

THIRD INTERREGIONAL DIALOGUE ON **EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA, THE CARIBBEAN, AFRICA AND EUROPE**

**REPORT FROM THE SESSIONS:
MAIN CONFERENCE THEMES, RECOMMENDATIONS
AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following report highlights the key interventions, messages, recommendations and suggested follow-up actions that emerged from the Third Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development, held at the EAN University under the patronage of the Minister of Science and Innovation of Colombia - convened by Obreal, the African Union Commission (AUC), the Associations of African Universities (AAU) and the Colombian Association of Universities (ASCUN).

The event's theme: FOSTERING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN, AND EUROPE, was explored through numerous dimensions: via an opening policy dialogue round table, a university associations round table, plenary sessions and interactive parallel workgroups. One of the main thematic threads through the conference was 'women in science', underpinned by the fact that the conference was organised in conjunction with the General Assembly of OWDS – the Association of Women in Science for Development. Over 150 female scientific leaders participated in the Interregional Dialogue to substantiate this important thematic element, which was also of high priority for the Minister of Science and Innovation of Colombia.

Amongst the other thematic issues explored, many of which carried over from the Second Interregional Dialogue in Addis Ababa in July 2024, were:

- Universities as Engines of Interregional Cooperation
- From Policy Dialogue to Transformative Action: Perspectives across the different Souths and Norths
- Dismantling Gender Barriers in STEM: Perspectives from the different South(s)
- Inclusive Education and Science for Development
- Energy, Climate and Food Security: Interregional Challenges
- Africa-LAC teaching and research cooperation models
- Equal Access to University: Voices from Student Associations
- Building on Indigenous Knowledge
- Peacebuilding and Resilience: The Role of Universities and Communities
- Data for policy: Perspectives on Women, Inclusion, Science
- Building shared solutions to common challenges through interregional Research
- AI for Local Development: Political, Ethical and Institutional Approaches
- TVET and the Future of Work

This report should not just be read as a summary, but as an indicative road map for concrete follow-up actions between continents, with shared visions and priorities. It is to be read in conjunction with the general conference conclusions on Reimagining Cooperation: Building a Polycentric Future for Education and Development.

2. FRAMING THE DIALOGUE AND HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL INTERVENTIONS

The first day of the dialogue entailed a high-level policy round table as well as a round table for university associations from LAC and Africa, an interview with the Colombian Minister for Science and Innovation and panels organized by both the British Council and the IDRC Canada on women in STEM.

The Vice President of Colombia – Hon. Francia Márquez – the first person and first woman of African heritage to assume this position, advocated Colombia's 'Shared spirit with Africa' and that "Africa esta en nuestras venas" (Africa is in our veins). She provided the current Colombian policy framework, highlighting social inclusion of marginalized groups and constructing peace. She also announced the first Summit of the CELAC and the African Union to be held in Colombia in 2026.

The Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) of the African Union Commission (AUC) – H.E. Prof. Gaspard Banyankimbona – stressed that the 21st century must be one of multipolarity. To foster this, mechanisms for joint research, mobility, co-developed degrees and qualifications, digitalization of teaching and learning and collaborative online learning can help bridge and connect continents at the level of the classroom and scientific labs. He stressed that policy actors must also support structural collaboration if academic collaboration is to become a reality. Furthermore, he reiterated the importance of co-designing projects, co-investing in talent for dignity, equity and mutual respect, quality assurance/recognition to articulate education systems, digital inclusion, and skills development. He emphasized that the AU is ready to institutionalize collaborations around these areas.

As part of a concrete road map, he proposed to anchor the partnership in three pillars:

- Co-building future skills for green and digital economies (bio-economy and renewables)
- Placing women and youth at the heart of cooperation (women in STEM, Lifelong learning, community-based education, and rural access)
- People-to-people ties and sustainable institutional collaboration (joint R&I networks around key shared issues, mutual recognition of qualifications, people-to-people exchange, citizen-led cooperation, and arts and culture).

The Minister of Science and Innovation of Colombia, Hon. Yesenia Olaya, complemented these interventions, highlighting the importance of knowledge transfer from the universities to the territories and the value-add of higher education to local productivity: She provided an example of coffee sector and announced an ambitious program in Colombia to bring science and science infrastructure to the territories.

