



**THE SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS  
CENTER FOR  
AFRICA**

**CONFERENCE**

**MOBILIZING AFRICAN  
INTELLECTUALS TOWARDS QUALITY  
TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre

5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017

The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGC/A) hosted the conference titled: *Mobilizing African Intellectuals Towards Quality Tertiary Education* at the Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre, Kigali on 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017. As a platform for intellectuals' engagement, the two-day conference brings together over 300 intellectuals and scholars from all over the continent and the diaspora, in an effort to convene major stakeholders for essential discussions on the major themes relevant to SDG implementation in tertiary education and research throughout Africa. The participants include Heads of State, government ministries in charge of education, university leadership including Vice Chancellors and Rectors of public and private universities and Heads of Academic Affairs, and other representatives of African academic networks, councils and research centers. The primary objective of the conference is to create a coalition of African intellectuals who will brainstorm and hold principal discussions on practical actions, explore solutions and build consensual approaches on the major themes relevant to SDG implementation in tertiary education and research throughout Africa.

Over the years, African policy makers have been aware of the pressing need to reform the education sector. For Africa to compete on the global stage, as well as for its countries to meet the SDGs and African Union's Agenda 2063, the quality of higher education across the continent is in urgent need of improvement. Given that Africa is home to 16% of the earth's population – 1.2 billion – it is surprising to note that none of the many African institutions of tertiary education are atop the podium of recent international university rankings.

It is evident that no African institution of tertiary education appears in the top 100 podiums of recent international university rankings. Only 10 of the world's top 1000 universities are in Africa – 8 of which are located in a single country, South Africa. It is critical for the African continent to strengthen the quality of its higher education in order to compete on the global stage, as well as to meet the SDGs and African Union Agenda 2063 (AU2063).

Despite the differences in the outcome, African countries in general have obtained results - quantity wise - towards the attainment of MDG2 - "Achieve universal primary education". There is an urgent need to capitalize on those results and accommodate the cohorts of young people who have successfully completed their primary and secondary cycles across the continent. The current projections urge us to do so.

The SDGC/A firmly believes that education is the most vital input for every dimension of sustainable development: it should not only be considered as a public value but also as a fundamental human right. In light of these considerations, the SDGCA decided to convene major stakeholders for discussions during the conference with the theme *Mobilizing African Intellectuals Towards Quality Tertiary Education*.

The conference featured the keynote address from **His Excellency Paul Kagame** (President of the Republic of Rwanda and Founding Chair of the SDGC/A Board); and opening addresses from **Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs** (Director, Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Earth Institute); **Dr. Abdalla Hamdok** (Executive Secretary (a.i), United Nations Economic Commission

for Africa (ECA) as well as other prominent speakers. During the introductory remarks, Dr. Belay Begashaw, Director General of the SDGC/A indicates that the Center “which has a Pan-African mandate to support sustainable development, particularly the acceleration of the implementation of both the SDG 2030 and AU 2063 Agendas; has made it one of its priorities to emphasize to stakeholders that education and knowledge are indispensable ingredients in forging positive change in any society. Given the impact that higher education has on the efficiency and quality of secondary and primary education, the Center has identified quality in higher education as a starting point.”

Under the patronage of His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda and Founding Chair of the SDGC/A Board, Mr. Aliko Dangote, Owner of Dangote Group and Co-Chair of the SDGC/A Board, as well as the Heads of State and other members of the SDGC/A Board, the *Mobilizing African Intellectuals Towards Quality Tertiary Education* conference will be a principal platform for examining tertiary education as a “game changing” lever for African societies to meet the SDGs and beyond.

“The world is forging ahead into a knowledge-based society, and the disparity in the quality of education between developed countries and Africa has the potential to turn into disaster! This has already manifested itself by significant differences between the knowledge possessed by graduates of the high quality and low quality education systems ends of the world, and if this trend continues many African graduates won’t be able to compete with their counterparts from other parts of the world. This is simply unacceptable!” states the Dr. Begashaw.

The two-day workshop is thought as a platform of engagement for the field actors who are exposed to Africa’s higher education bottlenecks in their daily professional life. The SDGC/A foresees that the fruitful interaction among intellectuals can accelerate conclusive realizations on the ground, trigger emulation for implementation, and share successful practices among tertiary education establishments.

Dr. Begashaw highlights the important of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as “fortunately, the SDG agenda recognizes higher education as a priority in the education goal (SDG #4), but more importantly all SDGs are interconnected and comprehensive.” It is evident that universities are uniquely positioned as multidisciplinary knowledge centers that can diagnose complex and multi-dimensional challenges of sustainable development; understand interactions among multiple goals and, identify the most suitable development pathways.

Before concluding, Dr. Begashaw indicated the specific outcomes that the SDGC/A hopes to accomplish over the upcoming days:

1. To initiate a short-term project proposal that will be piloted for interested African Universities;
2. To encourage African universities to join existing global university networks;
3. To convey a platform for key tertiary education;

4. To foster the engagement of African intellectuals into continental and global agendas in partnership with African policy makers;
5. To agree on mechanisms to closely monitor the conference follow up.

The dynamics and the format of this two-day event conference are designed in such way that, after framing the need for immediate action to upgrade tertiary education quality in the continent, the participants will be divided into four different Thematic Sessions: Session 1: The Enabling Environment in Education - Excellence in Teaching and Learning; Session 2: Research - Scope and Scholarly Reputation; Session 3: Building Reputable University Systems in Africa ; Session 4: Knowledge for Development – Transforming Societies.

Within each session, relevant stakeholders such as academics, intellectuals and policy makers will hold a fervent discussion in order to properly frame the challenges, learn from similar successful experiences in comparable environments and devise potential solutions to tackle the problem in an effective manner.

The next day, in The Finding of the Thematic Sessions, the Chairs of each session will present the discussions' outcome, highlighting problems, best practices and debated solutions. This will be open to further questions and suggestions.

After this, the Chairs of each session will deliberate with the panelists of The Way Forward Session, mainly Vice Chancellors representing all the regions of the continent, on how to make the previously reached solutions into **operational actions that will lead the way forward to position 25 African universities in the top 300 global university ranking by 2030**. This will help identify concrete solutions to be tested by interested Universities across Africa, with the support of governments and key financing international institutions.

For more information on the SDGC/A Conference contact: [info@sdgcafrica.org](mailto:info@sdgcafrica.org)

Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for more updates. Use the #MAIConference and share this event with your followers.