



AfricaLics Mentorship Strategy 2021 – 2027

Adopted March 2021, Revised in 2022

Background

Mentorship has been pursued under AfricaLics to enhance capacity building in the I&D field. To this end, a mentorship report was written based on a survey that was conducted in 2020. One of the emerging recommendations was the development of an AfricaLics strategy on mentoring to provide direction on mentoring activities and a dedicated mentorship programme for AfricaLics.

Introduction

Mentorship is relevant for both professional education and training. It is useful in helping PhD students and early career scholars integrate theory into practice in their respective professions (Arnnesson and Albinsson, 2017). Hobson et al. (2009) demonstrate the value of mentorship for those teaching others i.e. not just for students or recent graduates involved in research. Mentoring programs are very diverse in terms of structure, execution and intervention. Further, mentoring programs vary in their goals, objectives and components. For instance, those programs that focus on academic success in higher education, as opposed to personal development, may differ in the expected or desired outcomes.

The AfricaLics mentorship strategy takes into account lessons learned from previous mentoring activities conducted by members of the network. It is acknowledged, that the strategy will need revision also in future as more experience is gained. The strategy may also benefit from more systematic empirical research on mentoring in the field of innovation and development (I &D). This may provide inputs for the design of a contextualised mentoring program in the context of the increase in activities within the field of I&D studies in Africa. Tools for improving mentoring in connection with AfricaLics activities will be developed and made accessible on the AfricaLics website.

What is AfricaLics' understanding of mentorship?

In AfricaLics, mentorship (or mentoring) is defined as an interactive process between someone with considerable experience in Innovation and Development studies research on the one hand and someone (e.g. a post-graduate or early career scholar) who wants to learn from this experience. In the best cases, the interaction leads to mutual learning, so both partners in the relationship benefit from the interaction. Mentoring can relate to specific skills (e.g. writing a good conference paper or a good journal paper) but can also be broader and related to knowledge in the professional field or how to build your career. It follows from this that, mentoring can take many forms. In the case of AfricaLics, mentoring is part of the PhD academies, the PhD visiting fellowship programme (VFP) and the Globelics/AfricaLics conferences (Table 1).

Table 1 summarizes the main ways in which mentoring is currently used in different AfricaLics activities, including PhD academies, the Visiting Fellowship Programme and the dedicated mentoring programme.

Table 1: Major AfricaLics mentoring activities.

	i) PhD Academies (ongoing, formal)	ii) PhD VFP (ongoing, formal)	Dedicated conference mentoring (ongoing, formal)	Dedicated publishing mentoring (planned)	Ad-hoc and informal mentoring
What?	Feedback on papers/proposals submitted by PhD students	Feedback on papers or chapters of dissertations or proposals. Personal development support	-Feedback on draft papers to improve paper articles prior to submission for Globelics or AfricaLics conferences	Feedback on draft articles & dedicated support towards publishing	Junior and senior scholars meet informally and to exchange views.
How?	Senior I&D scholars + peers provide oral and/or written inputs.	One junior and one senior mentor provide oral and/or written feedback. Peers and coordinator also provide comments.	Senior I&D scholars from Globelics/AfricaLics network provide written or oral inputs on research articles	Senior I&D scholars from Globelics/AfricaLics network provide written or oral inputs on research articles	Informal interactions e.g. at a conference
When?	One-time input (during academy); sometimes with informal follow up	Multiple sessions during study period. In some cases, with follow up after study period ends.	Multiple rounds – depending on interest of mentee.		Conferences, other events

Methodology

AfricaLics has an ongoing pilot mentorship programme that commenced in 2018. A short-term (approximately one year) mentorship activity was organized culminating to the Globelics conference in Accra, Ghana 2018. This mentorship activity took advantage of the Ghana conference and, based on the nature of the applications received for the conference, a few borderline papers formed the basis for selection of the mentees. In a match making exercise that followed, mentees were provided with an opportunity to interact with scholars/mentors conversant with their research area. The second part of the pilot programme involves another pilot activity organized around the Globelics conference in 2021 in Costa Rica. The conference has been identified as the end and common goal and therefore role and expectations are defined based on this goal. The mentee is expected to develop a paper for submission to this conference and therefore the mentorship implementation phase constitutes discussions geared towards meeting this goal.

