

## **Integrating the knowledge economy with the prestige economy: Towards establishing a Centre for Africa-China Research at the University of Botswana**

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### **Abstract**

*The pace at which China's economy is growing and the influence the country is exerting across the world have disrupted the post Cold War economic order and are posing a threat to the position of the United States of America as the world's largest economy, and the only global superpower. Although still a developing country by Western standards, China has overtaken Japan as the world's second largest economy. China's eyes are now set on the USA, a country whose economy China may overtake in the next two decades. Although China's unprecedented economic growth and increased influence are a cause for concern, Africa may be particularly vulnerable to this expansionism because it has the economic space for China to occupy. In response, there has recently been a resurgence of interest from the USA as manifested in part through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The Africa-China Research Group (ACRG) at the University of Botswana, set up to conduct research on Africa –China relations, considers China's expansion more likely to continue than to reverse. The Group concludes that the best way to respond to this emerging socio-political change in the global landscape is to establish mutually beneficial academic relationships with China. This relationship can be facilitated by establishing research centres that focus on relationships between China and Africa. At the University of Botswana, such a centre would need to adopt a pan African perspective in order not to miss the inter-linkages between China and the rest of Africa. Hence, the ACRG's proposal for a Centre for Africa-China Research should be situated within the context of similar centres and institutes that have been established throughout the world with a focus on China's international relations. Such a centre, we propose, would involve various stakeholders such as scholars, university management and government policymakers, all of whom are the target readership of this paper. Cooperation is the sine qua non amongst members of the global community, but such cooperation is dependent upon the knowledge economy and a research centre at UB would facilitate the generation of knowledge.*

**Keywords:** China, Africa, knowledge economy, prestige economy, research, international research collaboration, Centre of Excellence

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## Introduction

In his article *Engaging academically with China in Africa: The institutional approach of the University of Botswana*, Youngman states that “The [University of Botswana Internationalization] policy made a commitment to increase the number of university partnerships, not only in the traditional areas of Europe and North America, but particularly within Africa and with key economic powers in Asia, which were identified as China, India, Japan and South Korea. The most intensive academic engagement within East Asia has taken place with China and a strategic institutional approach has been adopted to develop this engagement” (Youngman, 2014b). The present article builds on that position, and argues specifically for the establishment of a Research Centre that focuses on Africa-China studies at the University of Botswana, within the institutional framework of the University Research Strategy and the Internationalization Policy. The Africa China Research Group (ACRG), which was formed at UB in 2013, provides a foundation for the establishment of such a Research Centre (see University of Botswana, 2013). The ACRG has organised a number of successful events and publications, including visits of its academics to China and others from Chinese institutions to Botswana, conferences held at the University of Botswana, and the publication of research papers on aspects of Botswana-China relations (see Youngman 2014a, 2014b). This article provides justification for the actions of the ACRG, while additionally expanding the scope and dimensions of the interactions of China with the whole continent of Africa in order to understand more clearly the parameters and intentions of China’s engagement with Botswana.

For several decades China’s economy has been growing aggressively and its people have been developing. As far back as 1960, the United States of America’s Vice President Richard Nixon stated candidly his country’s concerns regarding the “cut throat” competition that America was facing from China ([www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/.../TNC-172.aspx](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/.../TNC-172.aspx) First Kennedy-Nixon Debate, 26 September 1960). China’s expansionist activities have continued to date, and the country has been establishing trade links with much of the world, including the USA, Europe, Latin America and Africa.

However, it is perhaps the level of success that China has attained over the past two decades that has stunned both the developed and the developing world. This success was clearly demonstrated when China celebrated its economic power by overtaking Japan as the second largest world economy after that of the USA. With its population of over 1,357 billion people (United States Census Bureau, 2013), China is the largest country in the world. It has succeeded in translating its impressive economic growth and its strategic position as a member of the United Nations Security Council into the considerable influence that it now wields globally. The ACRG considers that this influence will keep growing in tandem with the economy rather than diminish, so that in the near future, China’s influence will spread even more widely.

In view of this, the ACRG considers it prudent to engage formally with this emerging, large and influential economy. To initiate this process, the ACRG developed its Terms of Reference through which the research group has been engaging with Africa-China issues, until a

formally recognized organizational structure is established to allow it to operate more elaborately and authoritatively.

