

Online Article

Rethinking Academic Freedom in Africa

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Introduction

Since independence, African universities have undergone profound transformations, evolving through three distinct regimes: the nationalist university, the developmental university and the neoliberal university. These typologies mirror broader sociopolitical, economic and cultural shifts across the continent, each shaping the roles, purposes and operations of higher education institutions in unique ways. The transitions have had far-reaching implications for the structure, function and societal impact of African universities. This essay analyses how these regimes have influenced academic and intellectual freedom, the evolving roles of academics and intellectuals, and the strategies needed to bridge the divide between institutional and public knowledge production. By examining contemporary challenges and opportunities, it proposes a comprehensive framework for fostering inclusive, autonomous and globally connected knowledge ecosystems in Africa.

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The Changing Regimes of African Universities

The nationalist university appeared in the early post-independence period during the 1960s and 1970s. These institutions sought to break away from colonial legacies and were reimagined as tools for nation-building and cultural revival. Their primary purpose was twofold: to produce a cadre of educated professionals and leaders for newly independent states and to assert intellectual and cultural autonomy. This was often achieved through indigenising curricula and promoting national identity. The nationalist university was characterised by strong state control and funding, which reflected its strategic role in national development. It emphasised the humanities, social sciences and applied sciences relevant to governance and public administration. There was an expansion of access to education for historically marginalised groups,

although systemic inequalities persisted. However, this model faced several challenges. Overreliance on state funding left universities vulnerable to political and economic instability. Furthermore, tensions arose between the universalistic aspirations of academia, which sought to produce globally competitive knowledge, and the particularistic demands of nationalist projects, which emphasised local identity and development.

The developmental university typology emerged in the late 1970s and prevailed through the 1990s. These universities were tasked with addressing development challenges in response to growing societal needs, economic crises and structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The developmental university aligned higher education with national development goals, prioritising fields such as agriculture, engineering and health sciences. The goal was to contribute to socioeconomic progress through applied research and training. The characteristics of developmental universities included a focus on technical and vocational disciplines, often at the expense of the humanities and broader intellectual inquiry. These institutions were

expected to address pressing societal needs, such as poverty reduction, public health improvements and industrialisation. While state control persisted, financial support declined following the austerity measures imposed by SAPs. Chronic underfunding and deteriorating infrastructure, exacerbated by SAP-induced budget cuts, limited the effectiveness of these universities. The underresourcing of academics and institutions led to a brain drain, as highly skilled professionals sought better opportunities at home and abroad. Additionally, developmental universities struggled with limited autonomy because their priorities were often defined by state-imposed developmental agendas.

The neoliberal university developed in the 1990s and continues to dominate the landscape of African higher education. Shaped by the global rise of neoliberal policies, these institutions shifted towards market-oriented frameworks that emphasised efficiency, competition and privatisation. They have sought to diversify funding sources through tuition fees, private partnerships and revenue-generating programmes. They have also prioritised employability and market-driven curricula, positioning themselves within global academic networks and rankings. Key characteristics of neoliberal universities include the proliferation of private institutions and the privatisation of public universities. These institutions have emphasised the STEM disciplines, business and professional degrees, which have been perceived as having greater economic value. There has been an increased reliance on external funding from international donors and organisations. Additionally, managerialism and performance metrics have become dominant

features of university governance, reflecting a shift towards corporate management models. However, the neoliberal university has faced many challenges. Rising tuition fees have reduced accessibility for low-income students, aggravating social stratification. There has also been a decreased focus on the humanities and social sciences, which have been seen increasingly as less economically productive. This typology has further marginalised disciplines that are essential for fostering critical inquiry and societal engagement.

The evolution of African universities across these three regimes has had profound implications for their roles, financing, governance, social composition and institutional missions. In the nationalist era, universities were envisioned as nation-building institutions that produced bureaucrats and leaders and fostered cultural pride. During the developmental era, their role expanded to address practical development challenges by aligning research and education with national needs. Under neoliberalism, universities have focused on producing market-ready graduates and generating revenue, often at the expense of broader societal missions. Nationalist universities relied heavily on state funding, providing stability but limiting autonomy. Economic austerity during the developmental era reduced state support, leading to financial crises. Neoliberal universities have diversified their funding sources but have encountered new governance challenges, including administrative inefficiency and commercialisation pressures.

