

AAU  **AFRICAN ACADEMIC HERITAGE FAIR 2026**

CONCEPT NOTE

Anticipate!!!



1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Academic Heritage Fair (AAHF) 2026, convened by the Association of African Universities Television (AAU TV), under the auspices of the AAU, marks the fifth edition of this annual pan-African platform commemorating African Union Day.

Themed “Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation: The Role of Higher Education in Achieving Agenda 2063,” AAHF 2026 will convene university leaders, researchers, students, policymakers, and development partners to examine how African higher education institutions can accelerate progress toward continental water and sanitation targets.

This hybrid convening - scheduled for 25th May 2026 at the AAU Secretariat in Accra and streamed virtually across the continent - will feature a high-level policy dialogue, a youth leadership forum, a research and innovation showcase, and cultural celebrations marking Africa Day. By creating structured interfaces between knowledge producers (universities) and knowledge users (policymakers, practitioners, and communities), AAHF 2026 seeks to translate African scholarship into actionable solutions for one of the continent’s most pressing developmental challenges.

2.0 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 Continental Development Imperatives

Africa’s long-term development aspirations, as articulated in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, identify education, science, technology, innovation, and youth empowerment as foundational drivers of continental transformation. Within this continental vision, universities are strategic development actors, not only as centers for knowledge production, but also as platforms for leadership training, innovation, cultural preservation, and solution-building to Africa’s complex and intergenerational challenges.

This African Union theme for 2026, “Ensuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063, provides a timely and urgent call to action across Africa. As climate change intensifies droughts, floods, and water stress across the continent, the need for sustainable water governance, climate-resilient infrastructure, and inclusive sanitation systems has never been more urgent.

The World Meteorological Organisation has warned that climate-related disasters such as persistent droughts and devastating floods could displace up to 700 million people in Africa by 2030. The World Bank also predicts that climate-driven water scarcity could hit economic growth by up to 6 percent in some regions.

Simultaneously, inadequate sanitation infrastructure imposes economic losses

<https://genevasolutions.news/climate-environment/water-stress-to-displace-700-million-in-africa-by-2030-wmo-warns>

annually across sub-Saharan Africa, while disproportionately affecting women, girls, and marginalized communities

2.2 The Higher Education Opportunity

Despite the growing relevance of water and sanitation in Africa’s development agenda, the contributions of African universities remain under-recognized and under-utilized. Across the continent, higher education institutions are producing cutting-edge research on climate-resilient water management, groundwater mapping, wastewater treatment technologies, and behaviour change communication.

They are developing low-cost, context-appropriate sanitation innovations suitable for informal settlements and rural communities. They are training the next generation of water engineers, hydrologists, environmental scientists, and sanitation policy specialists. They are engaging communities through extension services, action research, and student-led development initiatives. And they are preserving indigenous knowledge systems related to water conservation and sustainable resource management.

Yet these contributions rarely achieve the visibility or policy influence they warrant. AAHF 2026 addresses this gap by creating a structured platform for knowledge exchange between universities and the continental policy ecosystem.

2.3 The African Academic Heritage Fair Mandate

Established in 2022, the African Academic Heritage Fair responds to a fundamental observation: Africa’s development challenges are increasingly well-documented, but African-generated solutions remain insufficiently visible, connected, or scaled. Conceived as an annual intellectual, cultural, and knowledge-sharing platform commemorating African Union Day, AAHF provides a structured interface between higher education institutions, students, policymakers, and development partners - translating the African Union Theme of the Year into evidence-informed dialogue, youth-led perspectives, and innovation showcases.

AAHF 2026 will therefore serve as a pan-African platform to advance the AU's 2026 theme by:

- Strengthening the connection between higher education and continental development priorities on water and sanitation
- Elevating youth and student voices as co-creators of sustainable solutions, and
- Showcasing African research and innovation that can support climate resilience, public health, productivity, and inclusive growth.

3.0 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Overall Goal

To establish a dynamic platform that celebrates African academic heritage, while strengthening the strategic contributions of universities, youth, and knowledge systems in advancing sustainable water availability and safe sanitation as a path to achieving Agenda 2063.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/05/03/climate-driven-water-scarcity-could-hit-economic-growth-by-up-to-6-percent-in-some-regions-says-world-bank>

3.2 Specific Objectives

The Specific objectives of this convening are to:

- Provide a high-level intellectual and policy-oriented space for reflection on the African Union Theme of the Year, thereby positioning universities as essential contributors to continental policy processes and implementation strategies
- Amplify youth and student perspectives on Africa's future through structured dialogue and engagement, ensuring that intergenerational perspectives inform development planning and that young people are recognized as solution co-creators
- Showcase African university research, innovation outputs, and cultural heritage aligned with continental development priorities, thereby increasing visibility of African-generated knowledge and facilitating pathways to adoption and scaling
- Generate tangible academic, professional, and networking opportunities for students and early-career researchers, thereby strengthening the pipeline of African scholars and practitioners working on water and sanitation challenges.
- Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships between universities, government agencies, development partners, and private sector actors, thereby creating enabling conditions for research to inform policy and innovation to reach communities

4.0 AAHF 2026 PROGRAMME

The 2026 edition of AAHF will be delivered as a hybrid event.

