While Africa is at the epicenter of the development challenges facing the world today, African academics exist largely on the periphery of academic research and publishing. While the majority of development challenges exist in developing countries, the vast majority of published research on development and development policies is conducted by researchers from the developed world. A recent study of articles published in top 20 development journals from 1990 to 2019 revealed that fewer than one in six (16%) articles were by Southern researchers, while close to three-quarters (73%) were by Northern researchers.\(^1\) Even articles with an explicit focus on a developing country or region (which represented 61% of all articles published) showed significant authorship bias, with a substantial majority (62%) being written by Northern researchers.\(^2\) There have been similar disparities in presentations at major global development conferences, where developing country researchers have been greatly underrepresented, with developing country universities reaching a mean of just 9% from 2010 to 2019, compared to 57% from universities in developed countries.\(^3\)

The disparity is even more stark with respect to African academics, who have been chronically underrepresented in development-related fields of study, even in Africa-focused articles.

For example, a study of leading economics journals found that, of the journal articles published on Africa during the period 2005–2015, only 25 percent had at least one African-based author. With respect to medical literature, multiple studies have shown Africans to be underrepresented. African health and medical journals are poorly represented in international indexing services and the continent’s research sector produces less than 1% of the world’s health research each year, raising concerns regarding the limited production, distribution, and availability of African health information.\(^4\) This was particularly evident in the representation of African authors in Africa-focused COVID-19 literature, as a large majority (66.1%) of authors of Africa-focused COVID-19 papers were not from Africa.\(^5\) Similar patterns have been found in journals focused on politics,

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\(^1\) Verónica Amarante, Ronelle Burger, Grieve Chelwa, John Cockburn, Ana Kassouf, Andrew McKay & Julieta Zurbrigg (2022) Underrepresentation of developing country researchers in development research, Applied Economics Letters, 29:17, 1659-1664 (Note: The remaining 11% were collaborations by Southern and Northern researchers)

\(^2\) Amarante, et al. (2022)


\(^4\)Naidoo AV, Hodkinson P, Lai King L, Wallis LA. African authorship on African papers during the COVID-19 pandemic. BMJ Glob Health. 2021 Mar 6; Africa generates less than 1% of the world’s research; data analytics can change that -- An in-depth analysis of the continent’s research reveals promising developments -- and strategies for continued improvement By Charon Duermeijer, PhD, Mohamed Amir, and Lucia Schoombee March 22, 2018 (https://www.elsevier.com/connect/africa-generates-less-than-1-of-the-worlds-research-data-analytics-can-change-that)

society and international relations as they relate to the African continent, as well as in Africa-focused public health research.

The underrepresentation of African academics in scholarship regarding development issues prevalent in Africa inhibits the plurality and richness of those dialogues while also promoting a harmful imbalance wherein non-African (primarily western) researchers have outsized influence in fields of research where African researchers have the advantage of first-hand knowledge. The absence of African scholarship from development publications means that African perspectives are largely absent from the scholarship that ultimately helps to shape global, regional and national development policies related to the continent.

This imbalance has direct and severe implications for development research and analysis, as well as for policy formulation and outcomes. Growing evidence indicates that intimate knowledge of and ongoing presence in a country are likely to provide vital insights into the framing of research questions, the formulation/application of methodologies, and the interpretation of research results. As a result of this underrepresentation, the dominant methodological tools and policy frameworks may not truly be appropriate for understanding and addressing the complex challenges facing the continent, resulting in policies that may be ill-fitted to the African context, and leading to poor development outcomes and the perpetuation of the very challenges they hope to address. In addition, given the trade-offs inherent to research, the imbalance may also result in a confluence of research on questions that tend to reflect western interests and priorities for the continent, often at the expense of other, equally important matters. Such pitfalls can be avoided only by extending the circle of consensus to include more voices from the continent.

**United Nations Academic Conference on Africa**

In an effort to strengthen African representation in global development scholarship and ensure that African voices are heard in the debates that help to shape the continent’s future, the Office of the Special Adviser will launch an annual academic conference and journal, with the aim of providing platforms for African scholarship that address the wide-ranging scope of Africa’s development, with particular emphasis on the quadruple nexus of development, peace, humanitarian work and human rights.

The academic conference will provide a platform for selected authors to present their research and analysis on issues related to development, peace, humanitarian action, and human rights in Africa. The conference will bring together African scholars, policymakers, and practitioners from different sectors and disciplines, and will feature keynote speeches from leading experts as well as panel discussions on the most pressing issues facing African communities. Selected authors will be invited to present their research and participate in these panel discussions, providing an opportunity for them to share their findings and insights with a wider audience.

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Distinguishing Characteristics

• **A Nuanced Perspective on Global Issues:**
  o The conference offers a distinctive lens through which to view the most pressing global issues. By showcasing the work of African scholars, the conference aims to enrich global discourse by bringing their unique and nuanced views to the forefront, underscoring the importance of diverse perspectives in addressing complex global challenges.