During the nationalist era, access to education expanded, but systemic inequalities persisted, with rural and marginalised communities of-

ten excluded. Efforts to include underrepresented groups intensified in the developmental era but were hindered by resource constraints. The neoliberal era has magnified social stratification through rising tuition fees, which have created barriers for low-income students. In terms of teaching and learning, nationalist universities emphasised national identity and intellectual autonomy. Developmental universities prioritised technical and professional education, whereas neoliberal institutions have shifted towards market-driven curricula tailored to employability. Research and scholarship followed a similar trajectory, with nationalist universities focusing on decolonising knowledge and addressing local issues, developmental universities pursuing applied research and neoliberal institutions aligning research with global priorities. Administrative models shifted from centralised state control to strained resources during the developmental era, to managerialism under neoliberalism, often undermining academic autonomy.

Nationalist universities prioritised student welfare, although resources were limited. The developmental era saw student services deteriorate due to austerity measures. Under neoliberalism, crises like Covid-19 exposed inadequacies in student support systems, particularly in areas like mental health, housing and food security. In public service, nationalist universities emphasised community engagement and national service. Developmental universities focused on development-oriented projects. In the neoliberal era, public engagement has often become secondary to market-driven goals, though some universities have continued to prioritise outreach as part of their mission.

Shifts in Academic and Intellectual Freedom

Academic freedom and intellectual freedom, while related, have distinct meanings in general and African contexts. Academic freedom refers to the rights of scholars within academic institutions to research, teach, publish and discuss ideas without interference from political, institutional or commercial interests. It emphasises the autonomy of universities and the protection of disciplinary expertise within institutional contexts. Intellectual freedom, on the other hand, extends beyond academic institutions to encompass the broader rights of individuals, including intellectuals, to express, critique and engage with societal, cultural and political issues in public domains.

In Africa, academic freedom has often been constrained by state interference, underfunding and pressures from structural adjustment programmes, limiting scholars' ability to freely engage in teaching and research. Intellectual freedom in Africa, however, has a broader focus, addressing issues such as decolonisation, national identity and socioeconomic justice. African intellectuals often engage in public discourse and resist authoritarianism, sometimes operating outside formal academic settings when universities are constrained by political or economic pressures. Whereas academic freedom is tied to institutional contexts, intellectual freedom emphasises public and societal engagement, although the two frequently intersect in practice.

Academic and intellectual freedom in Africa have evolved alongside the transformation of institutional frameworks, social composition and governance of universities. These shifts have shaped the opportunities and constraints faced

by academics and intellectuals, negatively impacting the creation and dissemination of knowledge across the continent.

The academic workforce has grown significantly across the nationalist, developmental and neoliberal eras, with distinct trends in each period. In the nationalist era, academic workforces were small and elite, primarily trained in colonial institutions, and their efforts were directed towards state-building. This era prioritised producing local professionals who could lead newly independent nations. During the developmental era, however, as African universities expanded to address development-focused education, the number of academics increased. Despite this growth, disparities in gender, regional representation and access to higher education remained prevalent. The neoliberal era has seen an explosion of private universities and a diversification of academic roles. Academics now juggle responsibilities such as teaching, research, administration and public engagement, which has often led to role strain and reduced emphasis on research excellence.

Intellectuals, too, experienced transformations across these periods. In the nationalist era, intellectuals were often synonymous with academics, deeply engaged in public debates about nation-building and cultural identity. The developmental era marked a shift; intellectuals aligned themselves increasingly with political and social movements, addressing issues like poverty, inequality and decolonisation. In the neoliberal era, intellectuals have become more independent, using platforms such as social media and think tanks to reach global audiences, often operating outside traditional academic institutions.

