UWA Africa Research Cluster

Launch, 25 May 2015

Remarks by Cluster Coordinator
Dr. David Mickler

—Introduction—

Thank you very much Professor Anderson (DVC Community and Engagement) for that introduction and for supporting our launch tonight, much appreciated.

I’m Dr David Mickler and I’m the Coordinator of the UWA Africa Research Cluster. I’m based in UWA’s Political Science and International Relations program, in the Faculty of Arts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, myself and the other members of the Cluster are delighted that so many interested people from different sectors of society have responded to our invitation to attend tonight’s launch.

Thank you all very much for supporting this new initiative and I would invite you all to become further involved in the Cluster’s activities and events as we develop them over the coming weeks and months.

So, I'll first say a few words about the UWA Africa Research Cluster, before introducing tonight’s speakers.

—About the UWA Africa Research Cluster—

The UWA Africa Research Cluster is designed to be an inter-disciplinary research group that brings together researchers from across different areas of the university who have an interest in Africa or Africa-related themes.

I would like to here acknowledge the prior work done in coordinating UWA Africa research by Professor Kadambot Siddique, who represents UWA at the Australia Africa Universities Network, as well as Jill Stajduhar in the UWA Energy and Minerals Institute, who from behind the scenes has laid the foundations over the past few years for what has now become this Cluster.
The research purposes of the Cluster are threefold:

1) To further develop high-quality, relevant and ethical Africa-related research at UWA, including by creating an environment to support and provide opportunities for research on Africa by postgraduate research students and early career academics at UWA;

2) To coordinate Africa-related research projects at UWA, particularly by working across disciplines and faculties to tackle complex and multi-faceted social, political, economic, scientific and technological challenges.

> UWA researchers and their collaborators are already doing important work on Africa-related themes. For example, we have the work of:

- **Professor Ben Smith** and the team of Archaeologists in the Centre for Rock Art Research and Management, who are working on a range of projects on rock art in southern Africa.

- **Professor Wendy Erber** and her team in the School of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, who are working with African colleagues to provide education and diagnostic support on blood diseases.

- **Professor Farida Fozdar** and her colleagues in Sociology and Anthropology, who investigate a range of challenges faced by African migrants living in Australia.

- **Dr Laura Boykin** and her research team in the School of Chemistry and Biochemistry, who work with African scientists to use genomics and supercomputing to help smallholder farmers in Africa control whiteflies, which have caused devastation of local cassava crops.

- **Associate Professor Jill Howieson** and her team in the Law School, who collaborate with African partners to develop policies and processes to help regulate the mining industries in African countries, alongside the work—as Professor Anderson mentioned—of the UWA-based International Mining for Development Centre;
• **Professor Mark Jessell** and his team of geologists in the Centre for Exploration Targeting, who have been involved in the West African Exploration Initiative

• **Professor Kaddambot Siddique** and his team including **Dr Amin Mughera** at the Institute of Agriculture, who partner with a range of African stakeholders to develop critical research on agricultural science, agribusiness and food security;

• And myself and my colleagues in the Social Sciences including **Dr Leila ben Mcharek** who examine causes of and institutional responses to political and other violence in Africa.

So, as you can see we are doing a range of research projects at UWA that are relevant to Africa, and we are using the Cluster mechanism to actually meet each other!!

3) **To promote** UWA research and thereby develop further research collaborations with researchers, universities and other stakeholders outside of UWA, particularly those in Africa, building on the individual and institutional research relationships that UWA has already forged, including:

• UWA membership alongside nine African university members of the Australia Africa Universities Network (AAUN);
• UWA membership alongside the Universities of Ghana and Cape Town via the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN);
• Individual MoUs between UWA and the Universities of Ghana, Malawi and Hargeisa.

In addition to these research and research collaboration aims, the Cluster also has a range of **broader engagement aims**, including:

1) **To help integrate** Africa-related themes, data and cases into UWA teaching and degree programs, such as the new MA in International Development—a collaboration between the Arts and Science faculties—so that UWA students have more opportunities to engage directly with Africa during their studies. This will hopefully include bringing African experts on a range of issues into our classrooms, while developing other staff and student exchanges with Africa. Here, we would like to work with the UWA African Students Union, which is represented here tonight.
2) To engage with community, government, industry and other stakeholders, including by hosting at UWA a regular series of public lectures and other events on a range of Africa-related themes. We will be developing a program of events and will promote this on our website soon.