• **Building Bridges:**
  o The conference aims to go beyond merely providing a shared platform for engagement, with a focus on building robust bridges of meaningful communication that foster shared understanding between African academics, policymakers, and development actors, bridging the gap between theory and practice in support of more impactful policies.
  
  o The conference will introduce a distinctive approach to the traditional academic conference format, by reimagining the role of academics as change agents and actively engaging policy makers and development actors throughout the conference process. From the initial selection of papers to the conference discussions and eventual preparation/publication of final papers, policymakers and development practitioners will be integral participants. This approach facilitates a dynamic exchange of knowledge and expertise between academia and the policy realm, fostering greater collaboration, the co-creation of solutions, and strengthened alignment between academic research on Africa and real-world policy and programmatic decision-making.

• **Multi-disciplinary Approach – Enriching Insights from Diverse Disciplines:**
  o The conference will take a multi-disciplinary approach that extends beyond the confines of typical social science fields, recognizing that addressing complex challenges requires insights from a diverse spectrum of academic disciplines, including humanities, natural sciences, and more. Featuring participants from a wide range of academic backgrounds, including anthropology, history, cultural studies, and other humanities disciplines, allows for richer discussions and greater nuance in our understanding of pressing issues.

Format

The conference process will be started with a call for abstracts. Selected authors would be invited to present short-version papers at the conference, with the aim of expanding those papers for publication following the discussions at the conference and an extensive peer-review and policy-review process.

The conference itself will be held in hybrid format, with in-person participation by featured speakers and audience at the UN Headquarters in NY, as well as audience members connected via Zoom. The main thematic sessions will be held in the mornings to allow full participation from audience in Africa.

The *morning thematic sessions* (9:00am – 12:00pm) will generally feature a keynote speaker and the presentation of 2 to 3 papers for discussion. Following each paper presentation will be responses by discussants representing academia, as well as the UN system and/or government (depending upon the approach of the paper). This will be followed by interactive discussions with featured speakers and the audience having an opportunity to exchange views on the issues under discussion.
In order to capitalize on the presence of distinguished and well-regarded African scholars in New York, the agenda will also include *additional activities* (typically between 3:00pm – 6:00pm) crafted with the intention of creating a bridge and facilitating meaningful engagement between African scholars and key decision-making bodies.

**Targeted Participants**
- African Academics (on the continent and transnational)
- Member States (African and Development Partners)
- UN System
- Students / Youth

**Outcomes**
- Conference Summary / Report
- Academic Journal – expanded / finalized papers to be featured in a 2024 academic journal publication

**Key Partners / Collaborators**
- UN Academic Impact
Conference Papers: Process & Timeline

**Step 1: Call for Abstracts (2 – 18 October 2023)**

Launch the call for abstracts, inviting scholars to submit concise abstracts of their proposed papers. Promote the call through academic networks, relevant institutions, and the conference’s website. Abstracts should include key research questions, objectives, and expected contributions.


A diverse review panel comprising academics, practitioners, and subject matter experts evaluates the submitted abstracts based on their relevance, originality, and potential contribution to the conference themes. Authors of accepted abstracts are notified and invited to present short papers at the conference.

**Step 3: Expansion of Abstracts into Short Papers (25 October – 22 November 2023)**

Authors work on expanding their abstracts into short papers, adhering to the suggested length (approximately 2,000-3,000 words). Short papers should outline the scope of the paper and include methodology, key arguments, literature reviews, and initial findings, offering a clear picture of the larger paper’s direction and meaningful content for conference discussions.

**Step 4: Presentation at the Conference (5-7 December 2023)**

Authors present their short papers at the conference, where they receive feedback and engage in discussions with a diverse range of interlocutors, including academics from various disciplines, UN system representatives, and government officials. Feedback received during presentations will help authors refine their full papers.

**Step 5: Expansion into Longer Articles (December 2023 - March 2024)**

Following the conference, authors expand their short papers into full-length articles for publication. Articles should undergo a significant expansion, providing in-depth analysis, methodology, and comprehensive findings.

**Step 7: Review Process: Peer Review and "Practitioner Review" (April - June 2024)**

Dual-Track Review Process:

**Stage 1 - Peer Review**: Articles are subjected to a traditional peer review process by experts in the field to assess academic rigor and quality.

**Stage 2: Practitioner Review**: Articles are also reviewed by practitioners, including UN system representatives and policymakers. Practitioner reviewers provide:

- *Content Suggestions*: Feedback on the article’s content, structure, and messaging to ensure its relevance and clarity for practitioners.
- *Practical Applications*: Recommendations on practical applications of the research findings, including policy implications, programmatic insights, and potential interventions.
- **Dissemination Strategies**: Suggestions on channels and entry points for sharing the article’s insights, such as relevant target audiences, multilateral and regional entities, intergovernmental processes, etc.

**Step 8: Creation of “Snapshots” (July 2024)**

Authors collaborate with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) team to create concise 1-2 page “snapshots” for each article, highlighting key points, data, and actionable recommendations in a visually appealing and easily digestible format. These snapshots will accompany the articles and serve as an additional resource to engage policymakers and decision-makers with the substance of the articles, promoting evidence-based policy and practice.

This additional step ensures that the research findings are not only rigorously reviewed but also effectively communicated to policy and decision-makers, enhancing the impact of the conference’s academic contributions on real-world policymaking and programme development.

**Step 9: Publication (August - September 2024)**

Finalized articles are published in a journal publication, benefiting from input received during both stages of the review process.