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## **Knowledge powerhouses urged to join mission to level up global research and restore Africa to its rightful place**

Global institutions are today, Wednesday 5 July 2023, being called on to back a bold, transformative plan for Africa to take its rightful role in research alliances, driving forward social justice, advancing science, and supercharging global scholarship.

The Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations (ACTRC) is an ambitious charter, which is firmly Africa-centred. It is co-created by Africa's major higher education bodies and facilitated by the [Perivoli Africa Research Centre](#) (PARC) at the University of Bristol (UoB) in partnership with the [Institute for Humanities in Africa \(HUMA\)](#) at University of Cape Town (UCT) and the [Albert Luthuli Research Chair](#) at the University of South Africa (UNISA). It aims to redress entrenched power imbalances in global knowledge production. These historic disparities have fuelled a huge gap between universities and scholars in Europe, North America and Australia, and their African counterparts.

More than 400 Vice-Chancellors from universities across the world are invited to embark on this transformative journey at a special event on Wednesday, 5 July 2023, in Namibia where leaders championed excellence in African higher education at a [continental conference](#) hosted by the Association of African Universities.

They, along with representatives from higher education, research funders, publishers, governments, and policy bodies, were asked to [sign up](#) to a set of principles for policy reform and a step change in international cooperation. This new approach is set to rebalance and enrich the science and research ecosystem, which still systemically favours the Global North and disadvantages the Global South, perpetuating western predominance.

Associate Professor Divine Fuh, Director of HUMA at UCT, said: "UCT's Vision2030 emphasises the importance of centring Afrika as a framework for knowledge futures and social justice. The charter offers an opportunity for the global community to take seriously and resolve important critiques and constructive suggestions on how to build a better humanity, through truly equitable research collaborations.

"The charter brings the global epistemological, ontological and human dignity projects together, building on an intersectionality of critiques – decolonial, feminist, indigenous, LGBTQIA+ amongst others – to offer humanity a unique opportunity to place collective

research and a truly communal science at the core of advancing human dignity, world-making and futures creation.

“Launching the charter is just the start of a long and exciting journey towards balancing the global science and research ecosystem. As a global space for convivial and Africa-centred inquiry, HUMA is proud to be associated with and co-leading this world-transforming initiative.”

Despite forming 10% of the world adult population, Central, East, Southern and West Africa contribute a tiny fraction (just 1.6% in 2018) of scientific publications globally. Compounding this underrepresentation, the majority of African research involves collaboration with richer countries. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), between 2017 and 2019 around 88% of scientific work in East and Central Africa, and 85% in Southern Africa, had international partners with the USA, UK, and France being the most common collaborators.

Only five African institutions, four of which are in South Africa, make the top 500 and none outside of South Africa, Egypt, and Tunisia are in the top 1 000. Similarly, very few highly cited scholars are affiliated with African universities and as also shown in the UNESCO Science Report 2021, a disproportionately small number of researchers and scientific publications in the world are African.

#### **Key goals of the charter include:**

- Creating a radically new approach to research collaboration which redresses deep-seated divides in the generation of scientific knowledge.
- Championing this reformed equitable way of working as standard and best practice.
- Introducing an Africa-centred framework, setting out guiding principles and measures of success and accountability.

Over the coming months charter signatories will together co-create and further develop a comprehensive plan to achieve core objectives of the ACTRC.

PARC demonstrates the University of Bristol’s commitment to championing transformation in interdisciplinary research partnerships with Africa, as well as its wider culture of alternative thought and spearheading social justice. By rebalancing the global science and research ecosystem, African scholars, institutions and knowledge will be able to claim their rightful place in international scientific endeavour and status.

Funded by the [Perivoli Foundation](#) since its inception in 2020, PARC has been modelling this ethos through open competitions for African researchers from all fields of study to ensure an Africa-led agenda and a focus on national or regional priorities.

Professor Isabella Aboderin, Perivoli Chair in Africa Research and Partnerships at the UoB, said: “The charter signifies an essential movement, which ultimately aims to rebalance the entire global research ecosystem. The end goal is unashamedly ambitious, but the initiative recognises Global North-Africa research collaborations as a vital and viable entry point to help achieve this comprehensive shift.

“Our call to action is timely, as there is growing understanding across the world that this is not only crucial for social justice, but also for fostering the enhanced scholarship and science the world so urgently needs to address the many crises and challenges we face collectively.

“The scale of our journey will be all-encompassing and at times complex, changing mindsets, shared norms, resourcing, and policies. But the core ethos is simple and clear: the Global North must cede influence and space so Africa can take the wheel.”

Professor Agnes Nairn, Pro Vice-Chancellor: Global Engagement at the UoB, said: “We will tackle pressing global challenges including climate change, pandemics and poverty more effectively if Africa takes a more prominent role in global transdisciplinary research. We are proud to be associated with this Africa-centred charter that will make global scientific knowledge production not only more just but also so much more powerful.”

Professor Puleng LenkaBula, Principal and Vice Chancellor of UNISA, said: “This charter effectively creates a platform for Africa and her people to redefine, redraw and reframe collaborations to reflect the spirit of mutual respect, shared vision, and shared aspirations of participants: a true reflection of Africanism finding global expression.

“This is a radical charter and moment in history where a broad range of African people get to have agency to determine their own futures at all levels. In this way, Africa’s agency will be fully recognized, reinforced, and protected for achieving the envisioned Afrofutures.”

- [Watch a short explainer video about the charter.](#)

### **Notes to editors**

Interviews and advance copies of the draft charter are available on request. Images of the event held on 5 July 2023 will also be made available.

***Ends***

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