

**Communiqué of the 16th General Conference of the Association of African Universities**  
**(AAU)**

**Date:** 21st – 25th July 2025, Rabat, Morocco

**Venue:** University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (UM6P)

The Association of African Universities (AAU) held its **16th Quadrennial General Conference** from **July 21st to 25th, 2025**, bringing together close to **500 delegates**—, including university vice-chancellors, researchers, policymakers, industry players, and development partners—to chart the **future of African higher education**.

Themed “**Shaping the Future of Higher Education for Innovation and Sustainable Development in Africa**,” the conference was co-hosted by the **University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (UM6P)**. Across **12 plenary sessions, stakeholder dialogues and parallel sessions**, participants tackled the continent’s most pressing higher education challenges and opportunities, such as demographic boom, research sovereignty, AI adoption, quality assurance, and the inclusion of marginalized youth in higher education.

**A New Vision for African Higher Education**

The conference opened with a resounding call for **universities to serve as “living laboratories”** that not only educate but also **drive innovation, generate evidence for policy, and address Africa’s social and economic challenges**.

Prof. Hicham El Habti, President of UM6P, reminded participants that:

*“African universities must transcend traditional roles, becoming engines of knowledge and innovation to drive the real-world change it seeks”. He emphasized that “Collaboration and resilience are no longer optional—they are our lifelines”.*

The **continent’s demographic boom—projected at 2.5 billion by 2050, predominantly youth—was framed as both a challenge and a transformative opportunity**. Prof. Olusola Oyewole, AAU Secretary-General, emphasized:

*“With the right partnerships, investments, and focus on skills, Africa’s universities can transform this youth dividend into the cornerstone of our socio-economic future.”*

## **Day One: Setting the Agenda for Transformation**

The opening plenary underscored:

- The **urgency of regional collaboration** to pool resources and expertise.
- The **need for curricula reform and investment in research capacity**, as Africa currently produces only **1% of global scientific output**.
- The **African Union’s unveiling of the Continental Education Strategy (CESA 2026–2035) and the TVET Strategy (2025–2034)**, urging HEIs to **adopt these frameworks, submit data to UNESCO, and support the ratification of the Addis and Global Conventions**.

UNESCO’s Dr. Borhene Chakroun called for **universities to be independent, international, interdisciplinary, and innovative** as the foundation for Africa’s sustainable growth.

The keynote address by **Mr Azzeddine El Midaoui, Morocco’s Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation** underscored the fact that higher education, scientific research, and innovation serve as pivotal forces in fostering skills development, advancing knowledge production, and strengthening academic collaboration across Africa. By enhancing university cooperation—spanning human, intellectual, and scientific dimensions—higher education can accelerate regional integration and cultivate a cohesive, complementary African higher education ecosystem. This collaborative framework is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring inclusive, forward-looking progress for the continent.

## **Day Two: Digital Futures and Research Sovereignty**

### ***Harnessing AI and Creativity in Education***

Sessions on **Generative AI** revealed that **87% of African students already use AI tools**, yet faculty readiness and equitable access remain gaps. Delegates resolved to:

- Develop **ethical AI policies**,
- Expand **micro-credentials**, and
- Train both students and educators to leverage AI as a tool for **creativity, equity, and employability**.

### ***Reclaiming African Scholarship***

Diamond Open Access (DOA) and the **African Platform for Open Scholarship (APOS)** were endorsed as game-changers for **reducing prohibitive publishing fees, elevating African research visibility, and supporting indigenous languages.**

Dr. Reggie Raju of the University of Cape Town, South Africa noted:

*“Without reclaiming our scholarship, Africa risks perpetual dependency on systems that exclude our voices and diminish our global impact.”*

### **Day Three: Building Stronger Systems and Youth Pathways**

#### ***Quality Assurance and Research Management***

The **HAQAA Initiative** and **CAMES** showcased progress in **harmonizing continental Quality Assurance standards** and developing **regional education databases.**

The **Science for Africa Foundation** introduced the **Good Research Management Practice (GRMP) Standard** and the concept of a **“third profession”** to professionalize research managers as a career track.

#### ***Youth Empowerment and Inclusion***

The **Mastercard Foundation Fireside Chat** highlighted that only **1% of persons with disabilities and 3% of displaced youth** are enrolled in African HEIs.

Dr. Yeukai Mlambo stressed:

*“Innovation cannot happen without inclusion. By intentionally engaging women, refugees, and persons with disabilities, we unlock Africa’s true potential.”*

Institutions like UM6P demonstrated **entrepreneurship ecosystems**, integrating **labs, venture capital arms, and digital farming schools** to nurture innovators.

### **Day Four: Scaling Impact through Successful Regional Models**

The **Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE)** session celebrated **10 years of impact:**

- **83% master’s and 87% PhD graduate employment rates,**
- **Over 10,000 publications, patents, and strong industry linkages.**

The program will **prioritize depth over breadth** by consolidating existing centers as “lighthouses” for **postgraduate education and innovation**, while mentoring other institutions through regional consortia.

### **Resolutions and Commitments**

The Conference unanimously agreed to:

1. **Strengthen Pan-African Collaboration** – establish shared infrastructures, enable cross-border mobility, and foster inter-university research networks.
2. **Advance Inclusive Higher Education** – achieve **15% enrolment of women, refugees, and persons with disabilities by 2030**.
3. **Reclaim Knowledge Sovereignty** – scale **Diamond Open Access (DOA) and African Platform for Open Scholarship (APS)** to at least 20 institutions by 2026.
4. **Embed Digital and AI Literacy** – make AI, creative, and critical thinking core skills for students and staff.
5. **Enhance Quality and Research Systems** – adopt the **Good Research Management Practice (GRMP) Standard**, harmonize QA systems via **HAQAA**, and professionalize research management.
6. **Empower Youth Innovation** – expand **incubators, venture funding, and experiential learning** across HEIs.
7. **Institutionalize and Scale ACE Centers** – fully integrate ACE into national systems, sustain funding, and leverage them as regional mentors.

### **The Road Ahead**

AAU, in collaboration with the **African Union, UNESCO, Mastercard Foundation, and development partners**, will:

- **Establish a monitoring task force** to track adoption of these resolutions,
- Support HEIs to **align with CESA and TVET strategies**,

- Host a **Pan-African Open Science & AI Summit in 2026** to showcase advancements.

Prof. Oyewole concluded:

*“This Conference is a call to action: to invest boldly, collaborate intentionally, and transform Africa’s universities into engines of innovation, equity, and resilience. The future of our youth—and our continent—depends on it.”*

**Prepared by:**

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