

## 2024 – 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

***External Vision/Mission:*** To address African priorities, which will be determined by partners and aligning with our strengths, through impactful engagement in knowledge creation and exchange with African partners and in collaboration with other Canadian and global partners.

***Internal Vision/Mission:*** To promote equity, diversity and inclusion in all programming, student recruitment, and hiring of faculty and staff at Western; to promote working in inter- and/or transdisciplinary partnerships; and to become a hub for Canada-Africa collaborations at global, national, and local levels.

### ***Guiding Principles:***

#### ***i. Community***

Create a community that is a voice, a connector, a champion of common issues, interests and goals pertaining to Africa.

#### ***ii. Collaboration***

Address major societal concerns through an approach that is rooted in respectful and reciprocal partnerships, synergy, collaborative and intersectional research. Create intentional and impactful change by fostering an environment that facilitates engagement, strategic communication and alignment of mutual strengths and goals.

#### ***iii. Capacity Building***

Offer bi-directional opportunities for capacity building to the Africa Institute members and African partners. Build the capacity of students by preparing them to work in careers in Africa and/or with organizations that operate in or impact Africa.

#### ***iv. Interdisciplinary Focus***

The primary focus of our research will be interdisciplinary, collaborative, and incorporate capacity building. A priority will be ensuring that diverse areas of research and expertise are showcased across fields addressing challenges from a systems science perspective. Research today is moving further away from single researcher, single discipline-focused research towards thematic, team-based collaborative initiatives, which the Institute will reflect.

#### ***v. Impactful Research***

It is essential to engage with African partners in addressing their needs, priorities, and ensure we are engaging and striving for reciprocal partnerships that also fit well within our member's

research strengths. Research aims and objectives will align with Western research strengths as well as with priorities of African countries and scholars and address major societal issues that will benefit both Africa and the global north.

## ***vi. Improved Engagement***

Strategic partnership building and long-term relationship sustainability will be a key area of focus. Engagement with partners in governments, organizations, not-for-profit organizations, academic institutions, and communities with a common purpose to build capacity of research and academic endeavors with the African continent will be strengthened.

## ***vii. Knowledge Exchange***

Improving our knowledge exchange will be tied in with improving engagement. Ensuring that partners are included throughout the process of the research from ideation, development, to implementation and outcomes impact will be a central practice. Constant updates to our website on current projects, research and activities will be vital. Taking advantage of remote learning's opportunities during COVID-19 and post-pandemic to increase engagement and knowledge exchange activities via technology. Further events such as seminar series, course exchanges, workshops will also all contribute to keeping members and partners engaged.

## ***viii. Lobbying/Advocacy for International Students***

Several barriers face many study visa applicants who come from an African country. The Africa Institute will endeavour to remain vigilant and aware of these barriers and play a greater role in advocating to improve and ensure equitable access to Canadian education and success of African students. This includes but is not limited to: provision of scholarships specific for African student applicants; advocating for different grading systems and a fair grading conversion; working with and supporting the Western International and Exchange Student Centre in addressing current Visa challenges faced by African students (government); playing a role in welcoming and engaging African students at Western; lobbying the central administration as well as Western International and the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for policy creation and action that will remove barriers African students face; support students and trainees in their education and transition to Canadian culture. An alumni network will be built, to provide a platform for current and past students to engage and share opportunities for networking and professional development - which is beneficial to foster a sense of community and sustainability, within the Institute. The Institute will ensure that at least 50 % of scholars engaged in all its programming will be women.

## ***x. Academic Programming***

We have a strong network of academic and research expertise at Western to offer Africa-focused programming at Western. We will ensure that a diverse representation of disciplinary areas will be covered by programming at the Institute, in addition to our established strengths in the health field. Moving forward, it will be key that programs are built in collaboration with African partners and with the flexibility to include virtual programs - especially due to conditions such as pandemic restrictions and conflicts.

## *xi. Sustainability*

Focus will be placed on long-term sustainable partnerships, and funding that will help build such partnerships to tackle major societal issues within the African continent. Partnership work that is deepened and strengthened through building rapport, meaningful relationships, and consistent sharing, will help ensure that we are aligning with our partners' goals and priorities. Funding opportunities should reflect the movement away from single researcher, single-discipline funding models and moving towards collaborative, team-based, long-term partnerships.

