



# Partnerships for the goals

SDG 17: Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

*Image by National Air Traffic Services.*

# Why global partnerships matter

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are wide-ranging and focus on the world's most intractable problems. The United Nations (UN) recognises that the goals cannot be met by people working in silos, and have included 'partnerships' as the 17<sup>th</sup> goal. One of the specific targets is to "Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms." **Danie Visser assesses what should be done to achieve this.**

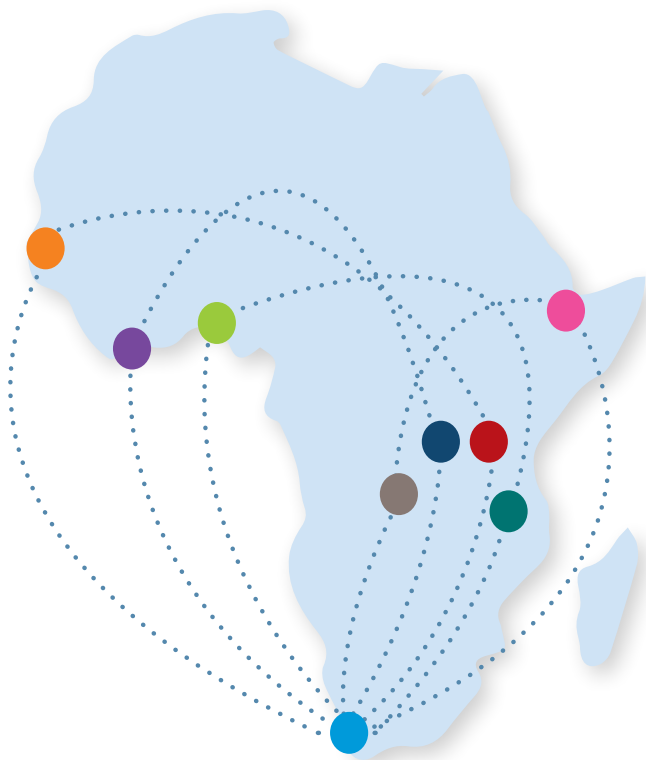
There are arguments that internationalisation – because of the domination of the global north, and a perceived relative disinterest in Africa – is another form of colonisation; Africa, it has been argued, should remove itself from the international stage and develop its own intellectual strengths and identities. Attempts by African institutions to become global institutions, argues Hawawini, "may divert them from their fundamental mission to educate their home-based students and help them become effective global citizens".

There is, of course, an opposing view: Teferra argues, for instance, that Africa's higher education system

suffers considerably from being the least internationally engaged in the world: "it relies heavily on the discourse, paradigms and parameters set by others, rendering it vulnerable to global whims".

Similarly, Connell has argued strongly that mainstream social science presents a picture of the world that is heavily dominated by the educated and affluent in Europe and North America. She cites, for instance, Giddens' reading list at the end of *Runaway World* – subtitled 'how globalisation is shaping our lives' – in which every one of the 51 books is published in the 'metropole' – urban and cultural centres of the global north.

## AFRICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCE (ARUA)



ARUA, a partnership of research universities in Africa, was launched in early 2015 as a response to the growing challenges faced by African universities. The alliance will form a hub that supports centres of excellence in many other universities across the continent. The focus is on building indigenous research excellence to enable the continent to take control of its future and assert itself as a powerful global force.

### ARUA universities

- Ghana University of Ghana
- Ethiopia Addis Ababa University
- Kenya University of Nairobi
- Nigeria University of Lagos  
University of Ibadan  
Obafemi Awolowo University
- Rwanda University of Rwanda
- Senegal Université Cheikh Anta Diop
- South Africa University of Cape Town  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
University of Pretoria  
Rhodes University  
Stellenbosch University | University of the Witwatersrand
- Tanzania University of Dar es Salaam
- Uganda Makerere University

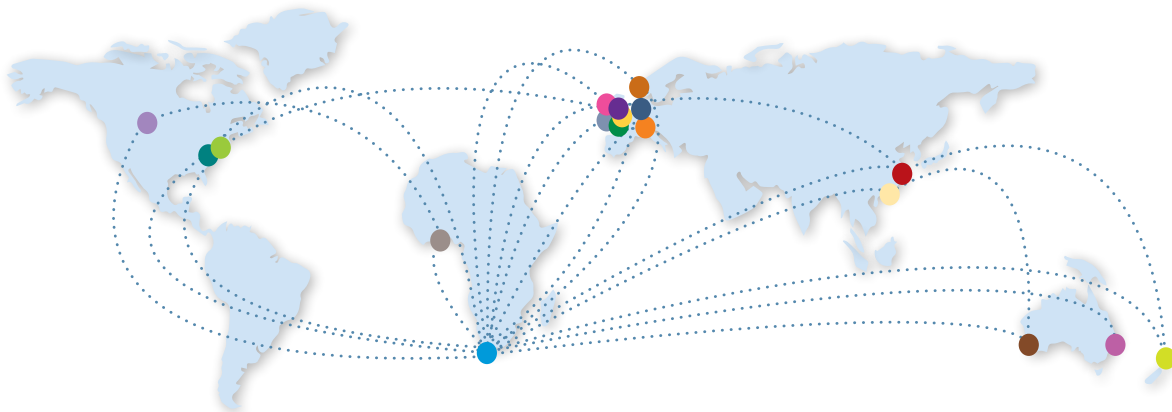
This is, perhaps, one of the strongest arguments for internationalisation. Decolonisation of the curriculum is a hot topic at the moment in South African universities. At research-intensive universities, the best teaching is fed and watered by the best research, so decolonisation of the curriculum depends on the development of African-centred knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, needs to feed into global debates.