### **Centres of Excellence**

Research organisational structures, commonly known as research entities, are an integral part of knowledge generating institutions such as a university, and particularly of a university like the University of Botswana that has an ambition to be “research intensive” (University Research Strategy 2008:4). A research group normally constitutes the lowest level of a research entity, followed in succession by a research unit, a research centre, and ultimately by a research institute. A research group is a group of academics who come together to brainstorm over a research activity or project. In contrast, a research unit is a formally recognised organisational structure usually in an academic Department. A research centre has more institutional recognition, and is broader in scope than a research unit. A research institute is even broader in scope and is permanent compared to a research centre. In some cases a research centre can grow into a research institute, but it is not always necessary that such a development takes place. However, a research group is formed with a strong anticipation that it will develop into a research centre or even a research institute. It is within this context that this paper argues for the transformation of the ACRG into a research centre. The scope, function and structure of the entity are discussed in a later section wherein the operational modalities of different research centres are compared to the research ambitions of UB.

Generally speaking research institutes and research centres are autonomous within a particular institution, and have a similar mission, which is to conduct research, carry out teaching and engage with a wide portfolio of stakeholders that include communities outside the institution. The main differences between a research centre and a research institute has to do with their scale of operation and the timeframe for investigating a research problem. For example, a research centre is located within a faculty and may remain in existence only for as long as the problem it investigates remains unsolved. In contrast, a research institute, because of its broader mandate, is situated outside a faculty, and it is more or less a permanent organisational structure, as is stated in the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres* of the University of Botswana (2010).

One key issue with research institutes and centres is that they should attain a level of competence in order to be designated as “Centres of Excellence” by their stakeholders on the basis of high quality outputs. Recently the term “prestige economy” has been used to refer to high quality research outcomes, such as the inclusion of research institutions in highly rated international rankings like, for example, the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (Ouma, 2014). Consequently, the terms “prestige economy” and “Centre of Excellence” both denote high quality. They operate within the same context even though they do not mean the same thing. A Centre of Excellence might refer to a research institute, a research centre or a recognized research programme or research collaboration, such as one between a major donor like the World Health Organization and a specific programme within a university department.

Within the context of UB's vision to become a research-intensive institution by the year 2021, Senate in 2010 approved the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres* (University of Botswana, 2010). Tertiary institutions worldwide now aggressively seek research intensive status. Many factors, both internal and external to the institutions are responsible for this pressure. For example, some universities have intensified research, commercialization and engagement as they compete with other universities. At the same time, universities respond to increasing pressure from governments which demand that they impart skills that are relevant for the contemporary job market in times of increasing graduate unemployment.

Yet it is clearly the external pressure that has had the greater impact. In the case of the United Kingdom this push has come in two forms, and both have been initiated by the government. The first was the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which in 2008 was superseded by the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The RAE had the effect of intensifying research inside the universities by allocating research funding on the basis of research outputs. The second initiative came from the government's decision to upgrade technical institutions into fully-fledged universities, and in some cases to merge them with existing universities. A number of polytechnics were upgraded into universities and mergers were carried out between institutes and universities. For example, Huddersfield Polytechnic became The University of Huddersfield, and the Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) were merged into the current University of Manchester. South Africa has undergone a similar transformation in its higher education sector. Although the reasons for the upgrading and the mergers were not identical in the two countries, all the new institutions emerging from the transformation have had a significantly expanded research agenda, implying that the change has resulted in increased research activity in both countries (Mazonde, 2007).

Within the same framework, the development of some universities into predominantly graduate institutions (such as, for example, the Universities of Cape Town and Ibadan with 35% and 45% graduate student enrolment respectively) is clear testimony to the value that research plays in determining the league into which a university falls relative to its competitors on the one hand, and the institution's potential for driving globalization in the context of the emerging knowledge based economy, on the other. In Botswana, the new Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) is initiating some programmes at graduate level. While this may be considered as an overambitious undertaking for which BIUST is not adequately resourced, the emphasis that this university is placing on research should be understood within the current global context in which universities are prioritizing research in order to be competitive and relevant. It was within the same framework that the University of Botswana was re-structured in 2010, with the objective of repositioning itself as a research intensive institution by 2021. However, whereas much of the burden of encouraging and funding research in an industrialized country such as the United Kingdom and in emerging industrialized

