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The DRUSSA Programme: Background and Aims

The Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa [DRUSSA] Programme addresses the demand for stronger Sub-Saharan African (SSA) participation in local pro-poor development research programmes; helps SSA universities efforts to ensure their local pro-poor research impacts on policy and practice in their countries; and promotes the dissemination of poverty reduction research beyond the academic domain to include an interactive network of organisations and individuals working in pro-poor development.

The DRUSSA programme: identifies the region's research-intensive universities as institutions whose capacity to be a key resource – for policy-makers and people working in the field – is under-utilised; focuses on strengthening these universities' capacity to participate in the international developmental science system and to contribute locally contextualised research evidence to inform SSA and global development policy and practice.

The programme focuses specifically on strengthening and institutionalising Research Uptake Management (RUM) capacity and professional competencies. This is so that universities can better fulfil their unique role in their national science system and be primary producers of knowledge. They can be better key intermediary contributors to the major developmental poverty-reduction programmes in their countries, and in the SSA region. In essence, improving RUM capacity stimulates real world benefits by providing channels for information to reach the people who can use it.
Impact statement.

The five-year programme was established in October 2011 following a two-year design and development phase, including the CRU Scoping Study funded by UKaid from the Department For International Development.
The DRUSSA partnership consists of three entities:
• UK-based Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), an organisation with 110 African member universities;
• The Centre for Research into Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at the University of Stellenbosch; and
• Organisation Systems Design (OSD), a South African-based consultancy specialising in facilitating change in the research management and capacity-building

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sectors in Africa.

Digital Engagement Strategy for the DRUSSA programme

The Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa [DRUSSA] Programme intends to digitally engage around the central topic of Research Uptake and Research Uptake Management with varied levels of audiences in both internet-challenged Sub-Saharan Africa and the hi-tech First World through comprehensive strategic planning, resourcefulness, innovative use of technology, initiative and solid systems management.

Defining the goal of the Digital Engagement Strategy

The goal of the DRUSSA Digital Engagement Strategy is to enrich the overall programme purpose by providing the means to engage with all the segments of the DRUSSA audience, principally located in SSA, but also internationally. While the DRUSSA digital presence on web, mobile and social media is an interactive information resource, it also serves as an exemplar of the ways in which Research Uptake can be done digitally – by contextualising, synthesising, repackaging, publishing and publicising research on a variety of platforms. Recent work by the ODI's Nick Scott provided the framework for the strategy.

Three strategic visions in developing the Digital Engagement framework[i]

1. **Style of Approach** – this integrates three foundational ideas, namely:
   - "**Reusing the wheel**" using content, tools and technologies that already exist on the internet
     - "**Cradle to grey content**" – understanding that content on the internet never dies and, properly managed, will grow in value over time.
     - "**Being there**" – a communications approach that aims to link information and place content on other sites or tools that are regularly visited by key audiences, rather than expecting them to come to our site on a regular basis.

2. **Proactively building an inclusive digital network for the African context**

   With inclusive community and network building top of mind, the DRUSSA digital strategy overcomes the potential of exclusion as a result of unreliable ICT access in some African contexts, by including user-friendly accessibility from mobile devices, as well as simple and effective online and offline functionalities from both mobile devices and desktops.

3. **Audience-relevant content themes that fulfill programme objectives**

   In choosing content themes, the practicalities of implementing these themes across a range of communication platforms to achieve optimal content integration and audience impact were closely considered. Awareness of limited resources necessitated a content framework that allows DRUSSA to place information for maximum impact for each audience.

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Differentiating audiences for strategic engagement purpose and style

The strategy is geared to engage with:

A closed Primary Audience where the purpose of interacting is to build a Research Uptake Management **Community**. The digital environment is geared to promote trust, and open up vibrant interaction, knowledge sharing and practical capacity building with the direct beneficiaries in a supportive, unthreatening environment. This confidential, interactive platform includes DRUSSA team members, vice-chancellors, university champions and the implementation teams from each of the selected universities – numbering anything up to 600 people.

