

IUA4DEV 2026



SUMMER UNIVERSITY FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

“LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: ACTORS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.”

ACCELERATING BALANCED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA
THROUGH RESEARCH AND ACTION



CONCEPT NOTE

FROM 28 TO 31 JULY 2026

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CONTEXT

Development has, for several decades, represented the ultimate horizon towards which contemporary societies strive. It is no longer understood solely as an economic ambition measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, but rather as a multidimensional quest aimed at sustainably improving living conditions, reducing inequalities, and ensuring greater social inclusion.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its Human Development Reports, emphasizes that genuine development cannot be measured only by the wealth produced, but also by the way in which it is distributed, by the strengthening of human capabilities, and by the respect for the dignity of every citizen.



In this context, the notion of sustainable development has redefined priorities and broadened the scope of reflection. Since the Rio Summit in 1992, and even more so with the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda in 2015, the international community has enshrined the principle that any development strategy must reconcile three fundamental dimensions: economic growth, social equity, and environmental preservation.

For Africa, this paradigm is particularly crucial. The continent, endowed with abundant natural and human resources, faces a dual challenge: ensuring a level of growth capable of meeting the needs of a young and rapidly expanding population, while preventing this growth from undermining environmental and social balances.

The 2022 report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) underscores that the continent remains lagging behind on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably the eradication of poverty, gender equality, access to clean energy, and the fight against climate change.

However, despite the significant progress achieved over the past two decades, structural imbalances persist and continue to hinder transformative dynamics. The African Development Bank (AfDB), in its African Economic Outlook Report (2023), emphasizes that the continent's growth, although often above the global average, remains insufficiently inclusive and weakly transformative. In other words, it benefits major urban centers far more than rural areas, thereby deepening territorial and social divides. Large segments of the population—particularly youth and women—remain excluded from the benefits of modernization. Moreover, rapid and sometimes poorly planned urbanization generates new vulnerabilities, especially in terms of housing, access to basic social services, and decent employment opportunities.



In addition to these internal imbalances, external vulnerabilities further exacerbate the challenges facing the continent. Africa is highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, with significant consequences for agriculture, food security, infrastructure, and traditional livelihoods. According to the World Bank (Africa Climate and Development Report, 2022), Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world most affected by climate-related shocks, despite contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions. This paradox heightens the pressures on states and local authorities, which are already struggling with limited resources and rising social demands.

It is at the intersection of these realities and aspirations that the idea of the **Summer University for Africa's Development (IUA4DEV)** was conceived. The central theme of this inaugural edition is: **"Local Development in Africa: Actors, Challenges, and Opportunities for Sustainable Growth."** This initiative seeks to be more than an academic forum: it aspires to establish a pan-African and international platform for dialogue, research, and action—bringing together scientific knowledge, practical experience, and policy decision-making with a common objective: **to accelerate balanced territorial development in Africa through research, innovation, and collective action.**

MAIN GOALS

IUA4DEV 2026 aims to provide a strategic platform where researchers, public policymakers, local authorities, civil society organizations, development partners, and the private sector can come together to:

- **Analyze in depth the dynamics of local development** in Africa and their implications for governance, social inclusion, and economic sustainability.
- **Identify the key actors in local development** and highlight their roles in shaping public policies and community-driven initiatives.
- **Explore opportunities for sustainable and inclusive growth**, particularly through social innovation, ecological transition, digital transformation, and local entrepreneurship.
- **Propose concrete and transferable solutions** to strengthen local governance, reduce territorial inequalities, and enhance community resilience.
- **Create an intersectoral and interdisciplinary framework** that fosters synergies between states, local governments, civil society, the private sector, the diaspora, and international partners.
- **Build the capacities of local and national stakeholders** through high-level training and the dissemination of best practices drawn from African and international experiences.



RESULTS

At the conclusion of this first edition, several strategic outcomes are expected:

- **The adoption of the “Abidjan Declaration on Local Development in Africa”,** synthesizing the priorities, challenges, and commitments of the various stakeholders.
- **The production of a Compendium of Communications and Local Experiences,** designed to inform policymakers, local authorities, and technical and financial partners.
- **The establishment of thematic pan-African networks** bringing together researchers, local governments, and development institutions.
- **The emergence of pilot projects and strategic partnerships** aimed at testing new approaches to governance and territorial cooperation..
- **The formulation of a pan-African roadmap** to strengthen the impact of local initiatives and promote sustainable and inclusive growth across the continent

TARGET

- **Actors from the scientific and academic community**
- **Financial and development partners**
- **International development assistance institutions**
- **Civil society organizations (CSOs) and social actors from across Africa committed to sustainable development**
- **Government representatives**
- **Private sector enterprises**
- **Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECs)**
- **The African diaspora**
- **Participants from around the world, engaging through the virtual forum and various social media and communication platforms**

METHODOLOGY



PLENARY SESSIONS AND THEMATIC PANELS

The IUA4DEV Summer University will open with a series of high-level plenary sessions and thematic panels, designed as strategic spaces for intellectual exchange. Led by researchers, experts, institutional leaders, and field practitioners, these sessions will explore key issues related to local development through the lens of the social sciences. They aim to foster critical dialogue, interdisciplinary perspectives, and actionable insights for policy and practice.



INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS AND THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

Running parallel to the plenaries, small-group workshops and thematic working sessions will offer participants the opportunity to explore specific topics in greater depth. These sessions will emphasize direct exchange, co-construction of knowledge, and the development of practical, context-sensitive recommendations.

A call for papers and participation will be disseminated via the official IUA4DEV website and its social media platforms, encouraging broad engagement from scholars, practitioners, and emerging professionals across the continent and the diaspora. Participants will be selected based on rigorous criteria, ensuring balanced representation in terms of geography, discipline, and generational diversity.



VIRTUAL FORUM

IUA4DEV will include a strong digital and interactive component, with live-streaming of key sessions on multiple online platforms.

Virtual engagement spaces will allow remote participants—including researchers, students, diaspora members, and international partners—to follow debates, ask real-time questions, and contribute to discussions.

Video highlights, podcast episodes, visual summaries, and curated panel excerpts will be published in real time across social media, significantly expanding the event's reach and visibility at both pan-African and global levels.



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND GUIDED TOURS

Beyond its intellectual ambitions, the IUA4DEV Summer University will also serve as a space for cultural celebration and human connection.

Evening cultural events will showcase the artistic, musical, and culinary heritage of the participating countries, offering a warm and informal setting for networking and intercultural exchange.

To conclude the program on an inspiring note, a guided tour of Abidjan will be organized on the final day, allowing participants to explore the city's historic landmarks and urban dynamics in direct resonance with the themes addressed during the university.

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