

Rethinking global research: The Africa Charter on Transformative Research Collaborations



The [Africa Charter on Transformative Research Collaborations](#), launched in **July 2023** in Namibia, represents a significant milestone in redefining research partnerships involving African institutions. This initiative was co-created by major African higher education and scientific bodies, including the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), the Inter-

University Council for Eastern Africa (IUCEA), the Association of West African Universities (AWAU), the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and the International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA). The Charter was facilitated by the Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC) at the University of Bristol, in collaboration with the University of South Africa's Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair and the University of Cape Town's Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA).

Context and Rationale

Historically, research collaborations between African and global institutions have been characterized by **power imbalances** at various levels (epistemologies, language, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the “development” mindset and gaze, resources, capabilities and practical collaboration arrangements). These disparities have often marginalized African scholars and institutions, limiting their contributions to the global production of scientific knowledge ecosystem. The Africa Charter seeks to address these challenges by promoting equitable and transformative research partnerships that recognize and elevate Africa's role in scientific knowledge production and innovation.

Core Principles and Aspirations

The Charter outlines ten guiding principles designed to reshape research collaborations:

1. **Equity and Mutual Benefit:** Ensuring that all partners have equal standing and derive shared advantages from collaborative efforts.
2. **Respect for African Intellectual Traditions:** Valuing and integrating indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies.
3. **Capacity Strengthening:** Building and enhancing the research capabilities of African institutions and scholars.
4. **Sustainability:** Fostering long-term partnerships that endure beyond individual projects.

5. **Transparency and Accountability:** Maintaining open communication and responsibility among all stakeholders.
6. **Ethical Research Practices:** Upholding the highest standards of ethics in all collaborative activities.
7. **Inclusivity:** Ensuring diverse representation and participation in research.
8. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Allowing collaborations to evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.
9. **Shared Governance:** Distributing decision-making powers equitably among partners.
10. **Commitment to African Development:** Aligning research objectives with the continent's developmental priorities.

In addition to these principles, the Charter sets forth six aspirations aimed at influencing policy and institutional frameworks:

- **Policy Reform:** Advocating for changes at institutional and governmental levels to support equitable research practices.
- **Funding Realignment:** Encouraging funding bodies to prioritize and support collaborative projects that adhere to the Charter's principles.
- **Research Assessment Transformation:** Redefining metrics of success to value contributions from all partners equally.
- **Science Governance Enhancement:** Promoting inclusive governance structures that reflect the diversity of stakeholders.
- **Educational Curriculum Integration:** Incorporating the principles of equitable collaboration into academic programs.
- **Global Advocacy:** Championing the Charter's ideals in international forums to foster widespread adoption.

Significance for the Global Research Community and Catholic Universities in particular:

The Africa Charter is pivotal in challenging and **transforming the traditional paradigm** underlying global research collaborations by addressing systemic power imbalances. Catholic universities, guided by values such as solidarity, equality and social justice are uniquely positioned to **integrate the Charter's principles** into their research frameworks and to **raise awareness** of the need to collaborate with African partner institutions in a respectful and fair manner.



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