Changes in the social composition of academic and intellectual communities have mirrored broader sociopolitical and economic contexts in Africa. During the nationalist era, universities prioritised the inclusion of local scholars to replace colonial administrators and academics. This marked a critical step in decolonising knowledge systems and asserting national identity. Indigenous scholars came to dominate university faculties, but access to higher education remained limited to a small elite, including urban and middle-class populations. Marginalised groups, such as rural communities, women and economically disadvantaged populations, were often excluded by structural barriers, inadequate secondary education pipelines and cultural biases. Further, universities were typically concentrated in urban areas, which made accessing higher education opportunities more difficult for rural populations. In addition, despite the increasing inclusion of Indigenous scholars, colonial hierarchies and frameworks persisted, perpetuating systemic inequities.

In the developmental era, efforts to diversify academic communities aligned with national developmental priorities, particularly in technical fields such as agriculture, engineering and health sciences. Affirmative action policies and scholarship programmes were introduced to promote access for underrepresented groups, including women and rural populations. However, these efforts were severely constrained by the economic austerity measures imposed under SAPs. Budget cuts led to overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating infrastructure and declining education quality. Rising tuition fees and reduced student welfare services disproportionately affected mar-

ginalised groups, creating further barriers to access. Economic instability and underfunding drove many talented academics abroad, resulting in a brain drain that depleted universities of qualified and diverse faculty. Efforts to include women and rural students saw limited progress, with socioeconomic disparities and cultural biases persisting as significant obstacles.

In the neoliberal era, the proliferation of private universities has expanded the number of higher education institutions. In theory, this privatisation has increased access, but in practice, it has catered primarily to wealthier students, creating a stratified higher education system. Low-income students have been relegated to underfunded public universities or excluded entirely. The introduction of tuition fees in public universities has aggravated inequalities further, with women, rural populations and poor groups facing even greater challenges in pursuing higher education. Market-oriented reforms have emphasised STEM subjects, business and professional programmes, which have attracted a more diverse pool of students but often sidelined disciplines and policies aimed at promoting inclusion. The neoliberal focus on global rankings and profitability has obscured local knowledge systems and the humanities, which traditionally amplified marginalised voices. The digital divide and unequal access to technology have further excluded rural and underresourced populations from participating in higher education, particularly during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gender inequality has persisted across all eras. Although the representation of women in higher education has increased over time,

significant gaps remain in enrolment, faculty positions and leadership roles. Cultural and societal expectations have often discouraged women from pursuing higher education or academic careers, particularly in STEM fields. Rural and marginalised groups continue to face structural barriers to access and economic challenges have reinforced class-based exclusions. Across all periods, academic structures have largely marginalised Indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western epistemologies, limiting the diversity of intellectual voices.

Despite these prevailing challenges, opportunities to create more inclusive academic communities in Africa are emerging. Targeted affirmative action and scholarship programmes can help support underrepresented groups, such as women, rural populations and economically disadvantaged individuals. Expanding access to online education and digital resources has the potential to mitigate geographic and economic barriers. Reimagining curricula to integrate African epistemologies and interdisciplinary approaches can make higher education more inclusive and relevant. Africa's growing youth population represents an opportunity to expand access to education and foster a more diverse academic community, provided sufficient resources and policies are implemented.

Academic freedom has also undergone significant shifts across these eras. In the nationalist period, academic freedom was often compromised to support nationalist agendas. Governments censored dissent and controlled research outputs, and academics who critiqued the state faced dismissal, imprison-

ment or exile. However, resistance among academics during this period laid the groundwork for future frameworks, such as the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility.

During the developmental era, economic austerity measures weakened academic freedom as universities struggled under constrained budgets. Faculty and student protests against funding cuts, brain drain and political interference highlighted the precarious state of academic freedom. In the neoliberal era, academic freedom faces new threats from market-driven pressures. Performance-based funding models and donor influence on research agendas have marginalised critical disciplines such as the humanities and social sciences, limiting the scope of intellectual inquiry.

The Kampala Declaration

The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility emerged as a seminal framework for safeguarding academic and intellectual autonomy in Africa. It was conceived in response to the widespread repression of academic freedom during the nationalist and developmental eras, where state interference, censorship and authoritarian control often stifled intellectual inquiry. The declaration sought to establish a protective foundation for academics and intellectuals, ensuring their freedom to engage in research, teaching and public discourse. Furthermore, it emphasised the role of academics and intellectuals in advancing social justice and contributing to the public good, aiming to foster a culture of intellectual responsibility and societal engagement.

