



Event Report

University of Toronto and Africa: Partnership for Mutual Excellence and Inclusive Impact

The [University of Toronto](#) (U of T) Africa Summit (June 2022) brought together the African diplomatic community, partners, faculty, staff and academic leaders from Africa and the University of Toronto, to discuss next-generation partnerships. This historic gathering served to expand our current understanding of partnership development guided by our shared commitment to addressing global challenges, particularly in Africa. Building on the lessons and contributions of the University of Toronto's engagement with the continent, participants were challenged to envision a new kind of collaboration framework, embedded in the region's visions and priorities, and based on principles of mutuality and inclusive impact.

The diversity of expertise and perspectives brought by participants produced a wide range of ideas that, when put together, offer a robust roadmap that will guide new and ongoing relationships with partners in African countries.

Why Africa and why U of T? Africa will be home to 40% of the world's population by 2100, generate the highest demand for higher education services, contribute to global labour in significant ways and is expected to play an increasing role in addressing global challenges, many of which are due to unequal distribution of resources and the legacy of colonialism and disproportionately affect Africans.¹

The University of Toronto is a major hub for research collaborations, academic initiatives, and capacity building with African universities and partners. U of T is home to hundreds of Africanists and Africa-related researchers and over 1,400 African students. Participants, therefore, recognized that the opportunities to strengthen U of T partnerships with various institutions in Africa can result in mutually beneficial, inclusive, and globally impactful outcomes. They committed to working together to seize these opportunities.

¹ Zeleza, Paul Tiyambe (2022, June 23). Global Higher Education Partnerships and Africa's Future: Principles and Actions for Mutual Success. Summit Presentation. University of Toronto & Africa: Partnership for Mutual Excellence and Inclusive Impact, Toronto, Canada

Thematic Areas of Focus

Participants discussed ways to improve collaboration, support students, and leverage networks in four major areas that are considered priorities for higher education on the continent:

1. Research partnerships
2. Entrepreneurship and innovation
3. Talent development, capacity enhancement, and next-generation networks
4. Co-learning, teaching networks, and next-generation leaders

In particular, participants were asked to identify opportunities for deeper collaboration as well as ways to ensure those collaborations are equitable, co-developed, mutually beneficial, and aligned with priorities identified by those working in Africa.

Research Partnerships

The following priority areas were identified under the research theme:

- **Sustainability and climate change:** The ability of African countries to provide sustainable energy solutions, mitigate the impacts of the global climate crisis, and sustain healthy ecosystems as they adapt to the effects of climate change was clearly highlighted.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Artificial intelligence was seen as a promising tool for the improvement of health care, food systems and education.
- **Joint publications and co-authorship guidelines:** Participants discussed the need for university leaders to examine how university policies, research enterprise, incentive and reward systems can be enhanced to support and encourage international joint publications and research co-creation. They also emphasized the importance of Canadian institutions and researchers acknowledging contributions made by African collaborators in international research projects. The advancement and protection of African knowledge, normally absent in the dominant international discourse, can improve our collective ability to address global challenges.
- **Research capacity building, libraries, and mobility:** Graduate training was seen as imperative to strengthening the African research enterprise and enhancing research partnerships. That training can be enabled through initiatives that facilitate student mobility, alumni and industry engagement, and access to library resources. These efforts will allow Africa-based future leaders to develop competencies that support rapid adaptation to societal changes.
- **Engagement of multilateral organizations:** It was the view of participants that African research ecosystems that generate appropriate levels of engagement among institutions on the continent and connect with continental bodies (e.g., African Union, African Development Bank) and international partners are key to revitalizing and enhancing the performance of the research enterprise.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

The following priority areas were identified under this theme:

- **Entrepreneurship ecosystem:** As centres of knowledge, learning, research and innovation, various universities in Africa and their partners, like the [University of Toronto Entrepreneurship](#), can contribute to the development of a robust entrepreneurship system capable of creating high quality employment, especially for African youth, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Entrepreneurship that serves the needs of African communities will depend on creating a thriving ecosystem that brings together large networks of partners able to address multiple objectives and create impact.
- **Entrepreneurship, social contract and regional innovation:** Approaches to training, supporting, and mentoring young entrepreneurs in Africa not only require intentional engagement with industry, the African diaspora, alumni, governments and community organizations, but also a new social contract among partners that is rooted in equity and inclusion. These principles of partnership are necessary to foster inclusive grassroots entrepreneurship and to build regional innovation hubs that leverage access to partners' international networks.

Talent Development, Capacity Enhancement, and Next Generation Networks

The following priorities were identified under this theme:

- **Collaboration and network development:** Growing high quality talent at scale and building the capacity of African institutions to address continental and global challenges were identified as key priorities. Of great interest to participants is the role that U of T and its partners can play in fostering networks of faculty and students through scholarly collaboration, co-learning, co-teaching, and co-creation of innovations that support mutual capacity building and talent development among future leaders.
- **Experiential learning and intercultural competence:** Provide enhanced opportunities to develop capacity by drawing on lived experiences and interdisciplinary perspectives to address complex societal issues within the continent and across the globe. It was also suggested that an inclusive excellence framework that promotes leadership development is critical.
- **Leveraging digital learning and joint funding opportunities:** The use of new technologies to reduce financial barriers for faculty and student mobility has great potential to accelerate reach and impact. Collaboration on identifying joint funding opportunities and connecting African entrepreneurs to the Canadian diaspora was highlighted by participants.

