

2027 Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP) & AAU Diamond Jubilee (60th Anniversary)

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Safari Court Hotel

Scientific Programme

Institutional Resilience and Governance

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Over the past six decades, African universities have navigated political transitions, economic volatility, public health crises, rapid enrolment growth and shifting societal expectations. Throughout these changes, they have demonstrated resilience by adapting governance systems, leadership models, and strategic priorities to sustain academic programmes, safeguard quality, and respond to societal needs.

This subtheme examines how universities across the continent have sustained resilience often in contexts of constrained resources, institutional reform, and emerging global disruptions. It highlights how strong leadership, transparent and accountable decision-making structures, sound financial stewardship, and adaptive governance frameworks have enabled institutions to maintain continuity, enhance stability, and strengthen long-term relevance.

The subtheme invites reflection on lessons and innovations have enabled universities to:

- Navigate funding shocks and diversify income streams;
- Develop responsive governance models in dynamic policy environments;
- Build digital and operational resilience during crises;
- Strengthen participatory governance and stakeholder trust; and
- Embed long-term strategic foresight into institutional planning.

Looking ahead, the subtheme also explores how African universities can further strengthen governance ecosystems to sustain impact amid demographic change, technological disruption, climate instability, and evolving demands on higher education systems.

Institutional Autonomy, Policy and Ethical Leadership

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Across Africa's higher education landscape, universities have long defended academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and ethical leadership, often in contexts shaped by political interference and authoritarian pressures. Historical and contemporary analyses show that despite efforts by successive regimes to curtail academic independence, such as legislation granting political leaders

powers over university governance, African intellectual communities have mobilized to protect the university as a space for critical inquiry, dissent, and truth-seeking.

Pan-African movements and declarations, including the Kampala Declaration (1990) and subsequent CODESRIA-led advocacy, reflect sustained continental efforts to reaffirm autonomy, resist surveillance, and counter the politicisation of knowledge. Research further underscores that academic freedom in Africa is closely intertwined with the continent's

democratic struggles, with scholars consistently arguing that freedom to teach, research, publish, and critique is foundational to sustainable democracy.^{7 8}

Studies emphasize that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are mutually reinforcing. Autonomy enables universities to make academic decisions based on scholarly criteria, while academic freedom protects staff and students from ideological control. Even in restrictive environments, academics have resisted repression through collective action, research networks, and rights-based advocacy that promote transparency, uphold human dignity, and align universities with public-interest values. At its 60-year milestone, the AAU highlights this tradition of principled resistance as central to repositioning African universities for resilience, relevance, and societal impact.

Abstracts under this subtheme may explore:

- Institutional strategies for resisting state control, censorship, or political interference in university leadership;
- Case studies on the protection or restoration of academic freedom during periods of political repression or conflict;
- Governance reforms or models (e.g., university councils, senates, shared governance) that have enhanced autonomy and ethical decision-making;
- Approaches to balancing state oversight with institutional self-determination, informed by African and global frameworks;
- Models for ethical leadership development among administrators, faculty, and students
- Values-based leadership practices that counter corruption, patronage, or the misuse of power;
- The role of national constitutions, regional protocols, and African Union frameworks in safeguarding academic freedom and autonomy;
- Policy innovations and forward-looking strategies to advance academic freedom; and
- Strategies for strengthening public trust and moral authority while maintaining political neutrality

and social relevance.

Curriculum, Pedagogy & Skills for the Future

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Over the past half century, African universities have evolved from institutions primarily focused on knowledge transmission to centres increasingly expected to drive innovation, employability, and societal transformation. While access and institutional diversity have expanded, a persistent challenge remains: the growing mismatch between graduate skills and the demands of dynamic labour markets. Rapid technological change, demographic shifts, and emerging global disruptions continue to expose gaps in curricula, pedagogical approaches, and the relevance of graduate skills.