Despite its visionary goals, the Kampala Declaration has been significantly challenged in its implementation. Its adoption across African universities has been uneven, with many institutions lacking the political will or resources to embrace its principles fully. These limitations have left academics and intellectuals vulnerable to continued repression, political interference and the growing pressures of market-driven educational policies. The gap between the declaration's aspirational objectives and its practical enforcement has highlighted the difficulties of instituting systemic change within constrained and inequitable higher education environments.

In the contemporary era, the declaration is still a critical reference point for intellectual freedom in Africa, but it requires significant updates to address emerging challenges. The digitalisation of knowledge, for instance, has created new opportunities for intellectual exchange but has also raised concerns about access disparities, intellectual property and the influence of transnational tech monopolies. Similarly, the commercialisation of education has reshaped the priorities of universities, often sidelining disciplines that emphasise critical thinking and social responsibility. Transnational dynamics in knowledge production, dominated by Western publishing houses and ranking systems, have further complicated the autonomy of African academics and intellectuals. These changes necessitate a reconceptualisation of the Kampala Declaration to ensure its relevance in addressing the multifaceted realities of today's academic and intellectual ecosystems.

Conceptualising Academics and Intellectuals

CODESRIA has been called upon to lead this reconceptualisation, particularly in addressing the tensions between academics and intellectuals, as well as between academic and intellectual freedom. This task requires clarifying the roles and relationships of these groups within broader ideological and institutional contexts. Definitions of academics and intellectuals vary across intellectual traditions, each offering unique insights into their roles, contributions and societal responsibilities.

The liberal tradition, for example, views academics as experts who operate within formal institutions such as universities. Their work focuses on specialised teaching and research, often targeting peer-reviewed scholarly communities and adhering to rigorous methodological standards. Intellectuals, in contrast, are seen as individuals who engage with broader societal issues, transcending institutional and disciplinary constraints. Their contributions extend to public debates, cultural critique and advocacy for social progress, often serving as mediators between complex ideas and general audiences.

The Marxist tradition provides a more critical lens, highlighting the tension between academics and societal structures. It sometimes views academics as technocrats whose expertise supports the ruling class unless aligned with revolutionary movements. Conversely, intellectuals are understood through the concept of 'organic intellectuals', who emerge from and represent the working class. These intellectuals challenge exist-

ing power structures and produce knowledge that advances social transformation. Gramsci's contributions to this discourse further distinguish between 'traditional intellectuals', who maintain established systems of power, and 'organic intellectuals', who are embedded in the struggles of specific social groups. Academics often fall into the former category when they uphold disciplinary norms and institutional hierarchies, whereas intellectuals challenge hegemony and contribute to counterhegemonic movements.

The African nationalist tradition positions academics as state-builders, tasked with producing knowledge to support national development and cultural revival. Their roles have been closely tied to government agendas, particularly in education, governance and applied sciences. Intellectuals in this tradition have played pivotal roles as cultural revivalists and political activists. Figures like Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o critiqued colonial epistemologies while advocating for Indigenous perspectives and liberation struggles, underscoring the intersection of intellectual work and political activism.

In the postcolonial tradition, critiques of academia focus on its detachment from real-world issues and its complicity in perpetuating global inequalities in knowledge production. Academics, shaped by colonial or Western-centric education systems, are often viewed as products of these hierarchies unless actively engaged in decolonial efforts. Intellectuals in this framework emphasise the need for decolonisation, global justice and the inclusion of marginalised voices.

They often work beyond academic institutions, influencing public discourse and policy through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.

Recognising these varied perspectives, it becomes clear that academics and intellectuals share overlapping roles but also distinct functions. Both engage in the pursuit of knowledge and critical inquiry, shaping public opinion, cultural discourse and policy. Many individuals straddle these roles, producing disciplinary research while participating in public debates. However, differences in institutional context, audience, methodology, autonomy and focus create distinctions between the two.

Academics are typically tied to formal institutions and operate within established disciplinary frameworks, addressing specialised scholarly audiences and adhering to professional norms. Intellectuals, by contrast, engage with broader societal and political contexts, often working outside institutional boundaries to advocate for societal transformation. Their methodologies prioritise accessibility and relevance and they enjoy greater flexibility, albeit with fewer institutional resources and less support.

