



## Tangaza University VC Opens Service Learning Conference

This year's theme, of the Service Learning Conference christened *"Promoting Freedom and Dignity of Persons: A Call for Climate Justice and World Peace among Catholic Higher Education Institutions"* reflects our deep commitment to addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing our world today.

These are the remarks, articulated by the Tangaza University Vice Chancellor Rev. Prof. Patrick Mwanja when he officially opened the 3rd Annual Africa Conference on Service-Learning. He wished the participants fruitful discussions, as the partnerships between the various partners were strengthened, even as they realize the vision for a better world.

Rev. Mwanja described Service Learning as an anchor for the university that enables us to identify and articulate our Core Values, such as the Preferential Option for the Poor, Academic Excellence, Integrity, Collaboration, Ministerial Priesthood, Interreligious Dialogue, and Inclusiveness. These values, he added, guide us as we strategize and implement our University Strategic Goals and Plans, fulfilling our motto to *"Teaching Minds, Touching Hearts, and Transforming Lives."*

The Vice Chancellor, noted that education at Tangaza University is not just about the acquisition of knowledge but about the formation of individuals who are committed to justice, peace, and the care of our common home. The Service Learning conference, he explained, is therefore a testament to that belief. It marks a vital moment in our collective journey towards fostering a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

He pointed out that the conference was not just another event, but represents a critical link between theory and community practice, highlighting the transformative power of experiential learning. Service Learning, he added, is more than just a concept; it is a fundamental approach that allows us to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world impact.

The professor noted that he was particularly proud to note that Tangaza University's dedication to Service Learning has not only enriched the educational offerings but has also been instrumental in the recent achievement of receiving the charter award. This prestigious recognition showcases the university's commitment to holistic education

university's commitment to holistic education that extends beyond the classroom.

He expressed joy at Tangaza being the Africa Hub for the Uniservitate program, a role that places the university at the forefront of promoting Service Learning across the continent. He expressed commitment to ensuring that Service Learning becomes a cornerstone of Higher Education in Africa.

Rev. Mwanja expressed hope that as institutions that shape the minds and hearts of future leaders, the universities have a profound responsibility to advocate for climate justice and to work tirelessly towards peace. The conference is therefore an opportunity for us to explore how we can integrate these values into our curricula, research, and community engagement, he added.

He asked the gathering to envision a future where our institutions are not just places of learning but also beacons of hope, justice, and peace. The VC asked the participants to commit to build partnerships that transcend borders, fostering dialogue and understanding among different cultures and religions, and nurturing a generation of leaders who are not afraid to stand up for what is right.

Other partner institutions represented in the conference were the University of Kisubi in Uganda, the Catholic University of Central Africa in Cameroon, Mwenge Catholic University in Tanzania, Loyola University of Congo in DRC, and the recently added Catholic University of Ghana and Catholic University of Malawi.



Rev. Mwanja thanked the various partners, like Porticus and CLAYSS, for their unwavering support, and commitment to promote Service Learning in Africa.

Others present during the conference were Barbara McCrabb, Assistant Director for Higher Education, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Prof. Maria Cinque, Professor of Teaching Methodologies and Special Pedagogy and Director of the Center of Service-Learning, Rome Italy, representatives of Catholic Higher Education Institutions from across Africa among others.

## 3rd Annual Africa Conference on Service Learning

The 3rd Annual Africa Conference on Service Learning, held here last week brought together students, educators, and representatives from Catholic Higher Education Institutions across the globe.



The conference was a unique platform for participants to reflect on the role of service learning to address global challenges, foster sustainability, and promote peace across Africa and the world. This aligns well with Pope Francis' call to "*care for our common home*".

The two-day event under the theme; *Service Learning in Promoting Freedom and Dignity of Persons: A Call for Climate Justice and World Peace among Catholic Higher Education Institutions* addressed the importance of service learning in addressing social and ecological issues while inspiring active citizenship among students.

The conference was officially opened by the Tangaza University Vice Chancellor Rev. Prof. Patrick Mwanja. He welcomed the participants to the university and to the country; for those who came from across Kenya's borders.



The Vice Chancellor underscored Tangaza's commitment to integrating service learning as a transformative approach to education.

The first day's keynote speaker Prof. Barbara McCrabb, who is the Assistant Director for Higher Education at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, set the tone for discussions in her speech on *Christian Anthropology and Ecology*.



Prof. Maria Cinque, who gave the keynote address on the second day, focused on the *Interconnectedness of World Peace and the Dignity of Human Persons*.

The conference also brought to light Service Learning experiences through presentations of research grants by universities from Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, and Tanzania. They all showcased their efforts to institutionalize service learning across the region.

Other panels explored themes such as Partnership for Peace and Youth Empowerment for Peace, whose collaborative efforts foster peace and social justice. Notable highlights were a project on the psychosocial support for prison officers and youth animators' capacity building program at the Archdiocese of Nairobi.