An open, networked Secondary Audience where the purpose of communicating is to both give and gain from knowledge sharing, lessons learned and capacity building, with the goal of mainstreaming the Research Uptake discourse. This **Network** consists of interested African academics, government officials, organisations, non-participating institutions, networks of professionals and practitioners, knowledge intermediaries, agencies, NGOs and research collaborations, media, etc.

Services and implementation

A range of digital engagement (ICT) platforms has been designed to fulfill the programme goals for differentiated audiences. It comprises a selection of web, mobile and social media platforms with online and offline capabilities. With the African context and inclusive community building top of mind, the DRUSSA digital strategy overcomes the potential of exclusion as a result of unreliable internet access in some African contexts, by including user-friendly accessibility of the DRUSSA digital community from mobile devices, as well as simple and effective online and offline functionalities from both mobile devices and desktops The aim is to use these DRUSSA platforms as "go-to" and "being there" bases for both the Community and the Network, to frame the discourse and refine the field of Research Uptake in the African context, and furthermore to promote Research Uptake Management practice and its potential to have impact.

1. **Web/blogsite**

   The simple DRUSSA site serves primarily as a blogspot, and is built on an open-source platform. It features live and static content defined by content themes. All content is visible to all users whether logged in or not. It incorporates DRUSSA's weekly digital magazine, and social media functionality.

   The blogsite furthermore features a document index as well as a discussion forum where smaller groups can discuss topics of specific interest to them.

2. **The DRUSSA App**

   The custom-designed DRUSSA App features easy-to-use multi-environment functionalities, cost-effectively incorporated into a single App design. Registered users of the App, both in primary (closed) and secondary (open)

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audiences, have access to audience-tailored content through the following access points:

- **A mobisite** The App is structured to offer an abbreviated, easily navigable mobisite version of DRUSSA site content.
- **DESKTOP and MOBILE DOWNLOAD** is available to a registered user's desktop or mobile device to enable online and offline access options. The app can detect whether the user is offline, and will synch new content, including comments posted offline, when the user goes online.
- **A download for third party websites** In line with DRUSSA'S "being there" strategy the App also offers the condensed version of the DRUSSA services, designed to be easily downloaded to third-party websites e.g. the four RIMA websites, participant universities' websites, etc. Simple download instructions are provided for third parties, with two appearance options offered depending on the style of the third-party site.

While all audiences have the benefit of the above technical service, in terms of content area access, their programme and registration will either channel them to:

- (Open Audience) **DRUSSA APP Open Services** where they will have access to information appropriate to the broader network, OR
- (Closed Community Audience) **Mkahawa | The DRUSSA Coffee Station**, which is the heart of DRUSSA Online. The full benefits of the Coffee Station are available only to the Community and the DRUSSA team to allow a friendly and informal environment of in-house collegial confidentiality. Accordingly, the content strategy for this area incorporates the initiation and moderation of a frequent mini-blog "Hot Topic" discussion thread, which encourages daily interaction.

Means of Engagement with audiences

1. **Direct Engagement** when registered with DRUSSA Online. Additionally, Community members are given access to the DRUSSA Coffee Station and its special features (DRUSSA postings to the social networks and a registry of the DRUSSA Network). Users can also indicate their preferred means of communication.
2. **Social Media** Interaction (open audiences) is managed from DRUSSA's central content management system (CMS), which includes blogging on LinkedIn, micro-blogging on Twitter, a managed Facebook presence and Google+ engagement.
3. **Newsletters** Four audience-targeted newsletters are distributed by email and posted online.

A central information dissemination system

The CMS is the engine that drives DRUSSA Online. All content for the full suite of services is loaded, adapted to publishing context, approved and published from here. This elegant system allows limited human resources to be used as efficiently as

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possible, while information resources can be curated, used and re-used as effectively as possible across the various platforms for specific audiences.

Management and administration

- Strategies around intellectual property and permissions are in place.
- So too are integrated production and publishing schedules, while an editorial board has been appointed and meets regularly to identify and facilitate access to timely and useful content for DRUSSA to publish.
- Use of the platforms by the Primary and Secondary Audiences is monitored and tested on an ongoing basis to determine trends, preferences and impact. Input effort will be measured against impact and reach.

Download the full DRUSSA Digital Engagement Strategy