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Further expanding the policy voice were different ambassadors to Colombia: The **Ambassadors of the EU, Canada, and the Delegate of the Catalan Government** were emphatic about their support for dialogue that connects the different Souths. The Ambassador of the EU to Colombia stressed that the EU Global Gateway (GG) investment package needs local and regional voices to give it life, not just for implementation but for ownership. “Triangulation” between the EU-LA-Africa is critical and programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon must build bridges between regions and between pillars of cooperation. He offered a new cooperation vision: “From connectivity to co-creation, from visibility to a shared narrative, building bridges between investment, education and research”. He reiterated that the Global Gateway must be more polycentric, including joint and co-financing from regional partners, which boosts reciprocity within mechanisms like Erasmus; Europeans need to go out (to Africa, to Latin America). Furthermore, “If we want a polycentric world, we need to explain it, we need to build a narrative around it”.

Echoing this sentiment, the Delegate of Catalunya offered Catalunya a springboard between regions, and the Catalan commitment to multilateralism was stressed.

UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATIONS PANEL

In the tradition of previous dialogues, major university associations and higher education representative bodies were invited to discuss concrete imperatives for Africa-LAC cooperation. Leaders of the Association of Colombian Universities (ASCUN), the Association of Mexican Universities (ANUIES), the Brazilian Associations for Internationalization of Higher Education (FAUBAI), the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), the African and Malagasy Higher Education Council (CAMES) and the Inter-University of Council of Argentina (CIN) all weighed in on this topic: providing concrete examples of the transformative role of universities in development and multi-regional cooperation. Amongst the examples:

- The FARA-FAUBAI initiative (an example of an Africa-Brazil initiative in agriculture), and the UCT (South Africa) - Brazil cooperation on biodiversity, both examples of concrete network-led platforms.
- The CAMES example of the ‘Joint QA project’ (Erasmus+, with Obreal): A mutually beneficial partnership whereby African authorities and universities learn in a South-South construction, but also EU partners learn how to enhance their own QA standards through cooperation with Africa.
- ANUIES: ARCO - the creation of an intergovernmental fund for development for cross- border science on common challenges

In terms of challenges and opportunities, other issues cited were:

- Issue of language, but also of cultural difference, which needs to be considered practically in collaborations
- How to incentivize students to go to Africa when the current is to the North, and also regionally in Latin America

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- Social inclusion in mobility and internationalization

In terms of the conclusions of the policy dialogue portion of the program, Saidou Madougou, Director of ESTI at the African Union Commission reiterated that universities indeed can be conduits of cooperation between the two continents, and that building on existing networks and associations is critical. He proposed a joint Africa-Latin American Fund, and to take advantage on regional articulation frameworks in Africa, like the African Continental Qualifications Framework. Jaime Perzick (CIN) reiterated the shared challenges of Latin America and Africa, like wealth inequality but also disease. He stressed that “it is our responsibility to develop research questions together and find solutions together”.

3. FROM POLICY TO PRACTISE

Two subsequent days of dialogue structured discussions and concrete actions in the form of plenary sessions with diverse expertise and parallel work groups.

WOMEN AND SCIENCE

An afternoon was dedicated to both policy discussions and practical examples of funding instruments to promote women in science. In an interview with the Minister of Science of Colombia, conducted by the rector of the EAN university and Carolina Santacruz of OWDS, the current Colombia political vision and policy interventions were shared: The Minister stressed how universities influence public policies and thus more women are needed in science. The Colombian science agenda, structured around five priority areas, aims for ‘feminización del campo científico’ (feminization of the scientific field), through regional hubs for inclusion in science, close cooperation with private sector, and promotion of women in fields that are not normal inclusive of women. That Colombia is opening new embassies in Africa is an opportunity for knowledge exchange and can be a strategic avenue for promoting women in science from a South-South perspective.

Panels organized by the British Council and IDRC substantiated these discussions: The British Council presented a multi-layered approach, involving a Skills for Women in technology platform and a Mentors in Science initiative. The Athena Swan Charter was offered as a Tool for implementation and follow-up, guiding universities through self-assessment when it comes to women in science.

IDRC launched a new book on Women in STEM in the Global South, with vibrant cases from different countries and world regions. Main take-aways were that 1) policy often lacks mechanisms or guidance to be put into practice, 2) women need to have role-models in science, and 3) the importance of investing in studies of transformative research that showcase who these diverse female scientists are and the challenges they face in different contexts.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SCIENCE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TACKLING SHARED CHALLENGES THROUGH INTERREGIONAL RESEARCH

These two sessions, with key interventions from the AUC, the Central American University Council and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic), as well as the African Association of Science Academies (NASAC), examined concepts and terminology, and also more practically, how regional policy strategies integrate these concepts: For example, the CESA and STISA strategies (African Union) and the PIRESC V strategy for the Central American integration system. Key messages included:

- A basic premise is to embrace diversity as richness in higher education and not an obstacle
- The importance of re-defining who our scientific research collaborators are: The community can and should play that role.
- The notion of ‘rebalancing science’ and focusing on the South setting its own science agenda
- The call to move towards more autonomous research, e.g. starting a project or a partnership with self-determination.