While these distinctions help to clarify roles and methodologies, they also risk oversimplifying the complex interplay between institutional and societal contexts. In practice, the boundaries between academics and intellectuals are often blurred, with many academics taking on public intellectual roles and intellectuals engaging in academic practices. This fluidity underscores the need for collaboration rather than division.

CODESRIA's role in addressing these tensions lies in fostering mutual understanding and collaboration between academics and intellectuals. The organisation can provide platforms for dialogue, interdisciplinary research and shared advocacy efforts. By emphasising the interdependence of these groups and their shared commitment to societal progress, CODESRIA can help bridge the divide and enable both to contribute effectively to Africa's intellectual and educational ecosystems.

CODESRIA, as a leading pan-African research organisation, holds a unique and strategic position in addressing the apparent divide between academics and intellectuals. Bridging this divide is crucial for advancing a unified vision of intellectual freedom and societal transformation in Africa. The proposed revision of the Kampala Declaration presents an opportunity to encapsulate efforts to harmonise the roles of academics and intellectuals while addressing the broader challenges and evolving contexts of African higher education. By fostering mutual understanding, clarifying roles and promoting structural reforms, CODESRIA can ensure that Africa's knowledge ecosystems are resilient, inclusive and impactful.

To begin with, clarifying and operationalising the definitions of academics and intellectuals is essential. CODESRIA should articulate precise definitions that highlight their complementary roles. Academics, often operating within formal institutions, contribute specialised disciplinary knowledge through research and teaching. Intellectuals, on the other hand, engage with broader societal, cultural and political issues, often outside formal academic

settings. Underscoring their interdependence rather than opposition will allow for a more integrated understanding of their roles. Highlighting examples of individuals who successfully straddle both identities can further demonstrate the potential for collaboration and mutual reinforcement.

Building collaborative platforms is another critical step. CODESRIA can organise interdisciplinary forums where academics and intellectuals can engage in open dialogue on shared societal challenges. These forums should prioritise respect for differing methodologies and audiences. Facilitating research collaborations that combine the methodological rigour of academics with the public engagement strengths of intellectuals will yield impactful outcomes. For instance, projects addressing climate change, governance or cultural preservation could blend evidence-based approaches with accessible outputs. Programmes enabling academics to engage with communities and intellectuals to collaborate on peer-reviewed research could foster stronger ties and shared learning.

Enhancing mutual recognition and understanding between academics and intellectuals is key to overcoming misconceptions and building trust. Highlighting shared goals, such as societal progress, critical inquiry and knowledge dissemination, can underscore their common purpose. Training and capacity-building initiatives can help both groups understand each other's methodologies and audiences. For example, academics could benefit from workshops on public communication, while intellectuals might learn to navigate academic publishing processes.

Reforming institutional and funding structures is also crucial for promoting collaboration. CODESRIA can design flexible funding models that support disciplinary research and interdisciplinary or public engagement projects. Joint funding applications, where academics and intellectuals collaborate on societal issues, should be encouraged. Furthermore, inclusive evaluation criteria should recognise non-academic outputs, such as contributions to policy discussions or public campaigns, alongside traditional academic achievements.

Bridging the gap between public and academic audiences requires creating accessible outputs and leveraging digital platforms. Academics should be encouraged to translate their research into policy briefs, blogs or public lectures, making their work accessible to broader audiences. Intellectuals, in turn, can be supported in producing evidence-based outputs such as case studies or collaborative research publications. Digital tools can facilitate this exchange by creating online platforms for sharing work and engaging diverse audiences.

Revising the Kampala Declaration offers an opportunity to explicitly address the roles of academics and intellectuals. Contextual updates should recognise the evolving challenges of neoliberalism, digital transformation and global knowledge production inequalities, which affect both groups in intersecting ways. An integrated framework should explicitly protect academic and intellectual freedom, emphasising their critical roles in fostering innovation, critical inquiry and public accountability. Actionable recommendations, such as encouraging institutional collaboration and mutual respect, should be included.