countries like South Africa is borne by the government (because of the positive and measurable connection between research and national development in those countries), planning a research agenda and implementing its strategy in the universities of most African countries such as Botswana can be not only a challenging task, but a daunting one as well. The main problem in African countries such as Botswana is the weak structural link between higher education and national development, caused primarily by the national leadership which does not perceive research and innovation as contributing directly to national development. This perception arises from the structure of the majority of African economies, which are still primarily resource driven, where agriculture, education, health, remain in silos as opposed to the knowledge driven economy of industrialized countries which is diversified and driven directly by research and innovation. The commitment to research is not readily apparent in a number of African governments, beyond the unfulfilled development policy statements that promise to utilise the expertise of universities in national development (see for example, *The 2015 Tertiary Education Council Proceedings*, forthcoming).

The result of this lack of governmental support for university research is that in their quest for driving their research agendas, African universities have to create their own research collaborations with partners, which are predominantly outside their own countries and continent. Against that background, this paper compares the Centre of Excellence model with other models of international research collaboration that are commonly found in African universities. The comparison is carried out within the framework of a discussion of the motivating factors for international research collaboration, the institutional preparedness of the participating institutions, and finally the framework for collaboration.

### **Motivating factors for international research collaboration**

Organisations that carry out research provide insight on the objectives of research collaboration. In turn, the objectives and funding levels determine the type and scope of the research collaboration. For example, the Research Councils in the UK are funded by the government for the purpose of supporting research both inside the UK and in collaboration with researchers outside the UK, as long as such research falls within the scope that has been set by the UK Government. In effect therefore, collaborative research that is supported by the Research Councils eventually adds to the stock of knowledge that advances the scholarship and development of the UK. Similarly, Canada's International Development Research Centre, while it funds research in developing countries, emphasizes that the research projects that it funds must have visibility within Canada for the purpose of satisfying the Canadian tax payer. Similarly, for many years the National Science Foundation (NSF) of the USA has insisted that the first or principal author in publications resulting from the research it funds must be based within the United States. The intention here was for the NSF to have ownership of the new knowledge arising from the research.

In a related move, the Republic of South Africa has begun to aggressively entice researchers from outside its borders to affiliate to its research institutions so that publications from such researchers can boost its publication profile. South Africa is aware of the fact that

high quality research publications constitute a strong indicator of a knowledge economy. This is what the research drivers of the industrialized world are aiming to achieve with their funding of research collaboration with other countries, irrespective of the mode of collaboration (i.e. north-south, bilateral or multilateral). From a developing world perspective, the important thing is that the collaboration facilitates research in the developing countries with funding from the industrialized world, even though one can argue that such research benefits the development agenda of the industrialized world more than it benefits that of the developing countries.

China, a large developing country that has recently asserted its influence across the world, especially in Africa, also promises to provide substantial funding for international research collaboration, and it is the Chinese government that is spearheading research and research funding in that country: “Very generous funding for academic activity is available from China through a variety of sources, including Hanban’s Confucius China Studies Programme, the China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Programme within FOCAC, the Chinese Ministry of Education “20+20” programme for China-Africa university co-operation, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs “10+10” programme for China-Africa Think Tank cooperation, local Chinese Embassy funds, Chinese Government scholarships, individual Chinese universities, and local Chinese businesses” (Youngman 2014b, p.31). In the same article, Youngman alerts the reader to the growing scepticism regarding the real intentions of Confucius Institutes by some people in the West. Such people view the Confucius Institutes as a propaganda machine which China uses to penetrate Africa (Youngman, 2014b).

### **Important factors for joint collaborative research**

Knowledge generation, whether for solving development problems or for expanding the frontiers of scholarship, often requires multi and inter-disciplinary research, and in many cases research that transcends the boundaries of individual disciplines. It is for this reason that most donors find greater value in funding large and broad-based research themes that are executed by multiple research teams across regions as opposed to small scale inquiries carried out by a single researcher. Yet, although ultimately the collaborators in interdisciplinary research aim at a common goal, there often exist, at other levels, important differences in their objectives for going into research partnerships. A UK Research Council, for example, might support collaborative research between a UK research institute and external partners predominantly because it wants to generate the kind of knowledge or information that is required somewhere in the British economy. In some cases, the donor organization might encourage such research collaboration with the deliberate aim of expanding its research capacity in the developing country. On the other hand, the external partners might seek to join the partnership primarily because they need the funding to drive research in their own universities or countries. Because of these differences in objectives, partners in the developing countries need to know which partnerships are in their best interests. This paper posits that such knowledge comes in the form of a framework that is discussed below. The framework highlights what the recipient partners need to take into account in order for them to maximize their benefit in the partnership.

