

Foreword

It is an honor and a privilege to introduce this Special Edition of the African Journal of Sustainable Development, a journal that stands as a beacon of African scholarship and intellectual innovation. Prepared in partnership with the esteemed Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), this special edition is a critical outcome of the 2023 Academic Conference on Africa, held from 1-3 December 2023 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Organized by the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UN-OSAA) in collaboration with UN Academic Impact and supported by the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, the 2023 conference brought together incredibly accomplished scholars from across the continent, united by a shared vision: to redefine African futures through the power of knowledge, collaboration, and shared purpose. The diverse group of participants—academics, policymakers, practitioners—from various disciplines and sectors, discussed critical issues facing Africa and the world. The conference served as a platform not only for intellectual exchange but also for building bridges towards deeper and more meaningful collaboration between African scholars and global development actors, addressing the stark underrepresentation of African scholars in global policy discussions.

For too long, global narratives have imposed narrow limits on how Africa's potential is understood and pursued, hindering the exploration of bold, lasting pathways to sustainable development and durable peace. The Academic Conference aimed to create a vital space for African academics to challenge and reshape these narratives, contributing to the transformation of mindsets and policymaking.

This Special Edition of the African Journal of Sustainable Development is a continuation of that essential work. The theme of both the 2023 conference and this special edition, "*Redefining African Futures: The State, Resilience, and Pathways to Progress*," is both ambitious and urgent. It challenges us to look beyond the conventional narratives that have long dominated global discourses on Africa, and to instead elevate the voices of African scholars, whose insights, experiences and perspectives are crucial to understanding and addressing the continent's complex realities.

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In this context, this edition features a collection of articles that echo the themes and discussions of last year's conference, while also expanding the dialogue to address the broader challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. The contributions in this edition are as diverse as they are profound, covering a wide range of topics across the peace, security and development nexus – from governance and resilience to health, education, climate change, and beyond.

As we approach the UN Summit of the Future and the implementation of the ambitious Pact for the Future, the urgency of the challenges facing Africa cannot be overstated. In this light, the articles in this edition offer not just analysis, but inspiration. They challenge us to think differently about Africa's role in the world and to recognize its potential as a driver of innovation, resilience, and progress on the global stage. These works not only enrich the academic discourse on Africa but also provide practical insights that will guide policymakers and practitioners in their efforts to create a better future for the continent.

Looking ahead, the bridges we have built through the 2023 conference and this publication are just the beginning. The work of building connections – between scholars and policymakers, between Africa and the world – must continue with even greater urgency and resolve.

Finally, I am reminded of the powerful keynote address delivered by Prof. Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate, Playwright, Poet and Activist, during last year's conference. He aptly described African universities and academia as "*a self-sustaining component of overall society, autonomous in the realm of ideas, generating unlimited possibilities in virtually every field of human endeavour.*" I invite you to engage deeply with the *unlimited possibilities* presented in this special edition. Let them inspire you, challenge you, and guide you in your own work. Together, we can redefine the future of Africa and, in doing so, contribute to the creation of a better, more equitable, more peaceful and more prosperous world for all.

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