To do this, however, we need a different pattern of collaboration. A [Nature Index](#) supplement on global scientific collaborations shows that African universities most frequently collaborate with universities outside of Africa. We need to change this. To become a strong presence in the international intellectual arena and influence global debates, we need to strengthen collaborations *within* Africa – which, in turn, will strengthen the African voice as a whole.

The African Research Universities Alliance is a network created in 2015 as part of an attempt to tackle this challenge. A partnership of 16 research universities across nine African countries, its focus is to build research excellence and to boost research capacity, so that we can address transnational public policy and development strategies. This will enable the continent to take control of its future and develop a more assertive voice, which, in turn, will enable us to assert African research as a powerful global force.



We should build our partnerships in such a way that our collaborations with the global north bring African priorities into the research agenda. An excellent example of this is the Investigation of the Management of Pericarditis (IMPI) trial that established for the first time whether the prescription of steroids to patients with TB pericarditis – a dangerous form of TB that can cause fluid build-up and compression of the heart, and kills a quarter of those who contract it – are effective. Until then, prescription of steroids depended on whether

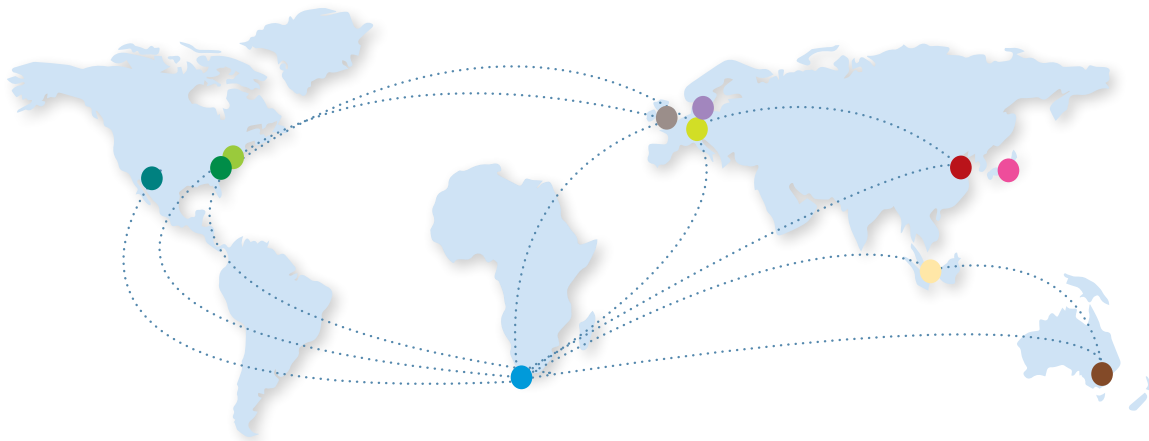


## WORLDWIDE UNIVERSITIES NETWORK (WUN)

The Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) is a leading global higher education and research network made up of 19 universities across the globe. Together they work to drive international research collaboration and address issues of global significance. WUN is the most active global higher education and research network, with 90 active research initiatives, engaging over 2 000 researchers and students collaborating on a diverse range of projects.

### WUN universities

- Maastricht University
- Chinese University of Hong Kong
- University of Alberta
- University of Auckland
- University of Basel
- University of Bergen
- University of Bristol
- University of Cape Town
- University of Ghana
- University of Leeds
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- University of Rochester
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University of Sydney
- University of Western Australia
- University of York
- Zhejiang University



## INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES (IARU)

The International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU), established in 2006, is a network of 11 international research-intensive universities from nine countries across the globe. IARU members work together to address the major challenges of our time, providing opportunities to students and staff and promoting joint projects at various levels between member universities.

### IARU universities

- Australian National University
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of Oxford
- ETH Zurich
- University of Cambridge
- University of Tokyo
- National University of Singapore
- University of Cape Town
- Yale University
- Peking University
- University of Copenhagen

the specialist treating the condition believed in them or not. But it is not a pressing issue in the global north, where TB pericarditis is a relatively rare condition. It took a South African – Professor Bongani Mayosi, dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences – to put the issue on the table, and institutions from seven African countries teamed up in an effort to solve the problem. Halfway through the trial, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research stepped in, which allowed them to leverage further funding and complete the trial.

Building three-way partnerships between UCT, a partner in the global north and another from the global south has become a successful strategy for us that could work equally well for others. Such trilateral partnerships – specifically mentioned in the targets of SDG 17 – can take a bit of midwifery to set up, but they repay the effort with dividends. For instance, in climate adaptation research, UCT is leading research projects collaborating with African research partners

such as the universities of Namibia, Botswana, Ghana and Addis Ababa, as well as with overseas research institutes including the University of East Anglia, University of Oxford, the UK Meteorological Office, the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute and California’s Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Each of these partners brings something unique and valuable. The African partners bring expertise and southern hemisphere perspectives on social and environmental issues, and provide opportunities for comparative case studies across the continent. The European and US partners bring state-of-the-art climate computing resources and expertise.

As with the IMPI trial, African investigators need to apply the best scientific methods to local problems, they need to collaborate with one another to achieve the scale required to answer these questions in a definitive manner, and link up with centres of excellence elsewhere in the world. ○



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*Professor Danie Visser is the deputy vice-chancellor for research and internationalisation.*