards and administration.

Substantively, participant self-selection yielded a rich and heterogeneous discussion reflecting diversity of participant interests, institutional settings, and disciplinary fields.

The workshops generated a good number of registrations and participation was vigorous and insightful. However, it must be noted that RESNET has not yet developed fuller convening power not only due to its infancy as a pilot project but due to the need to build a presence in this arena and cultivate working relationships with FAO's partner organisations (i.e., RUFORUM and VU), and others. It is expected that with time these network relationships will strengthen.

### **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION ACROSS WORKSHOPS**

There was general acknowledgement that an ACU-based RESNET can play a role in facilitating work on agri-food system transformation given the ACU's experience in capacity strengthening and as a university membership organisation.

In general, workshop participants indicated that an ACU-based RESNET would facilitate the accomplishment of individual research, academic departmental goals and the educational and research aims of universities more broadly by providing additional support and tools to meet specific challenges related to conducting research, teaching, and funding research activities on agri-food systems. For participants, there was a sense that RESNET would provide an opportunity to foster (academic, teaching, funding) collaborations and networking forging stronger working relationships particularly across South-South contexts, and in instances where they don't have ready access to (non-financial) resources. Some of the participants also felt that an SSTC RESNET would help increase their opportunities to bid for funding.

What follows is cross-cutting workshop feedback on the aims possible RESNET role for capacity strengthening via the facilitation of researcher activity (e.g., networking, professional development, teaching, research lifecycle, and funding awards and administration).

#### **Individual researcher capacity strengthening (all agri-food systems specific):**

- Dedicated funding (e.g., fellowships, grants, research lifecycle, professional stage, professional development, theme-based, etc)
- Mentorship, shadowing, and training (e.g. all career stages, skills but also thematic, disciplinary, formal training, etc)
- Networking and collaboration (e.g. targeted events, seminars, conferences, public engagement, etc)

### **Research lifecycle strengthening (all agri-food systems specific):**

- Funding (e.g., equipment, accelerator funds, seed, and post-research funding, facilitating joint research, research recognition, lobby funders to recognise contradictions in funding calls, funding to engage in co-design/transdisciplinary research (stakeholder engagement), etc)
- Post-research funding and transdisciplinary resources to create, maintain and keep links across and beyond the life of the research project
- Funding for themed/cluster-related research, activities, etc.
- Increasing funding call preparedness and inclusion

**Teaching and learning:** the participants saw the role of an ACU-based RESNET as facilitating the activities described below via summer schools, training, convening scholars, students and others, supporting conference participation and creation, teaching and learning partnership-based resource sharing, among others. Thus, funding proposals for extending the life of RESNET must consider targeted and pedagogical issue/problem-based trainings related to agri-food system transformation to be delivered in a variety of formats. Some of the themes discussed in this session were:

- **Building capacity in systems thinking and learning:** Learning, developing and sharing appropriate methods and techniques to facilitate critical thinking, participatory and experiential teaching and learning, etc.
- **Facilitating skill development on application of specific/new teaching techniques and use of technology:** for example, scenario planning across countries to teach and learn about power structures and dynamics; virtual labs, training in use of AI etc.
- **Inter-university/departmental collaboration:** working on similar areas and encompassing anything from co-supervision of students to convening around knowledge gaps and practices in teaching and learning including challenging norms and creating solutions; identifying drivers of change, interconnectedness, knowledge as deliberation; resource repositories. Co-creation of modules led by academics to incorporate a range of perspectives, viewpoints, languages, epistemic approaches.
- **Facilitating variegated/complexity knowledge(s) pedagogical approaches:** horizontal and more inclusive teaching and learning.

### **Inequality:**

- Institutional differences in access –ACU can help ameliorate these differences by leveraging its position as a membership organization and its access to governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations and making its Equitable Research Partnership Toolkit available. The FAO can facilitate access to their long-established networks and resources to ameliorate institutional inequality.

An ACU-based RESNET provides the critical mass of individual and high-profile researchers and universities across the Commonwealth ready to engage in SSTC high impact research collaboration in agri-food systems.