This subtheme invites reflection on how curricula and teaching practices have evolved, the gaps that persist, and how universities can reposition themselves through modern, student-centred, and technology-enabled teaching and learning models. It underscores the need to align programmes with future-oriented skills, including critical thinking, digital literacy, complex problem-solving, creativity, communication, ethics, and adaptability, while strengthening industry collaboration and experiential learning.

Key issues include:

- Redesigning curricula to be flexible, interdisciplinary, and competency-based;
- Integrating digital and blended learning to expand access and personalise learning;
- Strengthening experiential learning through internships, apprenticeships, and community engagement;
- Fostering pedagogical innovation that shifts from teacher-centred delivery to active, inquiry-based learning;
- Embedding emerging skills (e.g. AI literacy, data analytics, green skills, entrepreneurship) across programmes; and
- Strengthening feedback loops between universities, employers, and society to ensure ongoing programme relevance.

Research, Innovation & Industry Linkages

Research, Innovation & Industry Linkages

African universities have progressively transitioned from primarily teaching-focused institutions in

the pre- and early post-colonial era to strategic actors within national innovation systems. Despite this progress, weak research funding, fragmented partnerships, misalignment between academic output and industry needs, and limited commercialization pathways continue to constrain the continent's knowledge-driven development.

Evidence consistently shows that university-industry collaboration enhances the relevance, quality, and impact of research and skills development. Such partnerships provide universities with access to equipment, funding, field-testing opportunities while strengthening programme relevance, and enable industry to benefit from knowledge exchange and technology transfer.⁹

Across the continent, regional initiatives illustrate how structured partnerships can drive innovation ecosystems. University-embedded innovation hubs are expanding Africa's research-to-market potential. For example, Zambia's Mukuba UniPod at Copperbelt University, launched under the UNDP Timbuktoo initiative, demonstrates how universities can nurture grassroots innovation, support prototype development, and strengthen linkages among students, researchers, and the private sector¹⁰. Large-scale innovation networks such as AfriLabs further highlight the value of continent-wide ecosystems in supporting startups, expanding digital skills, and connecting universities with technology industry actors¹¹.

Collectively, these experiences underscore a central insight: Africa's innovation future depends on strong, well-structured, and context-responsive collaboration between universities and industry. This subtheme therefore invites that explore how universities can scale effective partnership models, navigate barriers such as intellectual property constraints and limited

funding, and embed industry engagement across governance, research strategy, and teaching missions.

Abstracts under this subtheme may explore:

- Case studies of successful university-industry collaboration models in Africa;
- Research commercialization, technology transfer, and innovation policy reforms;
- The impact and scalability of university innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators;
- Co-creation of curricula and joint research programmes with industry partners;
- Digital innovation ecosystems and their roles in job creation and competitiveness;
- Governance, legal, and financial frameworks that enable partnerships; and
- Strategies for overcoming barriers such as IP constraints, industry reluctance, or funding limitations.

Infrastructure, Processes and People: Building Digitally Resilient African Universities

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From precolonial systems where knowledge was embedded in communities, guilds, and religious scholarship, through colonial and postcolonial restructurings, African higher education has continually adapted its people, processes, and learning platforms. The 21st century, particularly this post COVID-19 era, has marked a major shift, compelling African universities to confront longstanding infrastructural gaps and accelerate digital transformation. The pandemic underscored that true digital resilience requires fit-for-purpose infrastructure (e.g. broadband, campus networks, secure data systems), efficient digital processes (hybrid learning, AI-enabled services, end-to-end e-administration), and digitally fluent leaders, staff, and students capable of sustaining continuity and impact.

The rapid shift to online learning exposed weaknesses in connectivity, device access, digital literacy, and institutional processes, but it also highlighted universities' capacity for rapid adaptation through learning management systems, hybrid teaching models, and virtual administration.

Guiding questions under this subtheme include:

- Which digital infrastructure investments most effectively sustained teaching, research, and administration?
- How are institutions sustainably embedding AI-enabled services, cyber-secure data systems, and hybrid learning models?
- What leadership and capacity-building approaches have strengthened digital fluency among staff and students?