Showcasing exemplary practices can provide concrete models for collaboration. CODESRIA could highlight case studies of successful partnerships between academics and intellectuals within and outside its programmes. Role models who embody the dual roles of academics and intellectuals could be featured to inspire others and demonstrate the feasibility of integration.

Advocacy and public engagement are essential components of bridging this divide. CODESRIA can promote intellectual pluralism, valuing diverse methodologies and audiences as enriching to the collective knowledge ecosystem. Public campaigns can emphasise the societal importance of collaboration between academics and intellectuals, using media, events and publications to highlight shared objectives. Policy engagement with governments, educational institutions and funding bodies can encourage policies that foster mutual recognition and cooperation. For example, public engagement requirements in academic grants or support for interdisciplinary projects could be promoted.

Intergenerational and gender-inclusive dialogues should also be prioritised. Mentorship programmes can pair experienced academics and intellectuals with early-career individuals to guide them in navigating institutional and public spheres. Creating platforms to amplify the voices of women academics and intellectuals is particularly important, because their perspectives are often underrepresented in academic and public discourse.

Addressing structural inequalities is fundamental to achieving equity between academics and intellectuals. Regional and institutional disparities often increase

the divide, particularly between well-resourced and underfunded universities. CODESRIA can provide targeted support to underrepresented regions and institutions. Supporting knowledge production in African languages can make intellectual work more accessible to local communities and narrow the gap between scholarly and public audiences.

Lastly, cultivating a new knowledge paradigm that transcends the binary distinction between academics and intellectuals is imperative. This paradigm should foreground interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration, focusing on problem-solving and societal impact. Decolonising knowledge production must remain central, ensuring that academics and intellectuals prioritise African epistemologies and address global power imbalances in scholarship.

Forging Forward

An effective academic and intellectual freedom agenda for Africa must address contemporary challenges while harnessing emerging opportunities to build resilient, inclusive and transformative higher education systems. The realisation of this agenda requires collaboration among diverse actors, including universities, intellectuals, governments and civil society organisations. By fostering autonomy, closing the divides between academics and intellectuals and embracing innovative practices, Africa can create globally connected knowledge ecosystems that reflect its unique contexts and aspirations.

Contemporary challenges to academic and intellectual freedom in Africa are significant and multifaceted. Neoliberal pressures, characterised by the commerciali-

sation and privatisation of higher education, have shifted priorities towards market-driven curricula and research agendas. This trend has diminished disciplines such as the humanities and social sciences, because they are deemed less economically productive, and reduced funding for public universities, increasing their reliance on external donors. Political interference and authoritarian tendencies exacerbate these challenges, with persistent government control over university governance often resulting in censorship, repression of dissenting voices and the politicisation of academic institutions. These dynamics undermine institutional autonomy and intellectual independence.

Digital and global inequalities further constrain the academic landscape. Unequal access to digital infrastructure limits participation in global knowledge production, particularly for academics and intellectuals in underresourced regions. Dominance by Western publishing systems and rankings continues to sideline African epistemologies and perspectives. Socioeconomic inequalities compound these challenges, as rising tuition fees and privatisation create barriers for marginalised groups, reducing diversity in academia. Additionally, brain drain persists, with African scholars seeking better opportunities abroad, weakening local intellectual and academic capacity. Facilitating brain circulation between continental and diaspora institutions and individuals is an important antidote.

Fragmentation between academics and intellectuals further diminishes the collective impact of African knowledge systems. Tensions over methodologies, audiences and legitimacy hinder collaboration, pre-

venting the alignment of institutional academic work with public intellectual contributions.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for advancing academic and intellectual freedom in Africa. The ongoing digital transformation offers pathways to the wider dissemination of African scholarship. Increasing access to online platforms and tools enables the creation of digital repositories for Indigenous and local knowledge, making African intellectual resources globally accessible. Moreover, there is growing international recognition of the need to decolonise knowledge systems. This momentum, along with increased funding and support for initiatives that promote African epistemologies and decolonised curricula, creates an opportunity for African intellectuals and academics to assert their perspectives, methodologies and priorities.