The generation of empirical evidence to inform this strategy therefore has been conceptualised as an on-going process during the whole mentorship programme that was launched in 2018. The idea was to let the outcome determine whether to introduce the conference focused mentorship programme as a permanent or formal activity of the research capacity building program funded by Sida. This learning process is complemented by data from a survey in 2020 that elicited perspectives and experiences of AfricaLics scholars about mentorship in the context of Africa.

Objective

Mentoring will remain a key tool in core AfricaLics activities such as the PhD VFP, the PhD academies and, in more formal manners, also in connection with Globelics and AfricaLics conferences. In addition, mentoring will be pursued through a dedicated mentoring programme (cf. below). The AfricaLics Mentorship Strategy 2021-2027 aims at setting out the overall direction for AfricaLics mentorship activities conducted in support of the development of a vibrant research community on Innovation and Development in Africa (see Table 1).

The proposed dedicated mentoring programme

A dedicated mentoring programme is intended to help increase the number of African young scholars a) with papers accepted for Globelics/AfricaLics conferences b) with papers accepted for publication in internationally recognized journals and c) with high quality PhDs in the field of Innovation and Development. Funds for

remuneration of the mentors will be sought from various sources. The mentorship programme is proposed to take different forms:

- 1) Provide pre-conference support to help young African scholars interested in I&D studies research develop their paper for acceptance in a Globelics or an AfricaLics conference.
- 2) Provide dedicated post-conference support for young scholars with an accepted conference paper to get a paper published.
- 3) Provide talented participants in PhD academies or the PhD VFP with support after they have participated in e.g. an academy or the PhD VFP to help them complete unfinished business and/or consolidate themselves as young researchers in the field.

The dedicated mentoring programme is designed to be flexible and linked to the individual needs of the mentee. It could run for a period of up to two years. The programme would normally not include courses or training, but mentors would help mentees develop their skills and their training plan (e.g. giving advice on where to search for relevant courses and resources that may help the student get the skills and qualifications needed). The development of the plan would benefit from information on future courses and online support made available on the AfricaLics and Globelics website and social media.

The mentorship programme will be administered by the Secretariat in the first instance and will involve an open call for mentors and mentees in pre-conference paper development support. For post-conference support and support to talented participants in PhD academies and the PhD VFP programme, a more targeted approach will be taken where promising students/ early career researchers are identified by the scientific committees of conferences, academies and the VFP and matched with mentors. A protocol for mentor-mentee relations would be developed and all mentors and mentees would be required to sign a contract outlining the details of their mentorship arrangement.

Monitoring and evaluation

The M & E of the mentoring activities will be informed by the following elements:

- A template for contracts between mentees and mentors engaging in the dedicated mentoring programme will be worked out and form the basis for each mentorship agreement. The template will include different options for what results to focus on, and indication of the timeline. Using the template, the two parties would agree on the objective and duration of the mentorship agreement.
- Experience from the various types of mentoring activities will be monitored during the strategy period and evaluated in 2026. This will provide input for future mentoring activities run by the various hubs of AfricaLics, university consortia linked to AfricaLics and the AfricaLics secretariat.

Targets for mentoring 2021-2027

- i. At least 10 mentees supported every year through the dedicated AfricaLics/Globelics conference focused programme.
- ii. At least 5 mentees selected among PhD academy participants and supported biennially through the PhD academies.
- iii. At least 1 mentee from each PhD VFP cohort supported every year.
- iv. At least 50% of those supported manage to get their paper accepted for a Globelics or an AfricaLics conference.
- v. At least 50% of those supported manage to get their paper published in an internationally recognized journal.

References

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