Resilient Financing Models for African Universities

Resilient Financing Models for African Universities

Since their early pre- and post- independence establishment, higher education financing in Africa has evolved through multiple economic, political, and structural transitions. During the 1960s and 1970s, many African governments fully funded public universities, covering tuition, staff salaries, student housing, and research. This model was sustainable under smaller enrolment systems and strong nation-building commitments. However, from the 1980s onward, declining public revenues, rising enrolments, and competing fiscal priorities rendered this approach unsustainable. Universities across the continent consequently adopted cost-sharing, fee-paying programmes, short courses, contract research, consultancies, and donor-supported projects to supplement public funding. Evidence from countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda also shows growing efforts to mobilise revenue through industry partnerships and philanthropy. Nevertheless,

access to private funding remains uneven, and reforms such as income-contingent loans or graduate taxes, while

promising, face implementation challenges in economies with large informal labour markets.^{12 13}

Today, financial sustainability remains the central challenge facing African higher education. Research highlights persistent underfunding alongside inefficiencies in the use of existing resources. As AAU marks its Diamond Jubilee, this subtheme invites reflection on the evolution of financing reforms and the development of sustainable funding models capable of supporting African universities through the next phase of growth and transformation.

Promoting Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Over the past six decades, Quality Assurance (QA) and Accreditation in African higher education have evolved from fragmented, institution-based practices into increasingly harmonised, continent-wide systems. During the 1980s and 1990s, declining quality, driven by rapid enrolment growth, underfunding, and governance challenges, prompted widespread recognition of the need for formal QA mechanisms. In response, national QA agencies emerged across the continent, supported by strengthened regional cooperation, particularly following UNESCO's 1998 World Conference on Higher Education, which called for revitalised QA systems.¹⁴

The 2000s and 2010s marked a further shift towards harmonisation, as African governments, regional bodies, and the AAU advanced frameworks to improve comparability, transparency, and academic mobility. Central among these is the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF), endorsed by the African Union, which provides a coherent continental architecture through instruments such as the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM), the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) (under development), and the Addis Convention on Recognition of Qualifications.^{15 16} The Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative (2015–present), implemented in partnership with University of Barcelona AAU, ENQA, EUA, and DAAD, has been instrumental in strengthening QA capacity, institutionalising ASG-QA, and laying the groundwork for a future Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA).

This subtheme invites critical reflection on the evolution of QA systems, the effectiveness of continental tools and frameworks, and how African universities can leverage QA not merely for compliance, but as a driver of institutional transformation, relevance, and global competitiveness.

Abstracts must address historical, contemporary, or forward-looking aspects of Quality Assurance and Accreditation at institutional, national, regional, or continental levels, including:

- The evolution of QA and Accreditation in Africa over the past 60 years;
- case studies of internal or external QA innovations within African universities;
- Implementation and impact of PAQAF tools (ASG-QA, AQRM, ACTS, Addis Convention);

- Lessons from HAQAA1, HAQAA2, or ongoing HAQAA3 capacity-building initiatives;
- Comparative analyses of QA agencies or regional QA networks (e.g., CAMES, IUCEA, AfriQAN);
- QA as a driver of relevance, employability, and curriculum reform; and
- Equity, decolonisation, and contextualisation of QA frameworks in African higher education institutions.

Internationalization, Regional Integration & Diaspora Engagements in African Higher Education

Internationalization, Regional Integration & Diaspora Engagements in African Higher Education

African higher education has evolved from largely isolated, nationally focused systems into increasingly interconnected, globally engaged, and regionally harmonized spaces. Early post-independence universities faced limited capacity and weak global linkages, but by the 1990s and 2000s, the need for cross-border collaboration in research, postgraduate training, governance, and academic mobility became widely recognized. This shift was driven by massification pressures, persistent underfunding, and growing demands for globally competitive knowledge economies¹⁷. Internationalization has since expanded rapidly, with African universities forging North-South and South-South partnerships to strengthen research, innovation, digital transformation, and curriculum development. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital internationalization, opening new pathways for virtual mobility and South–South cooperation.¹⁸