Other critical topics discussed during the conference covered areas in Climate Justice and Poverty in Africa; and Climate Action Now. The deliberations featured expert voices from Uniservitate networks and accompanying institutions in Africa.

*"Unlocking Prison Boundaries: Service Learning Psychosocial Support to Prison Officers in Kenya"* by Tangaza University, and *"Digital Innovative Skills Hub (DISH)"* were recognized as outstanding projects of 2024. The two, were celebrated for their positive social impact in the community.

Other key participants were Dr. Judith Pete, the Uniservitate Africa Hub Coordinator, exhibitors, Tangaza University faculty and students.

## Launch of the Africa University Network on Fair Open Science

This is the speech delivered by the Tangaza University Vice Chancellor Rev. Prof. Patrick Mwanja during the launch of the Africa University Network on Fair Open Science.

The aspirations of the Africa University Network on FAIR Open Science strives to enhance capacities for all its members by ensuring that African academia is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Re-usable. This resonates with the values the founders of Tangaza University in 1980s envisaged. To be a university that prepares ethical servant leaders across Africa in an environment of freedom and responsibility by promoting quality education, research and community service, the VC said, during the launch of the AUN on FAIR Open Science.

He explained that the academic FAIR opens up collaboration within Africa to promote African science and make it visible to current and upcoming researchers. Tangaza University embraces this new initiative, as AUN pushes for data production to contain emerging viruses, like malaria, TB, HIV, Monkey pox (MPOX) to avoid past mistakes.



As a university, the VC noted that Tangaza is fortunate to have collaborated with different health facilities under the auspices of the Ministry of Health in Kenya. He further explained that there were ICT technical persons and data stewards taking part in workshops run by SNOMED, VODAN and technical teams from Leiden and Mekelle Universities. Rev. Mwanja explained that trainees, from Beacon of Hope, Mutuini, Pumwani and Mathare North Hospitals, and close friends from Strathmore University are holed at Tangaza University, to appreciate different applications in data production.

Prof Mwanja recalled the enthusiasm the introduction of sustainable development goals in 2015 had brought, as the previous millennium goals had failed to live to expectations. He observed that developing nations across Africa responded with what was then called the African promise. The aim, he said, was to live in the spirit of sustainable goal 17 where the international community would strive to create a better, fairer world by 2030.



To achieve this promise required the international community to build a strong global partnership to end poverty. He however regretted that the introduction of research on the covid19 virus outbreak, the higher education institutions present, including Tangaza University, noticed an immediate concern. While developed nations could buy and control all the vaccines to contain the spread of covid-19, Africa could not compete with them.

A critique on that negative situation, Rev Mwanja said, was led by vice chancellors across Africa, some of whom were present at the launch; VC Mpeza from Uganda, VP Prof Eyasu from Mekelle University, VC Prof Francisca of Nigeria, Prof Van Reisen, and many researchers in the audience. They continued to make strong points on the importance of Africa taking the lead in deciding on data production, localization and ownership.

This argument, the VC explained, was made even stronger when VODAN Africa, in a joint conference with the Pan African Parliament and European Union in February 2022, made a resolution that future health data from all other disciplines, produced in Africa should be controlled, owned and localized at facilities that produced it.



In another conference, the Professor explained, the World Health Organization (WHO) Secretary General made a strong point to the G7, when he criticized the G7 Countries for purchasing and owning all covid 19 vaccines in the present and future. He added that Gordon Brown, former PM of Britain echoed the same sentiments at a EU leaders conference by calling it 'vaccine apartheid'. The wealthiest nations are still controlling vaccine production, distribution, and rights, he noted, while third world countries were experiencing debilitating economic, social and health associated aftermaths of the covid-19 with almost zero aid.

Rev. Mwanja explained that by creating Africa University Network, it would be a sure way to say there will be no more siphoning of important data, not just in health but across all disciplines from Africa. The network is expected to strengthen and revitalize global partnerships to support research in Fair data science.

The VC clarified that while quality education is at the heart of the African Promise, equipping Universities and institutions of higher learning with capacity to strengthen country specific resource mobilization can be achieved through research in data production across Africa.

He thanked Prof. Mirjam, van Reisen and everyone involved in organizing the launch, including the Leiden Team, Kai,



Kristina, Dr Aklilu and others.

The Professor also took time to thank Prof Mpezamihigo, the Vice Chancellor of Equator University of Science and Technology Uganda, Prof Eyasu, Vice President of Mekelle University, and other colleague Vice Chancellors who graced the event, and those following online, for the great initiative of creating AUN.