Date: Monday, 25th May 2025

Time: 10am GMT

Venue: AAU Secretariat, Trinity Avenue, Accra.

4.1 Key programme components

- High-Level Dialogue - *Water Security and Safe Sanitation: The Foundations for Human Capital and Climate-Resilient Development in Africa*

A moderated, high-level panel discussion bringing together academic leaders, policymakers, regional representatives, development partners, and technical experts to examine the AU Theme of the Year through an implementation lens. The dialogue will focus on practical pathways for strengthening climate-resilient, water management, and safe sanitation systems, including governance and policy coherence, financing and infrastructure investment, integrated approaches (including the WEF nexus), and regional cooperation on shared water resources.

- Youth and the Future of Africa Forum - *Youth Leadership for Water Stewardship, Resilient Communities, and Safe Sanitation*

A structured youth-led dialogue convening university students, early-career researchers, and youth leaders to articulate locally grounded and scalable solutions that respond to climate impacts on water availability and sanitation. The Forum will highlight youth-driven community action, innovation, behavioral change, and advocacy, while elevating practical commitments and priorities that advance inclusive and sustainable water and sanitation outcomes.

- Research and Innovation Pitching - *From Knowledge to Impact: African Research and Innovation Showcase*

A curated pitching session featuring selected researchers, student innovators, and early-career professionals presenting solution-oriented work that advances sustainable water availability and safe sanitation. Pitches will spotlight practical innovations designed for real-world adoption and potential partnership support and will be delivered to a targeted audience of mentors, funders, and investors to facilitate mentorship, partnership opportunities, and pathways to scaling.

- Cultural and Ceremonial Components

Curated cultural interludes and ceremonial elements marking African Union Day will celebrate Africa's cultural heritage while connecting artistic expression to themes of water, sanitation, and environmental stewardship.

These components will feature performances by student artists and cultural troupes, include a commemorative ceremony honouring contributions to water and sanitation research and advocacy, and provide networking spaces for informal engagement among participants

5.0 EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

- African universities and research institutions
- University students and early-career researchers
- Water, sanitation, health and climate policymakers and implementing agencies
- Academic leaders and policymakers
- African Union and Regional Economic Community representatives
- Development partners and donors
- Media

6.0 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased visibility and recognition of African research and innovation addressing water security and safe sanitation.
- Strengthened engagement between African universities and African Union policy processes.
- Enhanced platforms for students and early-career researchers to showcase their work and ideas.
- Improved access to continental networks, platforms, and professional development opportunities.
- Meaningful contribution to evidence-informed dialogue on Africa's development challenges and opportunities.

7.0 REGISTRATION AND PARTICIPATION

Participation in AAHF 2026 is open to all stakeholders committed to advancing the goals of Agenda 2063 through higher education engagement with water and sanitation challenges.

Registration Link: <https://workshops.aau.org/aaHF-2026>

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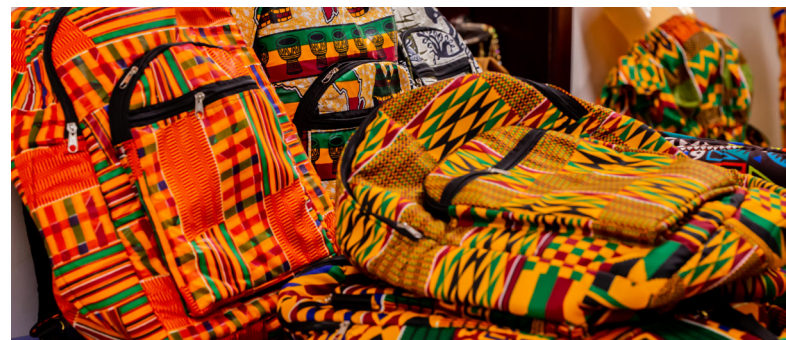
(mhnkumsah@aaU.org cc: itahinakwa@aaU.org, cc: aaUtv@aaU.org)

8.0 CONCLUSION

The African Academic Heritage Fair 2026 represents a strategic opportunity to meaningfully connect higher education, youth engagement, cultural heritage, and continental policy processes around one of Africa’s most urgent development challenges.

By leveraging the convening power of the Association of African Universities and the media reach of AAU TV, AAHF 2026 will elevate the visibility and influence of African research and innovation on water and sanitation, create structured pathways for student and youth engagement in continental development agendas, foster multi-stakeholder partnerships that translate knowledge into action, and celebrate Africa’s academic heritage while building the foundations for its future.

In doing so, AAHF 2026 will strengthen the contribution of African universities and students to Africa’s development trajectory, while fostering inclusive, knowledge-driven, and African-owned solutions for sustainable water availability and safe sanitation essential foundations for the Africa we want.





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