

'The best is yet to come for Africa' - UP Africa Week 2023 concludes

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The University of Pretoria's (UP) annual Africa Week scientific leadership summit concluded with an outlining of the priorities that need to be pursued to advance Open Science on the continent. Open Science is a global movement to make information about scientific research easily accessible at all levels of society.



The Africa Week 2023 summit took place at UP's Future Africa Campus in Hatfield from 24 to 26 May 2023. Speaking on the last day, UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Tawana Kupe said, "If the discussions and conversations at Africa Week 2023 are anything to go by, we are largely in agreement that the best is yet to come for the continent of Africa – provided we are focused and intentional about working towards the 'Africa we want', to borrow the tagline from the African Union's Agenda 2063."

He said the agenda for the week was extensive and wide-ranging, but the thought leaders, academics, and government representatives participating in the summit had succeeded in staying focused on its overarching theme, 'Open Africa, Open Science.'

Prof Kupe reminded guests, participants, and the in-person and online audiences that staying focused is critical to Africa's future. He quoted from the African Union's website, which says it is imperative to focus on a "fewer number of priority areas which have continental impact", and to pursue these priorities through a "clear division of labour" and "effective collaboration".

"Extrapolating this to the work we have been doing this week, we are wrapping up Africa Week 2023 with a keen sense of why Open Science matters to Africa, and what priorities we need to pursue in advancing open science on the continent. Equally, we are concluding this event with a sound understanding of the 'division of labour' needed to take Open Science forward in Africa; and of the importance of pulling it all together coherently through collaboration, collaboration, and more collaboration."

Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Blade Nzimande, said it is crucial that African science leaders work together in building a common African science and technology research agenda to enable African societies to tackle major developmental challenges of their time.

“I wish to reiterate that such an agenda would need to facilitate much more effective pan-African policy interventions to direct our continent towards sustainable development,” Minister Nzimande said. “The mission of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024) is that we would see an acceleration of Africa’s transition to an innovation-led, knowledge-based economy through improved STI readiness in Africa as well as enhanced research, innovation, as well as entrepreneurial capacity, and the implementation of specific policies and programmes in STI, that seek to address societal needs in a sustainable way. This could pave the way for transformation, economic recovery, and reformation in the continent.”

Dr Ed Gerstner, director of Journals, Policy, and Strategy at German-British academic publishing company Springer Nature, and Dr Connie Nshemereirwe, director of the African Science Leadership Programme in Uganda, who participated in the Africa Week 2023 sessions, said the event was a success that really emphasised the importance of Open Science, and of collaboration as a means to tackle the continent’s most pressing challenges.

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