## What is the Africa University Network on Fair Open Science?

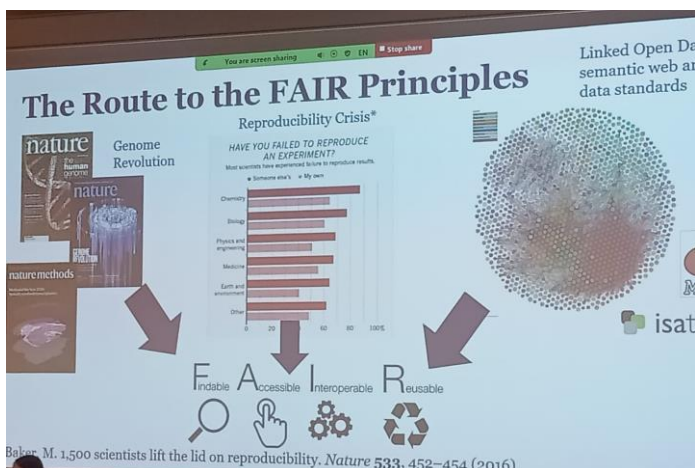
The Africa University Network on Fair Open Science is a collaboration in research between different universities on the continent.

Within the cooperation, these institutions of higher learning can create avenues for exchange among staff and students among other activities.

The Africa University Network on Fair Open Science started with MOU signed between Tangaza University and Tilburg University in 2019. At the start of 2020 COVID-19 situation there had been discussion around running a research on digital Health Data privacy.

The support from Tilburg University helped Tangaza University move towards research on how the Kenyan health space understands its own health scope in keeping health data safe and private under the Data Protection act 2019.

Surprisingly, there was a discovery of over 263 organizations handling digital Health data in Kenya. This means that there would be a gap in implementing data policies in the country and Africa without data interoperability. The data gap generated new ideas on data coming from student research, by looking at how others can access our research data to improve value addition to what exists.



The collaboration brought in universities from across Africa; Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Tunisia in collaboration with universities in Europe, USA and Asia.



This interest in data production and research has brought university vice chancellors together to form the Africa University Network on Fair Open Science. The Tangaza University Vice Chancellor, Prof. Patrick Mwanja was appointed the interim Vice President while the Mekelle University Vice Chancellor is the President.

## Ecclesiam Suam: 60 Years On An IRDIS Conference

The Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies (IRDIS) of Tangaza University, in collaboration with her partners, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome, the Catholic Mediterranean Institute (IMC) in Marseille, Harmony Institute in Nairobi, and support from AGIAMONDO in Germany, last week celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Encyclical on the Church; *Ecclesiam Suam* (81:2).

The Papal Letter, which is Latin for “His Church” was signed by Paul VI on 6th August 1964, during the Second Vatican Council. This was soon after succeeding Pope John XXIII who died on 3rd June 1963.

When Pope Paul VI issued this letter, he was inspired by the new spirit and boldness prevailing during the Second Vatican Council. This was both in terms of openness to other religions and to the world, that encouraged the Church to confidently look at and engage with the changing times.

The Church needed to enter into dialogue at different levels, not just with other religions but also with the secular world at large, with fellow Christians and more so the church needed to practice dialogue within itself.

The Pope envisaged that “our dialogue must be accompanied by that meekness which Christ bade us learn from Himself: “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart”.

“It would be a disgrace if our dialogue were marked by arrogance, the use of bared words or offensive bitterness. What gives it its authority is the fact that it affirms the truth, shares with others the gifts of charity, is itself an example of virtue, avoids peremptory language, makes no demands. It is peaceful, has no use for extreme methods, is patient under contradiction and inclines towards generosity.”



*His Grace Bishop Alfred Rotich of Kericho Diocese*

The document gave a theological foundation to interreligious dialogue; and to celebrate 60 years of this document, IRDIS organized, a one-day conference to discuss different themes raised by the encyclical. The event was graced by the presence of His Grace, Bishop Alfred Rotich of Kericho Diocese.

In his keynote speech, Bishop Rotich reminded the audience that the 60s were riddled with a lot of uncertainties and people were full of

anxiety. The Pope, like a pilot of a plane, boldly took charge of the situation and reassured his followers by providing a flight plan, a strategic plan.

In commemoration of such a great Papal Encyclical, IRDIS with her partners intended to remind themselves of the impact the Encyclical has had especially in interreligious dialogue.



*Dr. Daniel Kitonga, the Tangaza University  
DVC ARS*

The conference, entitled “*Ecclesiam Suam: Sixty Years On*” evokes how long the encyclical has been around, and that, it is opportune time to make an evaluation is a chance to reemphasize the importance of the official teachings of the Church in interreligious dialogue.

It is expected that this will help participants rediscover the pertinence of such a document for interreligious dialogue. In other words, the Church is to first do a sincere introspection before taking into account the realities surrounding it.

With the inspirations drawn from the Encyclical, the symposium reflected on the contemporary and future avenues of interreligious dialogue. As a concrete approach, there was a Muslim voice to give an Islamic perspective on dialogue as proposed by the Encyclical. The conference was held both online and onsite with presentations done online by our partners and others.