## **FUTURE DIRECTION AND GOALS OF THE AFRICA INSTITUTE**

On October 26, 2023, The Advisory Board of the Africa Institute revisited and refreshed the strategic plan of the Institute, and the following was decided upon, moving forward.

### **a) Research Priorities and approaches**

- Research will be **interdisciplinary and address major societal issues**, in close collaboration with African Partners, and in an equitable and integrated approach. The Institute started moving towards this direction, in the last 3 years.
- Defining a **critical mission is fundamental to sustainability** – the Institute will endeavor to make claims on specific areas of contribution, that can distinguish it, globally. The Institute will focus on future and emergent priorities, that have been identified by Africans.
- Ensure the research we co-create **makes an impact** in Africa and globally, by harnessing and focusing on our research strengths, and sharing and exchanging both with Africa and from Africa. The Institute will be mindful, aware, and responsible to countries' strategic plans and priorities for development.
- The Institute will use a **problem-centric and resource-centric model**, pooling resources so that abundance from some areas can be accessed by emerging clusters in others, thus helping to create a sustainable funding model.
- Given the large critical mass of scholars based in Schulich and Health Sciences, health research and scholarship has been a major area of focus. For the future, the Africa Institute will endeavour to put additional effort in co-developing programs in other fields as well, to reflect the **transdisciplinary nature of the Institute**, which encompasses scholars from most of the Western faculties.
- The Institute would like to view **funding as means rather than goals** - what is the ultimate goal that we can co-design and co-deliver, and that will not be contingent on funding?
- The Africa Institute is considering **lessons learnt through the pandemic restrictions** – how this has affected traditional models of operation and what are some alternative approaches that the Institute will use.

- Position the Africa Institute as a source of consultancy for government/media/business. The Institute will adopt systems thinking and capacity building, as a main priority.

## b) Knowledge Exchange

- It is important to make the Africa Institute **a hub** for symbiotic “multi-way” engagement and partnerships.
- By its very nature, the Institute operates virtually and therefore a vibrant and easy-to navigate **website** that showcases ongoing and completed projects, resources and lay summaries of research, is key to its success in exchanging knowledge.
- **Engaging African partners and African Missions in Ottawa** is important for connecting needs, priorities, evidence and actors bilaterally – it is crucial to understand what Knowledge Exchange is meaningful to them. This will also help in shifting away from a western-centric/colonial approach of imposition and tendency to focus on short term/unequal opportunities that favor one side of the partnership. The Institute will endeavour to engage in knowledge translation that is done in partnership with African stakeholders, to ensure commitment to impact and usability of research.
- The Institute will utilize **Scholarship@Western** in creating a **repository** of its work, which will also be a way of sharing and disseminating knowledge.
- The Institute will **co-create and host more events** - such as bringing in scholars, regular seminars with partners, summer schools, give access to courses to students at partner universities and vice versa, hold regular convening/mixers without agenda, for maximum participation. The Institute has already had success with this, through the African Conversation Series and the annual Africa-Western Collaboration Day.
- Promote **remote learning** to increase knowledge exchange by involving and recognizing African partners and what they bring to the table. The Africa Institute is currently offering an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization and Indigeneity (EDIDI) non-credit course for Canadian healthcare workforce on OWL, which was co-created with African partners. It is grant-funded and therefore available to students and people who would want to learn how the EDIDI Principles apply in healthcare settings in Canada and in Africa. Student-developed Case Studies will also be available soon, on Scholarship@Western.
- Using lessons learnt from the EDIDI non-credit course for healthcare workers, the intent is to co- develop with African partners, a certificate program that will include content on implications of the history of colonization and slavery as well as EDID; on various aspects of North- South relationships and monetize it.

## c) Enhancing Scholarship

- The Africa Institute will endeavor to **support and enhance diversity** of incoming and outbound students and trainees, by creating the connection between needs, researchers, and evidence, leading to meaningful scholarship.