The Research Strategy of a university is probably the most important policy document after its Strategic Plan. This is because the Research Strategy is a reformulation or synthesis of the research priority areas in the University Strategic Plan and those in the various research policy documents. The Research Strategy indicates the research themes that the institution seeks to pursue. It therefore helps the institution to remain focused on its goals by looking for partners from those institutions that pursue similar research themes (see for example, the *University Research Strategy*, University of Botswana, 2008). Institutions without a Research Strategy tend to move in random directions with the result that there is neither a sustainable research agenda nor any accumulated stock of knowledge in any subject or research theme after many years of conducting research. Another crucial document is the university's Internationalization Policy, which provides guidance on the type of preferred research partner (i.e. the circumstances under which a particular type of institution - research university, comprehensive university, specialized institution etc. - will be preferred). The practical manner by which research partnerships are executed is guided by the Research Funding Strategy, which documents what research infrastructure exists in the participating institution (especially the legally binding requirement to produce externally audited accounts). Some major donors carry out an investigation to ensure that the institutions they support financially are accountable and are a worthwhile destination for their funds.

### **Raison d'être for establishing a Centre for Africa-China Research at the University of Botswana**

As noted above, China has evolved into a world superpower. The diverse connections between Botswana and China have been steadily growing for many years, but more especially over the past two decades. For example, bilateral trade between the two countries increased from between US\$300,000 and US\$500,000 in 1986 to US\$343 million in 2013, and China has become Botswana's third largest trading partner and the second largest consumer of Botswana's diamonds (Zheng, 2014, p.4). The number of Botswana visiting China grew from 400 in 2005 to 3,000 by 2015. These include the eighty Botswana who receive annual Chinese scholarships to study in China. To date a total of 400 Botswana have graduated from Chinese institutions through this scholarship programme. Conversely, Botswana is rapidly developing into a tourist destination for Chinese people, with a total of 10,000 Chinese having visited Botswana since the 1990s (Zheng, 2014). The figures are equally large for the rest of Africa. The volume of trade between China and Africa rose from 10 US\$ billion in 2000 to 248 US\$ billion in 2013, in comparison to a mere US \$108 billion worth of trade between Africa and the USA in 2012 (The China Analyst, 2014). Even more importantly, Africa's largest trading partners with China, namely South Africa, Ghana and Kenya, are considering to diversify into Chinese currency following the lead of Nigeria, another major trading partner with China, that has started holding up to 10% of its currency in the Chinese Yuan (The China Analyst, 2014).

The expanding scale of cooperation between China and Botswana suggests the need for a systematic study which will provide both countries with important information so that further growth in relations can be better planned and managed. A Centre for Africa-China Research

based at the University of Botswana would be one of the best tools for providing such information. The advantages of establishing such a research centre are self-evident.

Whereas universities everywhere value collaboration because of the benefits of generating better quality information, universities in developing countries collaborate with partners for the purpose of securing research funding, increasing their global visibility, as well as improving the quality of their own research outputs through joint publications with partners in better established institutions. Such partnerships take many forms but the Research Centre is the one research partnership that is currently preferred by most successful and major investors in research. The reason for this is that this model is considered to most effectively pool and concentrate existing research excellence, research capacity and research resources, so that researchers can collaborate across disciplines, institutions and geographical areas. The requirements of a Research Centre include being locally relevant, internationally competitive, yet flexible enough to re-invent itself continuously and expand and contract as necessary to accommodate change and to take advantage of emerging opportunities (National Research Foundation, 2009, p.12). Broadly speaking, the main objectives of a Research Centre are:

- Research/knowledge production
- Education and training
- Information brokerage
- Networking
- Engagement that includes service and commercialization.

