



**COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
QUALITY: OUR AGENDA**

**CONFERENCE THEME
CATALYZING SYSTEMIC SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION
THROUGH RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

CONFERENCE REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**4TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE ON
UNIVERSITIES RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

**HELD AT KENYATTA
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE**

12TH TO 14TH JUNE 2024

COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Commission for University Education (CUE) held the 4th Biennial Conference on Universities Research and Innovation at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi from on 12th to 14th June 2024. The theme was “Catalyzing Systemic Social Transformation Through Research and Innovation”. This critical theme resonated deeply within the Kenyan and African context, emphasizing the pivotal role of research and innovation in driving socio-economic progress. The conference targeted a diverse audience, including representatives from universities (public and private), industry leaders across various sectors, policymakers at national and regional levels, and civil society organizations. Fostering collaboration among these stakeholders was a key for sustainable development. The success of the conference is attributed not only to the dedicated organizers but also to the invaluable contributions of key collaborators like the National Research Fund and all institutions that were part of the exhibitors.

2.0 CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The conference was organized into different sessions that included the opening ceremony, plenary, break-away sessions, and exhibitions. The conference program offered a rich tapestry of learning experiences. Plenary sessions brought together distinguished speakers, including Hon. Ezekiel Machogu (Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education), Dr. Beatrice Muganda Inyangala (Principal Secretary, State Department for Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Education), Prof. Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha (CUE Board Chair). These sessions addressed critical topics such as the role of Konza Technopolis in fostering innovation ecosystems, strategies for securing sustainable research funding, and preparing graduates for the future workforce – a theme that resonated throughout the conference.

Breakout sessions delved deeper into specific themes, facilitating focused discussions on topics like leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) in content delivery, building university-industry partnerships, and strategies for linking universities with research institutions. Poster sessions showcased cutting-edge research projects from various disciplines, fostering knowledge exchange and potential collaborations. Interactive workshops provided valuable skill development opportunities, focusing on enhancing postgraduate training, leveraging the digital superhighway for research and development, and catalyzing the research ecosystem within African universities.

Over 300 participants from diverse backgrounds – academia, industry, government, and civil society – participated in the conference, reflecting its inclusivity and extensive reach. This diversity of perspectives enriched discussions and sparked innovative solutions to address critical challenges facing the region.

3.0 DAY-BY-DAY HIGHLIGHTS

DAY 1:

- a) Opening Ceremony: Keynote addresses set the stage for the conference, emphasizing the importance of research and innovation in driving societal progress.
- b) Plenary Sessions: Discussions explored the role of Konza Technopolis, a flagship Kenyan development project, in fostering innovation ecosystems, along with strategies for sustainable research funding and preparing graduates for the evolving needs of the workforce.
- c) Breakout Sessions: Specific topics included leveraging AI in educational delivery, building strong university-industry partnerships for research and innovation, and strategies for linking universities with research institutions to enhance knowledge transfer.

DAY 2:

- a) Thematic Speakers: Renowned experts like Prof. Jamil Salmi (formerly World Bank) shared insights on building thriving research ecosystems, while Prof. Dolores Oriordan (Vice President for Global Engagement, UNA Europa) addressed fostering international research collaboration – crucial for African universities to gain global recognition and access wider funding opportunities.
- b) Paper Presentations: A diverse range of research findings were presented on topics such as integrating lifelong learning into curricula, bio-alkanol gel fuel as a renewable energy source and promoting sustainable and ethical research practices.
- c) Workshops and Interactive Sessions: Practical sessions focused on enhancing postgraduate training, leveraging digital technologies for research advancement, and catalyzing a research-conducive environment within universities.

DAY 3:

- a) Industry Engagement: Dedicated sessions addressed bridging the gap between university research and commercialization of innovations, along with strategies for monetization to ensure research outputs have tangible societal impact.
- b) Closing Ceremony: The final day culminated in recognizing outstanding research and innovation through awards, signing of the conference communiqué outlining key takeaways and action points, and closing remarks by Prof. Mike Kuria (CUE CEO).

4.0 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The conference achieved significant outcomes, aligning with the feedback received from participants.

The conference facilitated a vibrant exchange of ideas across disciplines and institutions. Interdisciplinary workshops and discussions on joint research projects exemplified the collaborative spirit fostered by the event. Industry leaders actively participated, providing valuable insights into current trends, challenges, and partnership opportunities. Sessions like “Building Strong University-Industry Partnerships” showcased successful collaborations that bridge the gap between research and practical application. Innovative thinking was ignited, particularly in sessions focused on leveraging AI and digital technologies for educational and research advancements. Interactive sessions encouraged participants to brainstorm solutions to critical challenges within the African higher education and research landscape, such as limited research funding.

5.0 STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

The conference excelled in several areas, reflecting best practices and addressing participants' feedback.

This includes the following:

- i. Presentations were well-received, praised for their quality and relevance. Feedback highlighted the focus on actionable research findings, clear communication styles, and diverse speaker perspectives (i.e. academics, industry leaders, policymakers).
- ii. The conference employed successful methods to encourage audience participation, as evidenced by feedback. Extended Q&A sessions, interactive workshops with practical exercises, and roundtable discussions fostered a dynamic learning environment and facilitated deeper engagement with the presented topics.
- iii. Recognizing the importance of time management, the conference organizers strived to adhere to the schedule, allocating appropriate time for presentations and discussions. While generally praised for this aspect, feedback suggested room for improvement, particularly in allowing for more in-depth discussions during breakout sessions.
- iv. Efforts were made to promote inclusivity, with a diverse speaker selection, financial support for remote participants, and accessible presentation formats (e.g., sign language interpretation for select sessions). Feedback will be used to further enhance inclusivity; exploring livestreaming options for future conferences and ensuring clear communication channels for all participants are key priorities.
- v. Dedicated networking events, online platforms, and designated networking spaces within the conference venue facilitated successful interactions and connections between participants with similar interests. Future conferences will incorporate feedback to further enhance these interactions by providing facilitated introductions or mentorship opportunities between established researchers and early-career academics.

6.0 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Commission continuously strive to improve and value participant feedback. Here are areas identified for enhancement:

- a) Feedback highlighted the need for more streamlined communication channels. Earlier distribution of conference materials, establishing a dedicated communication platform for timely updates and registration information, and exploring additional communication channels like social media groups or mobile applications are potential improvements.
- b) While the thematic scope was broad, some participants suggested broadening it further to encompass a wider range of disciplines within the research and innovation landscape. Additionally, a paper review process could be implemented to curate high-quality presentations that tightly align with the conference theme.
- c) Venue accessibility and catering services emerged as areas for improvement. Conducting thorough venue evaluations prior to selection, ensuring accessibility for participants with disabilities, and diversifying catering options to meet various dietary needs are key considerations for future conferences.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The 4th Biennial Conference on Universities Research and Innovation served as a powerful platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation within the African higher education and research landscape. The lively exchange of ideas, fostered by diverse perspectives and a commitment to addressing critical challenges, fueled a spirit of creativity and problem-solving. The Commission expresses sincere gratitude to all participants including speakers, sponsors, partners and organizers, who contributed to the success of this event. Looking ahead, the Commission is committed to building upon this momentum and plans to host future conferences or launch ongoing initiatives aligned with the theme of “Catalyzing Systemic Social Transformation Through Research and Innovation.”

PICTORIALS



PICTORIALS



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