- **Lobbying** central administration for including international students in budgets, for enabling more African students from our partner institutions to benefit from our partnerships.
- The Africa Institute will play **a role in welcoming and engaging African students** and in close collaboration with Western International, helping Western to become a prime destination for African students. The Institute could help to recruit learners and working with partners such as African embassies in Canada and Canadian embassies in Africa, offer packages of materials for their transition to Western; offer regular communication and have a student-led welcoming committee and so on. The Institute will clearly outline its role and benefits of associating with it. There are however measures that need to be considered by Western, to make this work:

### *Ways to support students/trainees.*

- a) **Recognize grading differences.** Western is missing out on top African students due to grade conversion; also broaden advertising outside of just universities, in Africa.
- b) Create a budget for **funding for TOEFL qualifying semester/year** for promising African francophone scholars – The Africa Institute sees the need to pay more attention to the francophone link our country holds.
- c) Develop Western fellowships for African students.
- d) Create Joint degree programs and build capacity in the African institutions.
- e) Pair Canadian and African students and with local people with knowledge of culture.
- f) Strengthen the Africa Institute Canada-Africa Young Scholars Coalition (CAYSC) that includes Undergraduate and Graduate students, Postdoctoral Fellows and other types of Trainees and Alumni, with the ultimate goal being to create a network across Canadian post-secondary institutions.
- g) Develop a cohort of students who would seek careers in Africa's organizations such as the African Union for career development and opportunities, this would be a great learning opportunity for our students
- h) Work with pre-existing alumni networks to help achieve this goal, from both student organizations as well as organizations such as the Canadian Association of African Studies to achieve a broad and inclusive national network.

## **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

- The Africa Institute has established new strategic partnerships, which help move its agenda and Western's interests forward, whilst at the same time, providing reciprocal benefits to our African partners. For example, we have managed to get government funding that will bring 15 African PhD and Early Career Scholars to Western and three Western and University of Waterloo Scholars to West African universities since 2022, for short research stays. Through these partnerships, we are also exploring a MasterCard Foundation opportunity that could fund more African students to come to Western for full or sandwich degree programs. These initiatives require strong and viable partnerships, which are respected in Africa. We are happy that we have managed to forge new strong partnerships with reputable universities in Anglophone and Francophone African countries. We have also signed an agreement with the Pan

African University of Water, Climate Change and Energy Sciences based in Algeria, and this is also our gateway and access to the other 4 centers of excellence of the African Union in this Pan African University System. Impactful Pan African collaborations will greatly be facilitated by this partnership. Further, the Institute continues to develop partnerships with other Canadian schools and institutes, that have similar goals.

- Foster, stimulate and support development of project proposals and work with Advancement and Development to identify seed funding sources. We will diversify the funding portfolio to include traditional and non-traditional funding - including ethical philanthropy.
- Strategically pursue large grants that will help build capacity for the Institute and attract top international researchers, scholars, and international trainees working in areas with and for African partners. The Institute will build relationships on the global stage and go after big funds.
- Large grant programs – including educational grants will support the mission of the institute; be a source of policy for government; and generate contracts.
- The Institute could generate revenue by playing a role in improving marketing to African self-sponsored students, both undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral, to make Western a top choice destination for students from the continent.
- Re-design the website to reflect the new focus of the Institute and use it to attract investors in research and scholarship.

## **FOCUS ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY INCLUSION, DECOLONIZATION, AND INDIGENEITY**

The Africa Institute interweaves equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and indigeneity (EDIDI) practices throughout its work. In recognition of the President's Anti-Racism Working Group's report of May 2020, the Africa Institute supports and stands with the following recommendations:

“Review and improve workforce planning processes to encourage and incentivize the hiring, recruitment, and retention of more racialized people into staff and faculty positions in accordance with EDI principles and practices (i.e., continue with EDI CRC, Postdocs, and cluster hires). Work with Human Resources and employee groups/unions to establish goals and remove barriers where they exist.”

“Increase the number of courses and programs focused on the study of and scholarship by racialized groups (e.g., Black studies, Indigenous studies, Jewish studies, Islamic studies, etc.). Greater emphasis should be placed on hiring academics who study race related subject areas and are able to provide more opportunities for students to study race and decolonization.”

“Introduce specific bursaries and scholarships for racialized students to make it more accessible for them to attend Western and to help ensure they do not experience financial hardship while they are attending.”