Youth engagement is another critical opportunity. Africa's growing youth population represents a vibrant audience and a potential pool of contributors to intellectual and academic work. Student activism can drive reforms in academic freedom, inclusivity and institutional priorities. Institutional and policy innovations also play a vital role. Frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals emphasise the importance of education and intellectual engagement in achieving sustainable development. Organisations like CODESRIA provide platforms for advocacy and foster collaboration across disciplines and sectors.

Emerging networks and collaborations among African academics and intellectuals, both within the continent and in the diaspora, fur-

ther enhance knowledge-sharing and capacity-building. Increased cooperation between universities, think tanks and civil society organisations strengthens the societal relevance of academic work and expands its impact.

Several actors are central to advancing this agenda. Universities and academics remain at the forefront of producing and disseminating knowledge. However, they must adapt to changing societal demands and global pressures while safeguarding academic freedom through research, teaching and advocacy. Intellectuals and civil society are also key. Public intellectuals, whether inside or outside formal institutions, shape public discourse and advocate for social justice, while civil society organisations amplify marginalised voices and engage with academic outputs to inform policy and practice. Governments and policymakers hold significant power over the autonomy and funding of universities, making their alignment with principles of autonomy, inclusivity and societal relevance crucial. International organisations and donors, such as UNESCO and the African Union, influence higher education policies and funding priorities. Their support must align with African priorities to avoid perpetuating dependency. Finally, students and youth movements are beneficiaries and drivers of academic freedom, often leading campaigns for inclusivity, accessibility and decolonised curricula.

For an academic and intellectual freedom agenda to be effective, it must prioritise the following features. Autonomy and accountability are paramount. Universities must operate independently of political and commercial pressures while remaining accountable to

societal needs. Clear policies are needed to safeguard academic freedom, including protections against censorship and interference. Inclusivity and accessibility must be central to this agenda. Higher education should be accessible to marginalised groups, including rural communities, women and economically disadvantaged populations. The inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in academic and intellectual discourse is essential for fostering equity. Decolonised knowledge systems should underpin academic and intellectual work. This involves emphasising African epistemologies, languages and methodologies in curricula, research and public engagement. Platforms for preserving and disseminating Indigenous knowledge must also be established. Collaborative ecosystems are another critical feature. Partnerships between academics, intellectuals and civil society can bridge institutional and public knowledge spaces, addressing complex societal challenges through interdisciplinary approaches.

Digital innovation and connectivity are essential for ensuring Africa's participation in global academic networks. Investments in digital infrastructure will enable broader engagement and facilitate the sharing of African knowledge.

Digital tools can also create accessible, multilingual repositories of African intellectual work. Global and regional advocacy should strengthen frameworks like the Kampala Declaration to reflect contemporary challenges and opportunities. African leadership in global academic and intellectual networks is necessary to reshape global knowledge hierarchies.

Finally, evaluation and impact metrics must value public engagement, societal impact and interdisciplinary contributions alongside traditional academic outputs. Regular assessments of the effectiveness of academic and intellectual freedom policies should inform strategy adjustments and ensure progress. It must be understood that academic and intellectual freedom, like democracy, is always a work in progress that requires renewal through the struggles and creative energies of each generation in a constantly changing world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of African universities through the nationalist, developmental and neoliberal regimes reflects the continent's sociopolitical, economic and cultural shifts. These transitions have shaped the university's roles and missions, from nation-building and cultural revival to development-focused goals and, more recently,

market-oriented reforms. Although these changes have opened up opportunities, they have also imposed significant challenges, particularly for academic and intellectual freedom, which remains contested under state control, market pressures and global inequalities.

The Kampala Declaration is still a critical framework for safeguarding academic and intellectual freedom, but its relevance must be continually updated to address emerging challenges. Narrowing the divide between academics and intellectuals is equally vital for fostering collaboration and addressing Africa's societal needs. Institutions like CODESRIA are pivotal in advancing these efforts, promoting mutual understanding, reforming structural inequities and decolonising knowledge systems.

Moving forward, African universities must address challenges like neoliberal pressures, political interference and socioeconomic barriers while leveraging opportunities such as digital transformation, youth engagement and global calls for decolonisation. By fostering autonomy, inclusivity and innovation, Africa's higher education institutions can become engines of knowledge production and societal progress, reflecting the continent's unique heritage and aspirations while engaging with global knowledge systems.

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