

Association of African Universities
2023 Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors & Presidents of
African Universities (COREVIP 2023)

Theme:

Advancing Excellence in African Higher Education

Concept Note

African higher education has recorded phenomenal growth in the last decades creating opportunities for millions of students—and in the process, building capacities for national social and economic advancement. The sector which is currently estimated to enroll some 20 million students still however needs to scale up, as the enrollment rate for the sector still remains in single digits in many countries.

The expansion however wrought about numerous nagging issues pertaining particularly to quality and excellence. Despite massive financial injection, the sector remains one of the most, if not the most, financially-challenged in the world with implications on every facet of the higher education landscape.

As a consequence, the narrative on African higher education has been disproportionately exhibited in a deficit mode typically highlighting it in a crisis and defective mode—permanently. This phenomenon has relentlessly pushed the debates and dialogues to focus on challenges and problems, instead of focusing on what is achieved so far and dampening the opportunities for success and excellence.

And yet, despite the challenges and issues that have confronted the sector, some pockets of excellence—typically at institutional or departmental level—have been well recorded. Some meagre body of knowledge, experience and perspectives on how these entities have overcome—and even thrived—exist creating an opportunity for a more nuanced narrative in advancing African higher education.

This particular Conference will seek to sharply focus on excellence and successful initiatives, interventions and outcomes in African higher education by highlighting the key enabling elements within the sub-themes outlined below. The proposed sub-themes include, but not limited to:

1. Doctoral education

African Higher Education has witnessed massive expansion in the last decade opening up unprecedented opportunities for access. This trend is anticipated to continue even more in the foreseeable future. Doctoral education resides centrally in this phenomenal development and its role in advancing excellence in African higher education cannot be overemphasized. Accordingly, efforts are underway to build the doctoral education landscape in the continent which faces a plethora of challenges which this Conference intends to extensively explore and propose relevant interventions and recommendations in the advancement of excellence.

2. Institutional differentiation

Despite the phenomenal expansion that the African higher education has witnessed, only little can be said about its differentiation. The new institutions have tended to copycat existing institutions in their form, content and culture—falling under a very strong spell of institutional isomorphism. This has undermined efforts of institutional and program diversity as well as establishing centers of excellence that are paramount in national higher education systems. The Conference will undertake a robust dialogue and analysis to advance institutional differentiation, among others, recalibrate institutional mission and revisit existing (and dominating) modalities of delivery (by capitalizing on virtual/distance learning), in pursuit of excellence in higher education systems.

3. Partnership/cooperation and internationalization

Research and academic collaboration, as a phenomenon of internationalization, have taken center stage in promoting quality and advancing excellence. Institutional vigor, status and reputation are now measured in terms of the scope and magnitude of international partnerships and academic cooperation. Student mobility, academic exchange, joint research and program development have emerged as key aspects in advancing academic excellence. The Conference will explore the challenges of promoting internationalization, for instance rankings, and academic partnerships and advance relevant and appropriate approaches to foster it.

4. University-industry linkages

The importance of university-industry linkages has been well established in advancing multi-disciplinary research, public-private partnership, innovation, entrepreneurship and excellence. Of recent, entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships have garnered robust support, among others, to expand employment and job creation opportunities—key aspects of development in the continent. While the contributions of university-industry linkages in advancing excellence and relevance has long been well understood, this particular path to excellence has not been fully exploited for a number of reasons. The Conference, while identifying the impediments, will propose relevant and practical interventions to address it.

5. Funding and financing

The massive expansion of the higher education sector in Africa has not been matched with commensurate resources. The sector which is striving to address a deficit in access, equity, quality and excellence needs to scale up and diversify sources of funding. It is well established that developing countries need to invest 1 percent of their GDP towards research; and yet, most countries are to pursue that in more sustainable, strategic and equitable manner. In countries where public funding for the sector has reached a threshold, multiple avenues of generating both public and private resources have been sought. As key to the advancement of excellence and quality in higher education, the Conference will deliberate on how African countries and their higher education institutions need to navigate the chronic challenges of financing the

sector in the aftermath of post-Covid 19 and the global economic, social and political upheavals.

6. Role of intellectual diaspora

Africa has a huge untapped capital in the intellectual diaspora. The human, financial and technical potential of the intellectual diaspora in advancing African higher education has been well recognized, recently. The Carnegie Corporation of New York's African Diaspora initiative in advancing higher education in the continent through the diaspora, is one case in point. Based on the lessons learned and experiences acquired—from such organizationally supported and also privately steered initiatives—the Conference will vigorously explore this emerging trend in advancing excellence in African higher education.

Date and Venue of Conference

COREVIP 2023 holds in July 2023 in Windhoek, Namibia and is co-hosted by University of Namibia.

Submission of Abstracts

Abstracts on the sub-themes should not be more than 500 words and should be uploaded at <https://event-mgt.aau.org/event/73/> no later than 28th February 2023.

Please note that the originality of information and contribution to knowledge would be key criteria for the selection of abstracts.