



Theme: *Digital Transformation in African Higher and Tertiary Education*

Concept Note

Background

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is the apex organisation and forum for consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa. Created in 1967 by the Heads of African Universities themselves, AAU is the voice of higher education in Africa. The Association aims to improve the quality of higher education, and to strengthen its contribution to Africa's development by supporting the core functions of higher education institutions and facilitating critical reflection and consensus building on issues affecting higher education. It is headquartered in Accra, Ghana and has three regional offices – North African Regional Office (NARO) hosted by the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt; Eastern African Regional Office (EARO) hosted by the University of Khartoum in Khartoum, Sudan; and North America Office (NAMO) in Washington DC, USA. The AAU is the technical implementing arm of the African Union Commission (AUC) in higher education and the coordinating agency of the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) of the AUC. It currently has a membership of over 400 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Africa.

The African Universities' Week (AU Week) is celebrated annually by universities in Africa to commemorate the birth of the AAU on the 12th November 1967 in Rabat, Morocco. The decision to create the AAU had been taken at an earlier meeting of Heads of African Institutions of Higher Education organized for this purpose at the University of Khartoum, Sudan in September 1963. The AU Week celebration brings together higher education stakeholders across Africa to discuss contemporary issues pertinent to the improvement of the quality and relevance of higher education to the development of the African continent. The African Universities' Week Celebrations have become a premier event on the calendar of AAU and has been celebrated by HEIs since 2000.

The Theme for 2020

This year's theme, '*Digital Transformation in African Higher and Tertiary Education*' was aptly chosen to stimulate dialogue on how African HEIs can digitally transform their various business processes – that is teaching, learning, working spaces, events management, administrative operations (financial, students records, health, accommodation, etc), collaborations, knowledge services, research, community engagement among several other functions of HEIs.



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EDUCAUSE¹ defines digital transformation as “*a series of deep and coordinated workforce, culture, and technology shifts that enable new educational and operating models and transform an institution's operations, strategic directions, and value proposition*”.

The 2020 Theme of the AU Week specifically links to the African Union Commission’s Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) whose vision is “*an Integrated and inclusive digital society and economy in Africa that improves the quality of life of Africa’s citizens, strengthens the existing economic sector, enables its diversification and development, and ensures continental ownership with Africa as a producer and not only a consumer in the global economy*”. The strategy identifies digital infrastructure, digital skills & human capacity, and digital innovations as some of the key foundation pillars required to digitally transform the African Continent. It singles out digital education as one of the critical sectors to drive digital transformation – and digital applications and emerging technologies as key cross cutting themes for realizing a digitally transformed continent.

This year’s theme will contribute to the following objectives of the African Union Commission’s digital transformation strategy to drive digital transformation in the African Higher Education sector:

1. Building a vibrant sector approach to digitalization of the African higher education sector
2. Promoting the digital revolution as the basis for higher education service delivery and transforming Africa into a Digital Society.
3. Making African citizens, enlightened and responsible e-citizens.
4. Contributing towards the digital empowerment of African Higher Education stakeholders by 2030

This year’s theme and discussions will also emphasize the importance of digital accessibility and sharing information and knowledge openly for the benefit of humanity. Open Access (OA) gives academics a worldwide audience and increases the visibility of their work; gives consumers of knowledge barrier-free access to the literature they need for their research and other engagements. African Universities practicing Open Access increase the visibility of their researchers and their research, reduce their expenditure on journals, and advance their mission to share knowledge. OA also provides taxpayers with free access to the results of research they helped fund. Digital transformation is therefore an important component of OA – without digital accessibility it would be impossible to achieve the goals of OA.

HEIs are encouraged to develop digital transformation strategies to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach to digitization. Digital transformation impacts staff, students, institutional culture and how technology is used. The success of a digital transformation project depends on dynamic and supportive leadership. In a digitally transformed HEI, there needs to be skilled staff

¹ <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/1/how-colleges-and-universities-are-driving-to-digital-transformation-today>



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- and critical attention to information security, privacy, sustainable funding, digital integrations, and student-centric services,

This year's celebrations will use AAU's virtual platforms to bring African Universities to deliberate on a diversity of sub-topics guided by the over-arching theme of digital transformation.

When the coronavirus pandemic created a major global disruption to the operations of higher education, with most institutions moving to online instruction, the situation challenged African HEIs to adopt innovative strategies, including digitization of their operations to continue to deliver their goals and objectives. This year's celebrations therefore aim to create a continental e-platform to share knowledge and experience among African HEIs in a diversity of topical areas and possibly inspire their journeys towards holistic and sustainable digital transformation.