Regional integration has become central to continental strategies. The African Union, Association of African Universities, and regional blocs such as EAC, ECOWAS, and SADC have advanced initiatives on mobility, qualification harmonization, and shared quality standards. Programmes like the World Bank sponsored Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence and the HAQAA Initiative provide a strong policy foundation for building a unified continental higher education space positioning universities as key agents of integration under Agenda 2063. At the same time, diaspora engagement has shifted from concerns about “brain drain” toward proactive strategies for “brain circulation.” Initiatives such as the Carnegie-supported diaspora fellowship programmes demonstrate how African scholars abroad contribute to strengthening teaching, research, innovation ecosystems, postgraduate supervision, and international partnerships, highlighting the transformative potential of structured diaspora collaboration beyond remittances¹⁹. Complementing these policy frameworks, implementation platforms such as the World Bank-supported Africa Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact) initiative demonstrate how regional academic mobility, collaborative postgraduate training, and cross-border research networks

can be operationalised in practice, reinforcing continental integration through excellence-driven collaboration.

Taken together, these trends reflect Africa's efforts to build a globally connected higher education ecosystem. Under this subtheme, the AAU invites case studies that demonstrate how internationalization, regional integration, and diaspora partnerships have strengthened institutional resilience, advanced innovation, and enhanced global competitiveness.

Climate Leadership, Equity and Inclusive Development

Climate Leadership, Equity and Inclusive Development

Across Africa, universities occupy a pivotal position at the intersection of environmental sustainability and inclusive development. As climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including rural communities, women, youth, and low-income households, and deepens long-standing social, political, and economic inequalities, universities are increasingly called upon not only to generate knowledge but to proactively shape equitable, community-centered climate solutions. Climate leadership is therefore inseparable from equity and social justice.^{20 21}

Recent scholarship emphasises that universities must evolve into engines of societal resilience by bridging the gap between climate knowledge and action through participatory research, community engagement, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Emerging initiatives, such as the AAU's climate adaptation capacity-building programmes and the Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CLARE) project, demonstrate how institutions can strengthen internal systems, improve access to climate data, and build capacity for socially inclusive climate action.^{22 23}

This subtheme invites critical reflection and case-based evidence on how African universities are advancing equity, justice, and climate leadership and how these roles can be strengthened to secure a just and sustainable future for the continent.

Universities as Catalysts for Peace and Social Justice

Universities as Catalysts for Peace and Social Justice

African universities, like others globally, have emerged as vital catalysts for peace and social justice, aligning closely with the African Union's Agenda 2063 vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens." Across the continent, higher education institutions have increasingly integrated peace education, conflict sensitivity, civic engagement, and social justice into their teaching, research, and community outreach. UNESCO's IICBA initiative, for example, has supported universities and teacher training institutes in 28 African countries, equipping youth with peacebuilding skills, resilience, and tools for preventing violent extremism through transformative pedagogy.

However, realising the Agenda 2063 aspiration of "silencing the guns" requires universities to deepen and expand these roles. Evidence shows that sustainable peace depends on strong governance, people-driven development, and democratic norms—outcomes strengthened when universities promote critical citizenship, human rights, intercultural dialogue, and evidence-based

policy engagement.

Peace and social justice are inseparable. Social justice is central to renewing higher education, as universities are called to address structural inequalities, promote democratic participation, and nurture critical citizenship. This also includes expanding access to education and basic support services for refugees and other marginalised student populations.

To ensure high-quality, relevant, and impactful contributions, abstracts should clearly demonstrate engagement with one or more of the following focus areas:

- Integration of peace education, conflict sensitivity, or civic engagement into curricula, research, or community service;
- University contributions to governance, democratic norms, human rights, and critical citizenship;
- Evidence of higher education institutions strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, or preventing violent extremism;
- Institutional strategies to address structural inequalities and promote equitable access, particularly for refugees, marginalised groups, and underserved populations;
- Approaches to embedding social justice principles in teaching, policy, campus life, and institutional reform;
- University roles in advancing African Union Agenda 2063 aspirations for peace, prosperity, and people-driven development; and
- Research or case studies demonstrating how universities contribute to sustainable peace, inclusive governance, or community resilience.

Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance and the Future African University

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping Africa's higher education systems, positioning universities at the centre of a continent-wide digital transformation. Despite infrastructural and capacity constraints, African institutions are increasingly integrating AI to enhance teaching, streamline administration, support personalized learning, and expand access to knowledge. A systematic review of 113 studies (2020–2024) highlights AI's contribution to pedagogical innovation, operational efficiency, and strategic digital transformation. Similarly, a WISE-supported study of 47 African higher education institutions documents emerging AI ecosystems in which faculty and students experiment with AI even in low-resource settings, underscoring the continent's potential to shape ethical and inclusive digital learning models, globally.²⁴

These opportunities are accompanied by significant governance, ethical, and data-protection challenges. Fewer than 20% of African higher education institutions currently have formal AI governance policies exposing risks related to academic integrity, bias, unequal access, and unregulated use of generative AI tools (UNESCO, 2024). Institutional readiness remains uneven: while early adopters such as South Africa, Rwanda, and Nigeria have aligned institutional guidelines with national strategies, many universities remain in aspirational stages due to gaps in infrastructure, human capacity, policy coherence, and digital literacy.

growing use of generative AI further heightens concerns around data privacy, transparency, and assessment integrity, prompting institutions to develop disclosure frameworks and ethical-use policies, such as those recently introduced at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

A future-ready African university will therefore require robust, context-sensitive data governance frameworks grounded in continental instruments such as the AU Data Policy Framework and the Malabo Convention on cybersecurity and data protection. As AI increasingly permeates research, teaching, innovation, and student services, universities must invest strategically in data infrastructure, AI literacy, and governance mechanisms that ensure safety, accountability, and digital sovereignty. Strengthening intra-African policy dialogue, building institutional capacity, and co-creating ethical AI frameworks with governments, industry, and civil society will be critical to enabling African universities not only to adopt AI, but to shape its future.

To ensure relevance and rigour, abstracts under this subtheme should address one or more of the following areas:

- Case studies of AI use in low-resource or infrastructure-constrained contexts;
- Institutional, national, or multi-country analyses of AI readiness or digital transformation;
- Assessments of AI governance gaps, including issues of integrity, bias, safety, and ethics;
- Institutional or national AI governance frameworks, guidelines, or disclosure protocols;
- Comparative lessons from early adopters (e.g. South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria);
- Development of context-appropriate data protection frameworks aligned with continental instruments;
- Research on generative AI risks, data privacy, and responsible data management;
- Strategies for strengthening AI literacy among students, faculty, and administrators;
- Evaluations of infrastructural, skills, and policy constraints; and

- Analyses of AI's implications for equity in access, learning, and student support

Open Science, Research Integrity and Scholarly Communication

Open Science, Research Integrity and Scholarly Communication

This subtheme highlights the transformative role of knowledge sharing in advancing African scholarship. Over recent decades, African universities have increasingly adopted Open Science practices—ranging from institutional repositories and open-access journals to collaborative research networks—aimed at enhancing the visibility and accessibility of African scholarship. These efforts have contributed to democratising knowledge, fostering inclusivity, and enabling researchers, policymakers, and communities to benefit from locally generated evidence.

At the 2025 Open Science Forum in Nairobi, African higher education leaders reaffirmed Open Science as central to equitable knowledge production and Africa's scientific independence, emphasising its role in transparency, collaboration, and research equity. This commitment was reinforced at the second Global Summit on Diamond Open Access (DOA), co-hosted by the University of Cape Town and partners including the Association of African Universities, Redalyc/AmeliCA, SPARC, the National Research Foundation of South Africa, UNESCO, CLACSO, and Science Europe. While the Toluca Summit positioned DOA as a public good, the Cape Town meeting advanced the agenda further by prioritising social justice,

decolonisation, and inclusivity, underscoring DOA as a model for accessible, equitable, and independent scholarly publishing.

