

Association of African Universities

AAU Partnerships Unit Workshop Series

Theme: Positioning Your University for Global

Visibility 2nd Edition

Venues: Zambia (January 27th -29th 2026)

Concept Note

Introduction

Universities and other tertiary educational institutions, anywhere in the world, play a pivotal role in driving economic growth. They produce a skilled labour force and foster productivity and competitiveness across industries through research and development. Additionally, they often collaborate with businesses, governments, and communities to address societal challenges, translating academic insights into practical solutions that boost economic activity. By nurturing entrepreneurship and providing lifelong learning opportunities, universities also empower individuals to adapt to economic shifts and contribute to sustainable development.

A university's visibility is enhanced through a variety of avenues, each contributing to its reputation, reach, and influence. One such is consistently high performance in global and national university rankings through research excellence, quality teaching, and graduate employability. Participating in groundbreaking projects, hosting conferences, seminars, and public lectures, and strong collaborations with industry, governments, international partners, and alumni networks, elevate a university's profile and position it as a thought leader in various fields.

A strong digital presence, boosted by a constantly updated and engaging website showcasing the publication of research outputs, and active social media channels, helps universities reach a broader audience and engage with their stakeholders.

Despite having over 15% of the world's population, the research outputs from African tertiary education institutions are just around 1%.¹ This is characterized by known challenges such as limited resources, poor industry collaboration, and slow adoption of emerging technologies, which hinder their full potential. This poor visibility is reflected in global university rankings. In the 2025 Times Higher Education Ranking, the top-rank university in Africa, the University of Cape Town was ranked 180th in the world. The second and third, Stellenbosch University and University of Witwatersrand, respectively, were ranked between 301 – 350 globally².

While these global university rankings may not always be beneficial for African universities due to real inherent biases such as the methodological approach (including using research outputs and citations in high-impact journals which African universities struggle to compete on these metrics due to underfunding), more focus on English-language research, and neglect of local and regional impact where African universities often excel in these, the rankings are beneficial and influential as they provide some useful benchmarks that can boost the visibility of African universities and thereby support their efforts in attracting international students and

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<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327323072> Repositioning Africa in global knowledge productio

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² <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-africa>

partners. The rankings also hold the potential to motivate universities to innovate and improve their teaching and research practices as well as attract investment in higher education and research.

The Workshop series

This workshop aims to empower universities and other higher education institutions in Africa to enhance their international presence, relevance, and global competitiveness through innovation, partnerships, local relevance, and responsible technology integration.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the workshops are:

1. Empower universities through their brand ambassadors (leaders and researchers) to give more visibility to their research outcomes, including empowering researchers to assume greater roles as principal investigators
2. Train participants on the short-term to long-term strategies to promote and sustain their presence in the global knowledge pool
3. Enhance universities' branding through their websites, and social media platforms.
4. Empower Internationalization / International Offices within African universities with the skills set to support their internationalization drive

The Workshop Duration and Structure

Each workshop will run over three days and is structured to offer participants a thorough, engaging, and hands-on experience to strengthen their universities' branding, knowledge generation, and visibility.

Modes of Presentation and Facilitation

- *Pre-Workshop Exercises:* Participants gather data on institutional strategic plans, internationalization policies, publishing policies, IPR policies, etc.
- *Lead Lectures:* Delivered by renowned experts on internationalization, institutional branding, and publication.
- *Plenary Discussions:* Sharing insights and recommendations for common challenges.
- *Case Studies:* Examination of globally ranked universities' strategies for alignment at multiple levels.
- *Group Work:* SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal) analyses for participant institutions, and development of draft guidelines for institutional branding.
- *Post-Workshop Assignment:* Proposed Theory of Change through a 6–12-month SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) action plan to be submitted to the AAU for effective monitoring.

Target Audience

- University Policy Makers (e.g., University Councils and Board Members, and Heads of Regulatory Agencies)
- University Leadership (e.g., Vice-Chancellors, Rectors, Presidents, and their Deputies)
- Staff of University International Offices
- Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments
- University Technical Staff (e.g., IT Directors, University Librarians, etc.)

- Academic Researchers

Please note

- Each workshop will take not more than 35 participants
- Participation will be on a first-come-first-serve basis
- For effective impact, universities can sponsor more than one participant to each workshop

Registration Fee

- US\$700 for AAU member institutions; and
- US\$800 for non-AAU member institutions.

Expected Outputs

- Development of adaptable frameworks to increase African universities' global scholarly output through publications, citations, etc.
- Arrangements to link participating universities with renowned universities that have built a niche around internationalization for experiential learning.

Expected Outcomes

- Reviewed universities' strategic plans that align their missions with national, regional, and global development goals.
- Well-placed universities on a path of international visibility
- Continuous networking among participating universities for enhanced relevance to national, regional, and global development agenda.
- Strengthened professional networks and new connections.
- Enhanced insights into international trends and best practices.

NB: There can be special arrangements for institution-specific training of its faculty upon request. To be cost-effective, not less than 20 participants would be required to attend.

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