How the 2020 African Universities' Week will be different

1. One continental virtual weeklong event is planned for the 2020 AU Week Celebrations - instead of various physical events in different African Universities.
2. The Week's Celebration will create several e-platforms for key stakeholders to discuss the important topic of digital transformation in African higher and tertiary education. However other sub-themes not directly relating to digital transformation will also be accommodated – these include AAU Membership issues, Partnership Opportunities, Entrepreneurship, Gender and Climate Change.

Objectives

The main objectives of the 2020 African Universities' Week Celebrations are to:

1. Discuss the opportunities for digital transformation in African Higher and Tertiary Educational Institutions
2. Create a virtual platform for diverse discussions on topical and varied issues.
3. Celebrate the success stories of Higher Education in Africa.

Expected Outputs

1. Increased understanding of the importance of holistic digital transformation of African HEIs
2. A communique relating to digital transformation of African HEIs
3. AAU Desk Officers fully inducted
4. Partnerships identified between member universities across the five regions of Africa and other countries, e.g Malaysia



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5. Vast knowledge and information gained by the participants on digital transformation

Venue

The Programme lined up for the week will be held virtually via the AAU Zoom Platform

Collaborating Organizations

The AAU Secretariat is collaborating with its three regional offices – North Africa Regional Office (NARO), East Africa Regional Office (EARO) and North America Office (NAMO) and its Member Universities to celebrate the Week.

Target Participants

The target participants include the following:

- Academic and administrative staff from universities, colleges, polytechnics, and professional/technical & vocational schools
- Students from universities, colleges, polytechnics, professional/technical & vocational schools
- Representatives from diverse sectors including – health, agricultural, financial, and educational industries
- Research Institutions
- Business and corporate organizations
- Government Ministries
- Anyone else interested in the African Higher Education Sector

How to Participate

Registration Link: <https://tinyurl.com/2020AUWeek> (for Monday to Friday, Except Tuesday's Parallel Sessions)

Contact Information

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Overview of the Program

S/No	Date	Activities
Day 1	Monday, 9 November 2020	<p>MORNING (10 am GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Keynote Address: Digital Transformation in African Higher and Tertiary Education: A holistic and sustainable approach: Ms Nodumo DHLAMINI <p>AFTERNOON (1300 GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Webinar: The Context in our Solutions: The realities of blended education for skills-oriented programs: Mrs Sheila Naah-Boamah, Executive Secretary, National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABTEX), Ghana : Supported by Mrs Larissa Odzebe Gidisu
Day 2	Tuesday, 10 November 2020	<p>MORNING PARALLEL SESSIONS (SESSION 1 - 10 am GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">AAU North Africa Regional Office (NARO) Session: Prof Amany El-Shariff (Register in Advance - https://tinyurl.com/session1NARO)East Africa Regional Office (EARO) Session: Prof Faiza Mohamed Osman Mahmoud Register in Advance- https://tinyurl.com/Session1EARO <p>AFTERNOON PARALLEL SESSIONS (SESSION 2 – 13:00 GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Webinar: Digitizing the landscape- Geoparks, Geo-tourism and Geo-conservation for Sustainable Development of Africa: Dr. Enas Ahmed, Matrouh University, Egypt - Member of UNESCO global geopark; Egypt, GIRAF ambassador Register in Advance - https://tinyurl.com/session2GeoparksAAU North America Office (NAMO) Session: Mr Kwesi A. Sam Register in Advance - https://tinyurl.com/session2NAMO <p>AFTERNOON PARALLEL SESSIONS (SESSION 3- 14:00 GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Webinar: Reshaping Women Leadership in a Transforming and Digitized World: Coaches of Influence Foundation & Mrs Felicia Kuagbedzi Register in Advance- https://tinyurl.com/session3Women



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Day 3	Wednesday, 11 November 2020	<p>MORNING (10 am GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome Session for New AAU Members: Ms Nodumo Dhlamini & Miss Edith Laari• Featuring a member university based in Malaysia – opportunities for collaborating with African Universities: Ms Nodumo Dhlamini & Miss Edith Laari <p>AFTERNOON (1300 GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel featuring member universities in North Africa – opportunities for collaborating with African Universities: Prof Amany El-Sharif & Mr Kwesi A. Sam
Day 4	Thursday, 12 November 2020	<p>MORNING (10 am GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Official Celebration: Address by the AAU President and Secretary General: Mrs Felicia Kuagbedzi & Miss Irene Dufie• Induction of AAU Desk Officers: Miss Edith Laari & Mr Kwesi A. Sam <p>AFTERNOON (1300 GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research, Journal Establishment and Maintenance in a Digitized Environment Dr Violet Makuku
Day 5	Friday, 13 November 2020	<p>MORNING (10 am GMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital Accessibility and Open Access for HEIs: Where are we? Mr Abednego Corletey• Closing Ceremony: Mrs Larissa Odzebe Gidisu & Miss Irene Dufie