Ladies and gentlemen, Africa does not receive much press in Australia, and certainly not much positive press. As a major world region it has been relatively neglected by Australian policy makers too, who tend to look north to Asia, across the Pacific to the USA or back in time to Europe. However, as a continent of over one billion people and over a quarter of the world’s countries, Africa and its peoples are crucial participants in our evolving global society. Moreover, there are over 330,000 African-born people now living in Australia, creating a range of important people-to-people linkages via these Diasporic communities.

Based in Perth—looking west towards Africa as Australia’s Indian Ocean capital, and also the hub of Australia’s natural resources-based relationships with Africa—UWA is well-placed to play a leading role in Australian research and research collaboration with Africa. The UWA Africa Research Cluster is an attempt to do so in a coordinated way. We would therefore like to invite you and your collaborators to work with us.

——Support for the Cluster——

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to acknowledge the generous support provided to the Cluster so far.

First, thank you to the UWA Energy and Mineral Institute and particularly new EMI Director Mark Stickells (who is overseas and could not be here tonight). Mark has made tonight’s launch possible with his enthusiastic, and of course financial, support. The launch would also not have been possible without the extraordinary Events and Marketing team at EMI, particularly Liz McGrath, Ully Fritch, Vicki White, Rachael Penning-Bourne and Jill Stajduhar, along with Ines Bortolini in Social Sciences.

I would also like to thank Professor Jane Balme and the Faculty of Arts Research Committee for supporting and formally approving the establishment of the Africa Research Cluster under the Research
Clusters framework, as well as Paul Buist and David Norman and their team in the UWA International Centre for their support.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of both the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, and the Africa Australia Association.
Ladies and gentlemen, today, 25th of May, was chosen for the launch of the Africa Research Cluster because it is the annual anniversary of “Africa Day”. To tell us about “Africa Day” and its meanings, I’m very pleased to be able to invite to the podium Tinashe Jakwa, who is currently a 3rd year UWA student studying Political Science, International Relations and Philosophy.

Please join me in welcoming Tinashe.

—–TINASHE SPEECH—–

—Speaker 1—

“The Meanings of Africa Day”

Tinashe Jakwa, UWA 3rd year student
Thankyou very much Tinashe for inviting us to think critically about the meanings and significance of “Africa Day”, much appreciated.

—Speaker 2—Keynote address

“Understanding structural vulnerability to climate change in Africa”

Prof. Petra Tschakert, UWA Centenary Professor in Rural Development,
School of Earth and Environment/School of Agricultural and Resource Economics

I’d now like to introduce our keynote speaker, Professor Petra Tschakert.

Petra only arrived in Perth about 10 days ago from Pennsylvania State University in the US to take up her new position as UWA Centenary Professor in Rural Development, based jointly in the School of Earth and Environment and the School of Agricultural and Resource Economics. She’s also a member of the Cluster.

Professor Tschakert is an internationally recognized scholar working at the intersection of climate change adaptation, social-ecological resilience, and participatory research within a development context. She was coordinating lead author on Livelihoods and Poverty (Chapter 13) of the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group II on Impacts, Vulnerability, and Adaptation, and a member of the core writing team of the Synthesis Report. Her research activities and practice focus broadly on human-environment interactions and more specifically on rural livelihoods, environmental change, marginalization, and social learning. Her main interest lies in the theoretical and empirical intersections of political ecology, socio-environmental justice, and complex systems science, reflecting her long-term commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship and extended periods of field work and capacity building in several parts of Africa.

Tonight she will speak for about 30 minutes on the theme of “Understanding structural vulnerability to climate change in Africa”.
Following her address, we will have about 10 minutes of Q&A between yourselves and Petra.

So, please join me in welcoming Professor Petra Tschakert, to both UWA and to the podium!

— — PETRA SPEECH — —

Please join me in thanking Professor Petra Tschakert.

I’d now like to invite you to ask her some questions about her presentation.

We have a roving microphone and about 10 minutes. Please try to keep your question short and ask an actual question!
Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your questions but we are out of time for this part of the evening.

However, I’m now very happy to invite you to join us for an informal reception with drinks, some light food and to listen to local Afro World band **Shangara Jive**.

This will be in Hackett Hall, a short one-minute walk away. Please follow the signs and our chaperones.

Before we go, I’d like to thank you for your support and ask you to visit the UWA Africa Research Cluster website, as up on the screen, where we will be adding information about the members of the Cluster, our projects, our partners and our upcoming events.

We will also be setting up a mailing list for those of you who would like to remain in contact with us. Or you can also email me directly in the interim.

Thank you again for attending and supporting us and we’ll see you over at the reception.