Co-learning, Teaching Networks, and Next Generation Leaders

The following thematic priorities were identified under this cluster:

- **Global Classrooms:** There was strong support for the development of virtual teaching and learning initiatives as valuable and cost-effective mechanisms for collaboration and co-creation that help to engender global learning and longer-term networks of students as future leaders. At U of T, Global Classrooms connect instructors and their students with peers from different universities through technology, allowing opportunities for co-learning and co-teaching.
- **Institutional systems and policies:** Participants recommended that the proper institutional structures, policies, incentives and guidelines be instituted and supported to ensure that the potential benefits of these initiatives do not become a missed opportunity.
- **Mentorship and sponsorship:** Early career mentorship also received strong support as an area of focus, where U of T and its partners can work together to find or make available resources that help with training and professional development for African colleagues, support faculty and graduate student mobility, identify supportive funding, and facilitate their access to professional associations and networks.

Enablers, Values and Principles of Engagements

Shared values and equitable partnership principles emerged throughout the discussions as intangible and essential guides for shaping engagement between U of T and its African partners that is long-term, deep and sustainable. They constitute the glue that enables realization of the goals of mutual excellence and inclusive impact that were at the heart of the deliberations at the Summit. Here are some enablers to facilitate U of T-Africa partnership opportunities:

- **Leadership:** Providing incentives for reducing barriers for collaboration, while improving existing internal capacity for international engagement.
- **Mutuality:** Identifying shared values that support mutually beneficial partnerships rooted in ubuntu (I am because you are) and inspired by the Harambee spirit of collaboration (Swahili: all pulling together).
- **Talent Creation:** Expanding and providing opportunities for Africa's talent (employability) at a larger scale and based on multidimensional approaches and perspectives.
- **Engagement:** Leveraging larger networks of partners (governments, communities, industry partners, alumni, donors, research agencies, African diaspora, international organizations, etc.) resulting in synergies able to create impact.
- **Funding:** Reimagining and expanding funding sources able to support long-term partnership engagement based on mutuality and inclusivity.

The U of T-Africa partnership will be guided by a shared undertaking to pursue collaborative initiatives that maximize mutual learning and scholarship, which benefit Africa, Canada, and the world, and make an enduring positive impact in Africa. As a group of partners, we will be inspired by the following values and principles:

1. An Africa-centric orientation, whereby we build capacity in Africa, guided by Africans, to benefit Africans.
2. Leveraging and expanding existing networks and partnerships, for the benefit of all partners.
3. Primacy of inclusive impact as an overarching goal, with evidence-based accountability mechanisms, to ensure that the benefits of all elements of the partnership (research, learning, entrepreneurship, innovation, mobility, etc.) extend to the most marginalized and most vulnerable groups in society.
4. Scalability and sustainability of initiatives to ensure broad and enduring impact, as well as long-term viability.
5. Inclusive excellence, whereby African scholarship, teaching, learning, and lived experiences; Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing; and other contributions are recognized, valorized, and incorporated as core elements of programs, projects, and initiatives.
6. Mutuality and equality of voice, whereby considerations of equity, justice, inclusion, and belonging, drive and sustain processes, plans, decision-making, design, and delivery of all elements of the partnership.
7. Specifically, U of T researchers commit, when working in Africa and with African partners, to:
 - A. Align with and aspire to the codes of ethics emerging from existing African Indigenous frameworks as laid out in the [San Code of Research Ethics](#), incorporated in the [Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings](#). These values (respect, honesty, justice, fairness and care) will guide our engagement in and with African partners.
 - B. Acknowledge contributions made by all African collaborators in publications, and ensure joint authorship with collaborators.
 - C. Collaborate on mentoring graduate students from Africa, through joint supervision and joint opportunities to be engaged in scholarship.
 - D. Seek out and recognize local collaborators to make substantive contributions to joint scholarship.

Next Steps

In order to move to concrete action, based on the deliberation at the Summit, U of T and its Africa- and non-Africa-based partners will convene an online forum by early 2023 to:

- Identify areas that may constitute “low-hanging fruits” that can easily be implemented in the immediate term. e.g., regular joint seminars related to African and global challenges and opportunities (climate change, green technologies and economies, AI).
- Explore best practices to guide future collaboration with colleagues in African countries.
- Work together, through joint advocacy, in support of African universities having access to journals and libraries.
- Explore joint advocacy on visas to help facilitate scholarly engagement.
- Develop a list of funding opportunities with African partners and explore joint applications, including liaising with multilateral institutions.
- Implement, amplify, and support principles and values articulated at U of T when collaborating with partners in Africa and elsewhere.
- Establish areas of focus for short- to medium-term collaboration, including:

Research	Entrepreneurship	Talent and Capacity	Co-Learning and Teaching
Joint supervision and publication initiatives	Incubators for students	Student and faculty mobility	Global Classrooms
International Doctoral Clusters	Entrepreneurship exchanges	Student networks	Co-Teaching network
Grant funding collaboration and library collections	Joint student competitions	Leadership development and mentorship	Experiential learning