

OPENING REMARKS BY PROF. AMINATA SALL DIALLO, CHAIR OF THE PASET EXECUTIVE BOARD AT THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP AND INNOVATION FUND (RSIF) ORIENTATION TRAINING FOR ITS COHORT II PHD SCHOLARS HELD VIRTUALLY ON 28 JUNE, 2021

Ms Ruth Charo, Task Team Leader for the RSIF Project, World Bank

Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai, Chair of the PASET Consultative Advisory Group

The Regional Coordination Unit team, *icipe*

Expert trainers

Third Cohort Scholars; Distinguished participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am most pleased to participate virtually in this Opening Session for the Orientation and training workshop for the Regional Scholarship and Innovation Fund (RSIF) Cohort III Scholars. Please allow me to welcome all the RSIF Cohort III Scholars specially and warmly to the PASET family!

Prof. Goolam and other speakers have already spoken broadly about PASET and the PASET Executive Board which I chair. I am also informed that a more comprehensive presentation will be provided to you on RSIF.

Allow me therefore to focus on the vision of the PASET EB and indeed the PASET Governing Council. Our vision as PASET has been to increase available funding to grow our science, technology and innovation systems in a sustainable way to solve African challenges. For a long time, if you wanted to do your PhD, you had to go to the United States or Europe to get funding for your studies. This is, in itself, is not the problem, and indeed we continue to partner with international partner institutions in Europe, the America's and even Korea to do high quality research. However, the past examples resulted in many of our well-trained graduates remaining outside the continent. Secondly, they would undertake research with little relevance to our context- for example, working on PhD topics on crops or livestock that are not grown in Africa. We believe this was because of the lack of local funding for pursuing PhD studies.

I am pleased to inform you that as of now, nine African governments have made contributions to the Regional Scholarship and Innovation Fund (RSIF), our flagship program, in addition to

support from the World Bank, the European Union and the Government of South Korea- over USD 50 million has now been committed for the RSIF program. With this funding, we have now awarded 184 PhD scholarships, and will provide an additional 100 PhD scholarships later this year! Our vision is to contribute to training at least 10,000 African PhDs in the next few decades. Importantly, at the heart of the RSIF program is an innovative funding mechanism, the RSIF permanent Fund, that we hope will be established later this year and enhance the sustainability of RSIF. Scholarships will be funded by profits from funds invested in this permanent fund.

So let me say that it is very fulfilling for me to be with you today to witness this third Cohort orientation training.

I congratulate all third Cohort Scholars on being awarded this prestigious scholarship. Congratulations! However, let me also take the opportunity to remind you that this is only the beginning, and much hard work is expected from you both by PASET and other funders of the program. African countries have funded this program in spite of the economic and other challenges that our countries are facing because we believe in the contribution that you will make. Much is expected from you and we believe that you will not let us down.

In recognition of this, the EB requires that anyone who leaves the program for an unjustifiable reason will be required to pay back what has been spent on you. So please focus and finish your PhD.

Allow me to mention a few of our expectations:

1. We expect that you will pursue high quality PhD topics that would respond directly to key challenges that Africa is experiencing. In this regard, the five PASET priority areas of food security and agribusiness, climate change, mines, minerals and materials science, energy and ICT were carefully selected to support this vision. During the Pandemic, we have begun to ask questions like “Why should Africa not have its own Covid-19 vaccine?”. We hope to rely on you as Africa’s highly trained human resources to deliver on these African aspirations.
2. We hope that there will be more sharing of knowledge across the continent and building of strong research partnerships including with International Partner Institutions, recognizing the currently comparatively low proportion of African scientists across the

continent. Please grow your networks through your RSIF PhD training and build stronger intra-african scientific networks.

3. We expect that all of you will finish high quality PhD research and thesis and go back to work in your national research ecosystems – at African research and training institutions to help to lead new programs and departments. We need to rebuild the quality of our higher education systems to train quality postgraduate students and drive our future research agenda. We have identified key advanced research institutions to support this training, but we hope that this will be increasingly done locally as capacity on the continent grows.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Segenet Kelemu, and her team at icipe for the leadership provided to implementing the RSIF program, which has come a long way, since its inception in 2015. I also wish to thank the World Bank and the Government of South Korea for the initial funding that helped to get this initiative off the ground. Africa is most grateful. Lastly, but most importantly, I thank the contributing African Governments who have made this initiative possible.

On behalf of the PASET Executive Board I am pleased to now open this orientation workshop for RSIF Cohort 3 PhD Students. I wish you a successful training program over the next few days, and more importantly a successful PhD program. I look forward to returning to witness your graduations, and the technologies and knowledge that you will deliver for your institutions, countries and the entire continent.

I thank you.