



## Global Africa Group: Strategy 2020 – 2023

*Challenging established orthodoxies through equitable research partnership approaches in support of Africa's sustainable development priorities*

### Introduction

The Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) is a global network driving international research collaboration and developing research talent. WUN's membership spans 24 universities from 17 countries on 6 continents. The Network fosters over 80 active research programs at any time, engages over 2,000 researchers and students, and works with government, international agencies and industry. WUN brings together major universities that sit in widely diverse geographical and cultural contexts, and which in partnership provide an unparalleled richness of capacities that are brought to bear on major research questions.

In 2015 the WUN formed the **Global Africa Group** to enhance opportunities -- enabled by the global network of partners -- to build research collaborations, innovations and impact in support of Africa's sustainable development challenges. Utilising the expertise and international partnerships amongst the WUN members in and outside of the continent, the Global Africa Group's ambition is to contribute to the identification of sustainable and equitable solutions to critical local, regional and global challenges of relevance to Africa. Focal research areas identified by the Group to this end are: (i) environmental change and food security; (ii) public health; (iii) governance, inequality and social inclusion; (iv) higher education and knowledge exchange; and (v) natural resources.

The Global Africa Group's initial work around these areas, 2016-2018, included a number of strategic research workshops, public engagement and a collaborative book project on Africa and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The success of these initiatives was driven, among others, by the centrality given to critical thinking as well as collaboration and governance principles in the group's efforts. Building on these beginnings, the Global Africa Group now seeks to foreground and address a challenge that is foundational for its endeavour going forward:

To challenge, explicitly, the historically rooted inequities and existing orthodoxies<sup>1</sup> in the global field of knowledge production and specifically,

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<sup>1</sup> Ampofo-Adomako, A. (2019) *Mε san aba: The Africa We Want and an African-centered Approach to Knowledge Production. Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World: Towards the Futures We Want (Sage Studies in International Sociology)*, edited by Markus Schulz;

in research cooperation with Africa; and to develop alternative epistemologies and methodologies for productive collaborations.

Entrenched power imbalances between and among African institutions and actors and those outside of the continent arise on several levels: in the financial control and management of projects, in the determination of agendas, priorities and locations for inquiry, in the epistemological and methodological approaches embraced, in the interpretation and use of findings, and in research dissemination.

These asymmetries impact Africa's sustainable development prospects, especially as they have imposed limitations on African constituencies and capabilities, have undermined the relevance and use of evidence in the continent's pursuit of its own aspirations and, ultimately, have diminished the global scientific endeavour itself.

It is imperative, therefore, that new approaches for Africa research partnerships are cultivated, which overcome the entrenched imbalances and engender action and change.

### **Strategy 2020-2023**

In the period 2020-2023 the Global Africa Group will prioritise joint engagement and scholarship to develop such alternative models.

#### ***Aims***

In collaboration with relevant partners -- scholars and institutions in and outside of the continent -- the Global Africa Group will bring together, and build on, existing thinking and debate within and beyond academia on knowledge production and research for sustainable development to:

- Determine the nature, manifestations and implications of power imbalances in research cooperation and collaboration with African institutions and actors
- Establish principles and practice approaches to redress these imbalances
- Pilot and promote the application of such alternative approaches in concrete research projects developed by the Global Africa Group
- Support learning on, and a progressive refinement of, the new approaches

In so doing, the Global Africa Group's goal is to define and advance a new standard for collaborative research and cooperation between institutions in and beyond the African continent. The Group envisions that a wide embrace and adoption of this standard among GAG and WUN members will lead to the generation of knowledge and innovation and the nurturing of capacities that are

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Chasi, S. (2019) *North-South partnerships in public higher education: a selected South African case study*. DPhil. University of the Witwatersrand. See also articles in the following two journals: *Journal of African Cultural Studies* and *East Africa Literary and Cultural Journal*.

necessary to drive the sustainable social and economic transformation that is needed in Africa and globally.

### ***Positioning***

The Global Africa Group -- comprising African and non-African research institutions with a common platform for, and a commitment to working together -- is particularly well positioned to accomplish this goal. We bring to the table our respective perspectives and interests and will be able to jointly interrogate the priority questions critically, yet respectfully toward acknowledging and resolving tensions constructively. Finally, we can put into practice and 'model' the new approaches we develop in the research projects we design together and with other WUN members.

### ***Approach***

The group will pursue its aims through the following activities:

- A series of dedicated lectures, seminars, and workshops, bringing together Global Africa Group members and key thought leaders to jointly:
  - consider existing knowledge on, and further examine the nature and implications of entrenched power and epistemic imbalances in development-focused Africa research collaboration
  - establish principles and practice approaches to redress them.
- Commissioned desk-based or small-scale empirical background analyses or reviews to support the workshop deliberations
- Production and dissemination of a set of outputs that distil findings in appropriate formats – an academic publication, a formal charter or 'call to action' and 'how to' guidance for research practice – to be used by GAG members, the WUN broadly, and academic and civil society sectors globally in shaping future Africa research collaboration
- Development of proposals, and seeking of potential funding support, for pilot research projects by GAG members, which explicitly apply and seek to foster learning on the new approaches
- Promotion of greater engagement between African and non-African GAG members, as well as with African institutions and actors outside of the WUN in pursuit of the above