

NEWS RELEASE

Food for Africa through Collaboration



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PRETORIA – Food is central to our lives. It holds cultural and social significance, and brings people together. However, the scarcity of food means that it is also a source of anxiety. While the COVID-19 pandemic contributed significantly to people going hungry, food insecurity is not new to Africa. Challenges in the way we produce and consume food have perpetuated hunger and malnutrition on the continent for several decades.

“To overcome these challenges, we need to approach research in new ways,” says [Professor Frans Swanepoel](#), [Future Africa](#) Research Chair for Sustainable Food Systems at the [University of Pretoria](#) (UP). “Single-discipline research is no longer suitable to address the multifaceted and multi-layered problems that constrain our food systems, especially in Africa.”

The [African Research Universities Alliance \(ARUA\)](#) is a network that comprises 20 research-intensive universities across Africa. A founding principle of ARUA is collaboration to advance research excellence. This is achieved through centres of excellence (CoEs) hosted by member universities, including the ARUA CoE in Sustainable Food Systems (ARUA-SFS), which is led by UP in partnership with the Universities of Nairobi and Ghana.

One of its flagship projects, the [Food Systems Research Network for Africa \(FSNet-Africa\)](#), concluded its first phase in December 2023.

“The FSNet-Africa project aims to bring together researchers from various disciplines to explore how food can be produced in a way that is sustainable, affordable and accessible to everyone,” says Prof Swanepoel. “It views the complexity of food security holistically, linking academics from multiple disciplines and, importantly, with non-academic stakeholders to create knowledge and move from knowledge to action.”

FSNet-Africa 1.0 was led by UP, the University of Leeds, and the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network ([FANRPAN](#)). This collaboration – between 10 African universities in six countries, one Global North institution and seven [in-country node partners](#) – saw more than 80 researchers collaborate on 20 transdisciplinary research projects. Each team consisted of a fellow, an African mentor, a UK mentor, and a researcher at UP. These teams worked with stakeholders such as members of government, farmers and NGOs to design and implement projects.

Five of the FSNet-Africa fellows are participating in FSNet-Africa 1.5, through which they will expand their projects, and be mentored by Dr Elizabeth Mkandawire, network and research manager of FSNet-Africa. One fellow developed nutritious recipes from an indigenous crop, and she will collaborate with a women’s association to train communities in preparing this food. Another fellow will train farmers on using moringa in chicken feed to reduce antibiotic use. This can reduce anti-microbial resistance and improve human health. Yet another fellow developed an app to help small-scale farmers use the right amounts of fertiliser to save on their input costs and improve yield.

The FSNet-Africa 1.5 team is conceptualising FSNet-Africa 2.0 and identifying funding opportunities.

“Through food, the FSNet-Africa project brings together researchers and stakeholders across multiple disciplines, countries and continents to work together to achieve zero hunger in Africa,” says Prof Swanepoel. “FSNet-Africa is more than a project; it is a culture that is embedded in ubuntu, aiming to reshape how we do science in a way that is meaningful and has a beneficial impact on local, national, continental and global communities.”

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za