Conclusions included:

- The examples of regional policy documents already provide a solid foundation for a South-South driven cooperation: They can be mapped and juxtaposed to identify common priority areas.
- Joint Africa-LAC research programs on inclusion must be launched. This can be done through the articulation of networks and better/more robust data sharing on inclusive education and science for development.
- There was also call made for a specific program targeting Africa and the Caribbean, which could be comprised of researcher exchange in specific fields (tourism, agriculture and the mining sectors suggested from the Dominican Republic) but also cultural exchange and tech parks for public-private linkages.

EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: AN INTERREGIONAL VISION

The session expanded the notion of inter-regionality: With a panel that integrated a UNESCO institute in China (UNESCO-INRULED) and Euraxess, it also gave a perspective from the ‘funders’ side. The Chinese-Africa Joint Teaching Centre, premised on in-service teaching training and mutual learning, was positioned as another multi-regional initiative, which could nurture Africa-LAC models. All panelists suggested the importance of partnership building between the regions (and between networks, associations, platforms and individuals). When it comes to funding modalities, Euraxess observed that successful partnerships lead to successful proposals, and hence a pre-condition for obtaining funding is first investing in partnerships. One question that was raised was “which capacities need to be built?” in cross-regional partnerships and how building that capacity could be cross-directional in a South-South context.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARALLEL WORKSHOPS

Participants engaged in parallel workshops, with the clear instruction to propose concrete actions that would form part of work plan in the lead up to the next interregional dialogue.

Build upon and exploit integrate indigenous knowledge

- A concrete recommendation was to set up an open group of associations, networks, key experts and change agents, to maintain relationships and also produce a regular publication, in the form of an interregional research project on indigenous knowledge.

Peace building and resilience

- The session aimed to identify concrete, collaborative solutions to strengthen peacebuilding and resilience through partnerships between universities and communities across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Asia in line with the overarching objective of advancing interregional cooperation in education, science, and sustainable development.
- One clear take away was “The classroom in the community” and the importance of students building trust in communities, which can create bridges between regions.
- A recommendation was to develop institutional incentives and academic appreciation for community engagement. This can be done through an interregional community-led university project fostering social cohesion, focused on youth engagement and capacity building. It should promote collaborative work to integrate resilience education into curricula and stimulate joint regional research on peace and social innovation.

Africa LAC joint teaching approaches

- This session presented a very successful pilot collaboration of the Pan-African University (an African regional university with five hubs) with 6 Argentinian universities (grouped in the CIN), born out of the first Interregional Dialogue in Buenos Aires: They developed nine collaborative teaching courses and delivered them across the African continent, through the PAU institutes. Main lessons are that political will is critical: The role of the AU in the high-level endorsement of such collaboration, but also in providing the institutional infrastructure (through the PAU) was a success factor; Sensitization and trust building was also recommended as a first step for the universities and teaching staff involved.

Recommendations/follow-up actions

- Scale to more countries through their associations: Include and target the Caribbean
- Triangular cooperation frameworks, including Europe for example, which is a means to generate financial support and value-add in research and teaching.

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- Monitoring impacts (how many students, employability prospects, sectors tackled) to also influence policy and ideally scale
- Substantiate through joint scholarship schemes and co-supervision of theses.
- Launch a future cohort in Spanish but also in selected African languages
- Launching an Africa-LAC Academic Forum
- Both SADC – at REC level - and the IUCEA in East Africa - are interested to help scale this model with members and member states.
- There is a need to map joint teaching collaboration between African and LAC universities

Data/evidence-based policy making

- This session explored regional data frameworks (SADC) and how they articulate with continental strategies. Data collection and management by governments in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya were featured.
- Common challenges included resource restraints, urban-rural divide when it comes to connectivity and data infrastructure, data security and ethics
- Successes included
 - a. Articulating data across ministries in South Africa, to better understand progression and pipeline issues (the example was given about how girls are overrepresented in basic education but then under-represented as they advance up to a scientific career)
 - b. Digital infrastructure in currently 95% of Zimbabwean universities
 - c. The SADC regional EMIS system, piloted in six countries due to the efforts of SADC to mobilize funds from different international partners.
- A positive take-away was that women (and inclusion) in science figure in all national, regional and continental development plans and diverse metrics are being used to evaluate it. In terms of commitments: OWDS offered its networks, and the information captured at country-level through its chapters, as a source.