Research Centres take many forms and occur at many different levels. Such levels might:

- be across academic faculties and departments,
- bring together local university(ies) and external university(ies),
- be a partnership between a local university and an external industry (for example the Oil Institute which is funded by SASOL, a South African oil company, is physically located at St Andrews University, in Scotland, UK),
- connect a local university with an external research entity (e.g. BIUST in Botswana and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in South Africa,
- create a partnership between a local university and the government (e.g. the Nigeria Institute of Scientific and Engineering Research (NISER) and the Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and the envisaged International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) at the University of Botswana.

This paper will now consider two very differently structured but internationally renowned research centres, the University of Cape Town Climate Change Research Centre, and the Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management. A centre for Africa-Chinese research at UB might opt to have elements of each type of research centre in order to acquire the strengths of both.

The University of Cape Town Climate Change Research Centre is an example to of how the University of Botswana (UB) can pragmatically establish a research centre which meets all of the criteria discussed above. With its graduate student enrolment standing at 35% of the total student enrolment, the University of Cape Town (UCT) is first and foremost a research intensive university. With this high percentage of graduate students, its research institutes and Centres of Excellence constitute a key feature of a research intensive university. UCT re-affirmed its position as a research intensive institution by hosting a Centre of Excellence that addresses climate change, a current international research concern.

The University of Cape Town Climate Change Research Centre is a global facility where accomplished researchers from all over the world work on various aspects of climate change. It comprises a number of research centres that include the Energy Research Centre and various climate change research groups in different academic departments. To emphasise the scope and level at which climate change is being researched at this centre, UCT established a Pro Vice Chancellor position to lead it. Consequently, the Centre of Excellence has been able to raise the necessary funds, most of them from international sources. Its network is world-wide, collaborating with Europe's Knowledge and Innovation Communities, or KICs, which are part of the Horizon 2020 funding programme, an eighty billion Euro research programme spread over seven years. Youngman notes that "in developing and sustaining a strategic institutional approach, the role of management is crucial" (Youngman, 2014b, p.31). Quite clearly, this Centre of Excellence owes its success to the strong commitment that the leadership of UCT is demonstrating in setting up and supporting its Centres of Excellence.

The Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management (SASSCAL) provides the second example of a Research Centre that is recognized as a Centre of Excellence. Whereas the University of Cape Town Climate Change Research Centre is physically located within a single university and country, SASSCAL, by contrast, satisfies the regional dimension of a Centre of Excellence by being a joint initiative of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. As such, it is a regional research centre that is set within a South-South research collaboration framework. Unlike a North-South collaboration which brings together a country in the north i.e. a developed country, with one in the South, usually a developing one, a South-South research collaboration brings together two or more developing countries. Typical of most South-South research collaborations (see Office of International Education and Partnerships, 2007, p.23), SASSCAL is funded from the northern hemisphere by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. It has three objectives, namely:

- to conduct problem-oriented research in adaptation to climate change and sustainable land management.
- to provide evidence-based advice for all decision-makers and stakeholders to improve the livelihoods of people in the region.
- to contribute to the creation of an African knowledge-based society.

### **Suggested structure of the proposed Centre for Africa-China Research at UB**

Although these two research centres are different in structure, there are at least three characteristics that provide a strong basis for their excellence as research entities: their regional and the global dimension; their stakeholder diversity; the committed support they enjoy from institutional leadership. Each of these three characteristics speaks to the requirements of a successful research centre as discussed above. The Centre for Africa-China Research at UB will require all three characteristics in order to be successful. Accordingly its scope needs to be broad enough to take advantage of those characteristics.

### **Scope of engagement**

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ACRG (Africa-China Research Group, 2013) appear broad enough to embrace the generic areas that a research centre normally addresses, namely research, graduate education and engagement. The research centre will forge close links with the degree programme in Chinese Studies at UB, especially with respect to research by graduate students. Although physically located on the UB campus, the research centre needs to have a Pan-African perspective, and therefore liaisons will be sought with the Stellenbosch University Centre for Chinese Studies and with similar centres across Africa as they are established. Such collaboration will expand the scope of the UB research centre and ensure it is a Pan-African research entity as opposed to one that is limited to Botswana. It will therefore stimulate various research themes which will enhance its activities across the continent. However, care will be taken to facilitate collaboration with the Stellenbosch University Centre in Chinese Studies and to avoid competition with it. Experience elsewhere shows that regional research centres in Chinese studies, such as the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies in Kuala Lumpur and the Chinese Heritage Centre in Singapore can exist and function without tensions even though they are geographically close to each other (Wu Xiao An, 2009). Both enjoy healthy working relations with The Working Group on China-Africa, which is an international and interdisciplinary group of leading scholars tasked with guiding a planning process to facilitate new research collaborations and build cross-regional research capacity relevant for understanding Africa's engagement with China and other emerging powers (Wu Xiao An, 2009).

