



MEDIA RELEASE

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Date: 3rd May 2023

BIUST AT THE HELM OF A NEW INITIATIVE THAT STRIVES TO PROMOTE SPACE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN AFRICA

In March 2023, the Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) is launching the project FAST4Future, Focus on Africa Space Science and Technology 4 Future Development.

FAST4Future aims at strengthening Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in Africa Higher education by promoting Planetary and Space Science and Technology (PSST) for the sustainable growth and jobs creation in a continent that is rapidly embracing the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). PSST has been identified as a key area of investment in Africa as it provides graduates and young scientists with both the necessary soft and practical skills to face 21st century challenges such as digital innovation and job creation.

This project, (coordinated by Associate Professor Fulvio Franchi, from BIUST's Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences), was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme under the Capacity Building in Higher Education call of the European Union. FAST4Future ambitious goals include:

- i) increase the accessibility to STEM in African Higher Education (HE) through high level PSST initiatives
- ii) modernize existing PSST programmes in collaboration with industry and policy makers

- iii) foster the internationalization of partner HEIs by promoting mobility of staff and students
- iv) Promote standardization of PSST in African tertiary education. To achieve these ambitious goals FAST4future will promote the creation of a Centre of Excellence in PSST (CESST) linked to a virtual platform to increase the accessibility, coordinate collaborative actions including the promotion and the transfer of skills in key strategic areas of PSST to boost the employability of graduate students. The creation of a virtual platform within CESST will open new pathways for dissemination of high-quality academic contents that can potentially reach thousands of STEM students across the continent and facilitate the access to STEM disciplines for Africans living in remote areas, conflict zones and will, thanks to ad-hoc specific actions, improve the number of women in STEM.

According to the Coordinator, Associate Prof Franchi, and his international team of collaborators, the “future prosperity of Africa depends on the creation of sustainable mechanisms to generate the ability of its nations to access the tools of space technology which in turn requires the inclusion of the appropriate sets of skills in African HEIs to deliver the workforce necessary for the development of this technology”.

In this new project, funded for a total of ca. 10 million pula, BIUST is leading a consortium of 13 partners, including African partners such as University of Botswana, Copperbelt University and University of Zambia in Zambia, University of Witwatersrand, the South Africa National Space Agency and Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa, University of Nigeria Nsukka, the Air Force Institute of Technology and National Space Research and Development Agency in Nigeria, as well as European partners from Italy, Università di Bologna, and Sweden, the Kungliga Tekniska Hoegskolan.

The project has also an important partner from the growing space industry being AAC SPACE AFRICA (PTY) LTD (AAC), a South Africa- based company pioneering satellite technologies in the continent.

FAST4Future is a spin-off of the successful Intra-Africa Mobility Project PAPSSN, Pan Africa Planetary and Space Science Network - PAPSSN that was awarded to BIUST earlier in 2020. PAPSSN has already sponsored more than 20 African students and professionals for MSc, PhD and job-shadowing scholarships: 2 young Batswana pursued their postgraduate academic careers in Space Science in Zambia and South Africa and 5 international students have so far enrolled at BIUST. While PAPSSN is giving opportunities to young Africans and Batswana to complete their studies, FAST4Future will create an infrastructure that will create momentum and promote Botswana as the continental hub for Space Science and Technology.

For interviews, please contact the BIUST Media Team at 493 1000/72/74/76.

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