TVET and the future of work

The session emphasized that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is not a marginal subsystem but a structural pillar for productive development, social inclusion, and a just transition in both Africa and Latin America. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen and harmonize National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to improve comparability, quality and relevance, facilitate mobility across education pathways, better connect TVET systems with labour market demands, and promote training, mobility and academic recognition across regions to allow for a free movement of labour.

A central element of the discussion was the recognition of prior learning, community and empirical knowledge, non-formal and informal learning, sectoral certifications and micro-credentials as essential instruments for building flexible and inclusive education-to-work trajectories. Without such recognition mechanisms, inequalities persist and workers' skills remain invisible.

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TVET was also framed as critical for the energy and ecological transition, digital transformation, gender equality in productive sectors, youth inclusion, and the resilience of vulnerable territories. Participants stressed the need for intersectoral policies linking education, labour, science and industry. Concepts requiring further dialogue include decent work, sustainable productivity, “future skills,” and the respective roles of higher education institutions, employers and governments in enabling more adaptive learning pathways.

Student Voices

This session saw strong participation from student associations in Africa and Latin America, who reaffirmed that equitable access to higher education remains a persistent challenge across the different Souths. Students called attention to structural barriers such as territorial and socioeconomic inequalities, insufficient financing, infrastructure gaps, and limited equity for women, rural populations, migrants, young people affected by child labour, and students with disabilities.

They emphasized that democratizing higher education (understood as expanding accessibility, equity and opportunities) is fundamental for sustainable development and for strengthening human capital in both regions. Examples such as Ghana’s GETFund were highlighted as promising models of locally driven financing that support retention, mobility and research aligned with national priorities.

Students proposed the creation of an Interregional Observatory on Access and Retention, stronger mobility schemes within the different Souths, and more meaningful participation of student associations in university governance. The session concluded with a shared understanding that governments, universities and student bodies must co-develop policies to ensure equitable and sustainable access to higher education.

4. A ROADMAP

Based on the different conclusions and commitments from the Third Interregional Dialogue, the following matrix is proposed with priority areas and actions: Certain actions are modest, and a clear and feasible commitment that can be realized in the next year, prior to the next dialogue. Other actions are more aspirational, but an important premise for collective action and eventual scaling.

PRIORITY	MODALITY	COMMITMENT
Co-building future skills for green and digital economies (bio-economy, renewables, sustainable tourism, health)	<p>Joint R&I networks around key shared issues</p> <p>Joint supervision of theses</p> <p>Collaborative teaching modalities (COIL and hybrid)</p>	<p>Expansion of the PAU-CIN collaborative teaching project to further countries, through SADC, the Inter-University of East Africa and CSUCA (Central America), with focus on the Caribbean and Africa</p> <p>Map joint teaching collaboration between African and LAC universities as a baseline</p> <p>Lobbying for an Africa-LAC Academic Cooperation Fund</p> <p>Establishment of an Africa-LAC Academic Forum</p>
Placing women and youth at the heart of cooperation (women in science, women in STEM, women in leadership)	<p>Enhanced data metrics and indicators for Women in science, STEM and academic leadership, as a baseline for program and research project selection between regions</p> <p>Cross-regional capacity building projects featuring women in development</p>	<p>Continued investment in capacity building for data that informs regional development strategies, highlighting women in education and science: Inter-continental comparative study</p> <p>Pilot project in coffee sector for Africa-LAC</p>

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PRIORITY	MODALITY	COMMITMENT
People-to-people ties and sustainable institutional collaboration	Enhanced trust through structural dialogue on mutual recognition of education, training and qualifications	CAMES-Mercosur dialogue and professional exchange program on regional quality assurance and accreditation (facilitated by Obreal)
Citizen-led cooperation Community-based education	Joint research leveraging indigenous knowledge Joint projects emphasizing service learning and peace building	Interregional community-led university project fostering social cohesion, focused on youth engagement and capacity building. Joint regional research on peace and social innovation Setting up an open work group of associations, networks, key experts to produce a regular publication on indigenous knowledge
Africa-LAC cultural heritage	Targeted research and teaching collaboration and cultural exchange programs	Launch of a people-to-people exchange initiative on arts and culture between LAC and Africa
Inclusion in inter-regionality and putting multi-polarity into practice	Incorporating new regions into the Interregional Dialogue	Hosting the next dialogue in Egypt as a direct articulating with Egypt and Northern Africa Inviting Chinese associations and government to take part, identifying common areas of action

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