



Unlock opportunities for Africa

COMMENT



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FROM droughts and diseases to floods and famine, Africa has seen and, in many cases, continues to experience wide-ranging challenges. Our continent's legacy of colonialism and its dire effects, as well as current socio-political systems that often mar development, count among the many reasons why African countries often struggle with challenges that high-income countries seemingly solve easily.

But those "First World" solutions can seldom be replicated in Africa to achieve the same results – our continent faces its own unique challenges, which require its own solutions.

As we celebrated Africa Day yesterday, we again have the opportunity to contemplate how different sectors – from industry to education – can contribute and ensure we address global challenges with African solutions.

For more than a year, the world has suffered due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which laid bare the inequalities in societies across the world. In Africa, we have seen huge stress on our health systems, and recently the inequality in the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines have come to the fore.

Although Covid-19 is top-of-mind, the world faces a plethora of other challenges. These affect our continent, but we need to find solutions that are tailor-made for Africa. In this, higher education institutions can play a key role, and specifically by supporting scholarship and research.

Training and investing in young academics so they can become skilled researchers whose work focuses on making a societal impact and finding solutions to societal challenges is



TO GET to tailor-made solutions, scholarship development of young academics and expansion of research output is critical, says the writer. | African News Agency (ANA) Archives

imperative. We have seen this with Covid-19 over the past year when academics and researchers contributed to various initiatives to respond to the pandemic's impact across the continent. To get to tailor-made solutions, scholarship development of young academics and expansion of research output is critical.

Two initiatives at Stellenbosch University (SU) aim to support scholarship and research, while also promoting the institution's internationalisation efforts and increasing its impact on the African continent.

The first initiative, SU's Africa Doctoral Academy (ADA), hosted by the African Centre for Scholarship at SU, has continued working virtually throughout the pandemic to co-ordinate and ensure excellence in doctoral education throughout Africa.

While its focus is on academic training and scholarship development, the work of the ADA has also strengthened SU's bonds with other universities across the continent through the Emerging Scholars Initiative.

The four courses of the ADA's online school towards the end of last year drew a total of 96 delegates from 13 countries. The courses – on teach-

ing in a digital world, supervising a PhD-by-publication, academic writing, and introduction to mixed-methods research – were facilitated by presenters from SU, KU Leuven and, for the first time, the University of Cambridge.

In this way, academics get exposed to global perspectives which will help them in their work in African countries.

The second initiative will launch next month: the SU School for Climate Studies is envisioned to be a world-class institution for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary climate and related studies in and for Africa, and to support and encourage research partnerships with other entities, both nationally and internationally.

Climate change affects countries all over the world in unique ways, and only research can lead us to understand its impact for the future, which we currently cannot fully predict. Much more research is needed to address climate change and its effects, and it asks of African researchers to focus on our continent.

The School for Climate Studies will conduct research, co-ordinate curricula development and facilitate postgraduate training, advice and consultancy

as well as technology transfer in the numerous fields of climate studies. This will be achieved by engaging a network of researchers at SU and other universities, institutions and organisations in South Africa and abroad to actively collaborate on climate studies.

One such collaboration is with the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate (GAUC), which includes the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the University of California, Berkeley, and other leading universities across the world. SU is the only African member of GAUC at present. GAUC allows SU to bring the climate agenda to a global platform, and facilitate collaboration through student summits and joint programme offering.

In November, SU will be at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, where we will be promoting the role that leading researchers on the continent play to influence the global agenda and advocate for equality.

Initiatives such as these that focus on scholarship and research provide us with opportunities to create sustainable futures for Africa and find solutions for the continent's unique challenges. We need skilled academics who create knowledge but also ensure that we transfer that knowledge.

In doing this, SU has enabled academics to do research that has an impact on communities across the continent. Climate change is a global priority and by its nature requires interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research. SU's School of Climate Studies will be at the forefront of research that uncovers the impact and effects of climate change on African countries.

If we look beyond the challenges faced across our continent, it allows us to see how scholarship and research unlock opportunities that can address these challenges through finding solutions uniquely relevant to Africa.

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