



**ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES
اتحاد الجامعات الإفريقية**

2021 GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUE

15th General Conference of the Association of African Universities

July 5-8, 2021 (Virtual)

The Association of African Universities (AAU) held its 15th Quadrennial General Conference of African University leaders on July 5-8, 2021. This was a virtual meeting of academic leaders, policy makers, funders, educational ministers and educational stakeholders across the African continent, the African diaspora and beyond.

The main theme for the General Conference was “***The Future of Higher Education in Africa***”.

In addition to keynote presentations on the main theme of the Conference, papers delivered under the following six sub-themes framed the deliberations of the conference :

Sub-Theme 1: The Future of African Higher Education Post-COVID-19

Sub-Theme 2: Contributions of African Higher Education Institutions to Addressing the Challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic

Sub-Theme 3: Contributions of African Higher Education Institutions in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Sub-Theme 4: Funding of African Higher Education Institutions in the face of unpredictable Economy

Sub-Theme 5: Mainstreaming e-learning and the digital divide

Sub-Theme 6: Contributions of the Diaspora to African Higher Education

The Conference was held under the Patronage of His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana.

We, participants at the Conference,

1. **Appreciate** the President of the Republic of Ghana for hosting this Conference.
2. **Welcome** the support of sponsors, donors and development partners, including the African Union, the European Union, the African Development Bank, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, in the organization of this Conference.
3. **Acknowledge** the numerous programmes generously funded by these organizations to support African higher education institutions, agencies, staff, students and researchers.
4. **Appreciate** the numerous goodwill messages delivered at the Conference by key partners across the African continent and beyond.
5. **Are aware** of the challenges confronting higher education across the African continent such as limited student enrolment; inadequate financial resources; deficient human capital; low research output; suboptimal physical and electronic infrastructures; and poor leadership and governance, among others.
6. **Resolve** to accelerate activities at the higher education institutional level that can help to overcome the challenges identified by the numerous presenters.
7. **Acknowledge** the fact that COVID-19 has disrupted teaching and learning, stalled research and threatened the much-needed skills to enhance Africa's teaching and research competitiveness.
8. **Recognize** the fact that the majority of African universities do not have the necessary infrastructure to adequately respond to the challenges that have emerged with the onset of the novel COVID-19 pandemic.
9. **Acknowledge** the fact that while COVID-19 has disrupted traditional learning systems and changed the educational trajectory on a scale never experienced before in higher education, it has at the same time created new opportunities for Africa to innovate rapidly.
10. **Are conscious** of the fact that COVID-19 has raised our awareness and created the need for African higher institutions to transition to areas such as: digital content creation, online instructional design; training of staff on online teaching, provision of e-Learning infrastructural facilities, support to connect to learning management systems and assistance with online learning strategies, methods and resources.
11. **Recognize** the need for African universities to urgently resolve the challenges posed by COVID-19 such as infrastructural deficit, limited access to affordable high-

speed internet connectivity, poor access to and/or unreliable electricity, recalibration of research, among others.

12. **Support** the design of home-grown solutions in response to the pandemic and appreciate the role of Africa Centers of Excellence in undertaking high-end research to develop a cure for COVID-19.

13. **Are aware** of the need to partner with prominent Regional Research Education Networks (RRENs) that champion educational and research infrastructure including internet connectivity, cloud services and other platforms to enable African researchers collaborate across the world.

14. **Appreciate** the importance to leverage the AAU African Research & Education Network (AfREN) project to facilitate improved teaching, learning and research collaborations, as well as use network economies of scale to reduce the cost of high-speed internet access and promote linkages of academics to industry, government and other international research/educational networks.

15. **Aim to** subscribe to large scale academic research infrastructures, such as Africa Light Source Initiative, to encourage African scientists to undertake research in Africa.

16. **Recognise** the need to cultivate and deepen mutual trust among governments at the continental level, understanding and respect for educational systems, as well as mobility opportunities within Africa and other countries.

17. **Undertake** to leverage international mobility mechanisms such as the European Union initiatives and inter-institutional joint degree programmes, in a manner that strategically benefits Africa.

18. **Resolve** to work with the AAU to support further initiatives with a focus on academic mobility such as the *African Jobs Board*.

19. **Undertake** to promote university-industry linkages with the objective of creating an “entrepreneurial university” to help transform African universities.

20. **Will promote** universities’ contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and their potential to develop local, national, regional and global economy, to create employment, to improve education in terms of curricula, teaching and learning, research and community engagement activities.

21. **Resolve** to explore creative ways to fund African higher education.

22. **Undertake**, consistent with the AAU strategic plan, to promote evidence-based advocacy to ensure a favourable policy environment and prioritization of higher education at national, regional and continental levels.

23. **Urge** African institutions of higher learning to harmonize their quality assurance frameworks and develop a quality culture that is embraced by all members.

24. **Resolve** to explore the adoption of the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), a network for quality assurance practitioners in African higher education initiated by the AAU with the support of the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) as a model in promoting a culture of quality assurance in higher education in Africa.
25. **Undertake** to determine the level of readiness for e-learning across Africa and implement measures to mainstream e-learning among higher education institutions in Africa in order to overcome the digital divide among countries and institutions.
26. **Recognize** Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) and the establishment of virtual and open universities as an innovative way of delivering education to the majority of Africans in need of higher education.
27. **Acknowledge** the role of the African diaspora in serving as a focal point for rebuilding the global African community and championing several developmental initiatives at the intercontinental level.
28. **Agree to take** measures to reverse the brain drain which has deprived the African continent of the kind of intellectual capacity the continent needs.
29. **Recognize** the role of the diaspora in promotion higher education in Africa, and undertake to develop strategic partnerships between African HEIs and, in particular, diasporas in North America and Europe, including the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the USA, to contribute to the African Union's Africa educational agenda.
30. **Undertake** to implement a coordinated and focused approach to bring back the children of Africa in the diaspora to help achieve the vision of the Africa we want.
31. **Recognize** the immense contribution that the diaspora can make in leading Africa to the next frontier of its development.

In closing,

We, participants at the Conference,

- a. **Applaud** the AAU for successfully organising the 15th Quadrennial General Conference of African University leaders which has profoundly refocused higher education institutions in Africa to commit to addressing the core challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. **Resolve** to work together to surmount the real challenges hindering the growth and relevance of Africa's institutions of higher learning for continental relevance within a globally competitive environment.
- c. **Acknowledge** the pivotal role played by Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education as the foundation for the development of other academic disciplines.

- d. **Urge** the AAU to create a platform that will enable African universities store all their research online within their institutions and to provide the expertise to transfer the knowledge useful for the development of Africa.
- e. **Undertake** to contribute collectively to the attainment of the goals of policies such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), the Science Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024), and the Global 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, among others, for the benefit of the people of Africa and the World at large.
- f. **Acknowledge** the fact that the *Africa We Want* can be achieved by undoing the miseducation Africans have received from colonial masters.
- g. **Urge** the AAU to admit diaspora institutions that have 50% of its members with African decent as AAU members, and encourage them to join AAU conferences and activities.
- h. **Urge** the AAU to undertake a review of the implementation of this Communiqué and report the progress achieved at the next General Conference.

Nana Professor Osei Darkwa
Rapporteur General