The Terms of Reference of the ACRG will need to be reformulated in order to be written in a standardized format in line with the UB *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres*.

### **Composition of the Management Committee**

The examples of UCT and SASSCAL have emphasized the need for a global perspective that also has local relevance. Consequently, the Management Committee of the research centre needs to comprise local and international researchers in order to reflect its scope and focus. There is much to gain from such diversity in the membership of the Management Committee. One benefit would be the intellectual exchange which results in the research centre addressing topics that are of concern to the local community while being of interest to the international community. The ACRG has research themes that would guide the initial research focus of the research centre. However, more themes would emerge as collaboration with external partners develops. Collaboration in research would result in joint publications with international scholars who have ready access to internationally rated publishing outlets. In the process, the visibility of UB research will be heightened and internationalised. The *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres* already provide for the inclusion of external members through Article 3.1 which states that “External stakeholders with the relevant expertise may also be invited to participate” (University of Botswana, 2010, p.6).

### **Financial support for the Centre for Africa-China Research**

A key objective of constituting a multi-stakeholder membership of the Management Committee is to ensure that there is recognition of the Research Centre in the institutions in which the external and international members are based. As indicated earlier, the University of Cape Town Climate Change Research Centre derives its global command in part from its international focus which is implemented with resources coming mainly but not exclusively from the external partners. To source funding, the research centre would need to build on the external links that the ACRG has already established with partners such as the Shanghai Normal University and the Chinese Embassy. A budget plan would be developed and submitted along with the proposal for establishing the research centre in line with the requirements of the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres*.

### **Director of the Centre for Africa-China Research**

The *Guidelines for the Establishment and Implementation of Research Institutes and Research Centres* provide for a part-time Director who spends half of the time at the Centre and another half in the base Department. But it also foresees a situation where the post could be funded from external sources. An interpretation of this provision is that the position might be full-time if the activities of the Research Centre so warrant and sufficient external funding is sourced. The level and intensity of activity manifested in the operations of the ACRG to date suggest that the proposed research centre is very likely to be on a greater scale than the one seen in other UB research centres. To enable the full potential of the research centre to be realized before interest is lost by researchers, it is proposed that the ACRG sources funds externally in order to initiate the envisaged **Centre for Africa-China Research** with a full-time Director. Funding for the Director position can be sourced from the existing partnerships of the ACRG.

### **Conclusion**

Over the past two decades the world has taken note of China's significant advance as a political and economic power. The ACRG within UB is responding to the rising importance of China by re-inventing itself into an organizational structure of the prestige economy that is equipped to engage systematically with China in the knowledge economy on behalf of Botswana.

It is against this backdrop that this paper presented a case for the establishment in the University of Botswana of a Centre for Africa-China Research developed from the ACRG. Developing a Research Centre out of a working research group has two precedents at UB in the shape of the Gender Research Centre (currently under formulation) which evolved from the Gender Planning and Programme Committee, and the San Research Centre which developed out of the Joint Collaborative Basarwa Research Programme between UB and the University of Tromsø.

However, there are some novel aspects in the growth of the ACRG into a full-blown **Centre for Africa-China Research** because this would be the first time that a research group matures directly into a research centre. Furthermore, the fact that this would be a Pan-African Research Centre means that it is essential for the ACRG to expand its scope. But the pay-off could be very large and tangible as it might encourage the formation of research groups around other research themes of the *University Research Strategy* across UB; it could stimulate further research activity, thereby enabling the institution to attain its goal of being research-intensive by the year 2021. Thus, it could contribute to UB attaining the prestige economy status that it is aspiring for.

The proposed research centre is planned on the basis of successful examples of similar organizational structures in the region, and UB has all the requisite provisions to establish such a centre – from policy documents to a proven record of setting up and running a successful ACRG. The single major challenge would be to persuade management to approve the expansion proposal, failing which the research centre may not reach its full potential.

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