

# ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

LAUNCHING OF THE DATAD ONLINE DATABASE  
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## ADDRESS

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### **THE AAU**

The Association of African Universities (AAU), with headquarters in Accra, Ghana, is an international non-governmental membership organization set up by the universities of Africa to promote cooperation among themselves and between them and the international academic community, in the service of African development. It was established in November 1967 at a founding conference in Rabat, Morocco, attended by representatives of 34 universities. This followed earlier consultations among executive heads of African universities at a UNESCO Conference on "Higher Education in Africa", held in Antananarivo, Madagascar, in 1962 and at a Conference of Heads of African Universities in 1963 in Khartoum, Sudan.

To put this in context, it should be noted that this was the period of the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (1963), when the spirit of pan-Africanism pervaded everything, when Africans and African institutions saw continental collaboration as a political, cultural and economic imperative. Thus, the Association of African Universities was the academic analogue of the OAU. As it celebrates its 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I am pleased to say that the Association remains as true to that vision now as it did in the beginning. Today, membership stands at 171 institutions (including private universities and non-university institutions) drawn from 43 African countries spread throughout all the sub-regions of the continent, and embracing all the major linguistic groupings as well as educational traditions. The official languages are Arabic, English and French.

As the apex continental body promoting cooperation and coordination among African universities, the Association of African Universities serves its members and African higher education generally by providing resources and running programmes that build on the synergy of collective action by its members. The programmes involve research and training; the collection, classification and dissemination of information on higher education and research in Africa; and advocacy and support for the programmes of member institutions. These are more fully set out at the Association's Website: <http://www.aau.org/>.

### **THE DATAD PROJECT**

The project for the development, management and dissemination of a *Database of African Theses and Dissertations* (DATAD) is an AAU initiative aimed at exposing the research output of higher education institutions in Africa to the wider research community. One of the ironies of the African research condition is that, although graduate theses and dissertations completed in African universities contain a wealth of empirical data and important insights, of great value to local and international development, they are rarely indexed in the major databases, nor do they feature much in the international literature. Not surprisingly, the body of research they represent has received little recognition at home or abroad. In other parts of

the world, by contrast, graduate theses and dissertations are well preserved and indexed, and scholars and students worldwide have relatively easy access to them in print or digital form. Efforts made to provide a globally accessible, well-documented source of information on African theses and dissertations have yielded little result in the past. But, thanks to the digital and communication revolution the AAU has, through the DATAD project, begun to come to terms with this problem.

The DATAD project was initiated at a planning meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 1998, to consider measures for contributing to the creation of capacity in African universities for the collection, management and electronic dissemination of theses and dissertations. Participants at this meeting proposed a study to test the feasibility of the idea, and acknowledged the centrality of the AAU in coordinating and providing leadership to the proposed project.

The Report of the Feasibility Study was approved by the Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents (COREVIP) of Africa in 1999, after which a three-year pilot phase, involving eleven institutions, was started in February 2000. This phase has now come to an end.

Apart from its broad objective, which is to provide information on African theses and dissertations, DATAD aims specifically at:

- \* contributing to the creation of an environment conducive to research and publication in Africa;
- \* creating capacity in African universities for the collection, management and dissemination of theses and dissertations electronically;
- \* providing visibility and improved access to the work of African scholars, both within and outside of the continent;
- \* facilitating the development of copyright procedures and regulations for the protection of the intellectual property rights of African university graduates and researchers; and
- \* providing support for other AAU programs.

As a capacity building initiative, DATAD supports participating institutions through training, infrastructure supply and orientation towards retrospective indexing of existing collections. Participating institutions, for their part, are expected to maintain annual updates as part of their institutional contribution.

The AAU oversees and coordinates the DATAD process, providing leadership by setting institutional, management, and capacity-building standards, as well as quality controls.

With the launch of the full DATAD project, issues to be addressed will include those of scale, sustainability, access, preservation and intellectual property management.

Today, thirty-five years after the establishment of the AAU; five years after the Dakar “Declaration and Action Plan on Higher Education in Africa”; two years after the “World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, the transformation of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union, and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the AAU is happy to mark the conclusion of the pilot phase, and to launch DATAD, its on-line *Database of African Theses and Dissertations*.