Alongside the expansion of Open Science, African universities have intensified efforts to strengthen research integrity. The Africa Research Integrity Project, launched in 2024 by Digital Science and TCC Africa, has supported national ethics review systems, built capacity for responsible research conduct, and promoted ethical scholarly publishing through webinars and hands-on training across multiple countries. Despite this progress, recent assessments indicate that only about 20% of African universities have publicly available research integrity policies, highlighting the need for stronger institutional governance and more harmonised standards. As the AAU marks its 60th anniversary, this subtheme seeks to showcase models, reforms, and innovations that advance scholarly communication—from research data governance to ethical publishing—and to stimulate new thinking on how Open Science and research integrity can further democratise knowledge, elevate African scholarship globally, and shape the future African university.

Paper submitters are encouraged to focus on:

- Case studies of Open Science adoption in African universities, including repositories, open-access policies, and data-sharing practices;
- Research integrity frameworks, ethics review systems, and institutional reforms promoting

responsible research conduct;

- Innovations in scholarly communication, such as digital publishing platforms, editor capacity-building programmes, and initiatives enhancing research visibility in the Global South;
- Policy integration approaches linking Open Science to national or regional STI frameworks; and
- Challenges and opportunities related to data governance, FAIR data practices, and cross-border scholarly collaboration.

Student Wellbeing and Holistic Support Systems

Student Wellbeing and Holistic Support Systems

Universities increasingly recognise that academic performance, retention, and overall student development are closely linked to students' mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing. As African higher education systems expand and diversify, student wellbeing has emerged as a critical pillar of institutional resilience, relevance, and academic success. Studies across the continent consistently indicate high levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and related psychosocial challenges among university students, with prevalence rates often exceeding 35–40% globally and similarly high patterns observed in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although student mental health and wellbeing have historically been under-researched and unevenly supported, the past decade has seen growing recognition of the need for more comprehensive and systematic support structures.

Across African campuses, universities are piloting a range of interventions, including peer-led support initiatives, digital mental health platforms, psychosocial counselling services, wellness campaigns, and academic support programmes. However, evidence suggests that many of these systems remain fragmented, underfunded, or inaccessible. Informal support networks—such as peers, lecturers, and families—often compensate for gaps in formal services, though stigma, limited mental health literacy, and financial barriers continue to constrain effective uptake. Emerging research further highlights that student wellbeing is shaped not only by counselling and health services, but also by academic support frameworks, quality of communication, sense of belonging, peer relationships, and intrapersonal capacities such as self-regulation and

resilience. Together, these insights point to the need for holistic, student-centred models that integrate academic, psychological, social, and environmental support.

As institutions work to create safe, inclusive, and enabling learning environments, calls for locally grounded wellbeing policies—adapted from global good-practice frameworks but responsive to African realities—have intensified. As the AAU marks its 60th anniversary in 2027, this subtheme invites reflection and innovation on how African universities can sustain holistic student wellbeing as a strategic foundation for academic achievement and continental development.

Authors submitting abstracts under this subtheme are encouraged to explore:

- Case studies of effective student wellbeing and mental health initiatives (e.g. peer support,

tele-counselling, wellness centres, digital tools, faculty-led interventions);

- Holistic frameworks integrating academic support, psychosocial care, and student life services;
- Development or evaluation of institutional wellbeing policies, mental health strategies, or governance reforms;
- Adaptation of global wellbeing frameworks to African university contexts;
- research on student mental health trends, barriers to service access, and determinants of wellbeing;
- Analyses of informal support systems (peer networks, lecturers, families) and their effectiveness;
- Institutional strategies addressing wellbeing among marginalised groups (e.g. first-generation students, women, rural students, refugees, students with disabilities);
- Context-specific approaches reflecting cultural, religious, and socio-economic influences on help-seeking behaviour;
- Innovations in digital wellbeing solutions, early-warning systems, and data-driven student support; and
- Institutional transformations required to embed wellbeing within the future African university