



## Resources in Africa

### International Conference GAPSVM18

Thursday 4 December 2025 at The Krook in Ghent, Belgium

#### 1. Call for papers

The [Ghent Africa Platform](#) (GAP) is pleased to announce its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium (GAPSVM18), themed "Resources in Africa". The symposia organised by the Ghent University Association (AUGent) Africa Platform have been trendsetting in the Belgian academic landscape over the last 18 years, providing a unique interdisciplinary forum to showcase academic research conducted in collaboration with African-based partners. These gatherings have fostered meaningful dialogue and collaboration across disciplines, contributing to a deeper understanding of Africa's complexities and opportunities.

The multidimensional concept of *Resources* and its relation to present-day Africa is the focus of this 18<sup>th</sup> multidisciplinary conference of the AUGent Africa Platform. Resources in Africa are central to global discussions on sustainability, development, and equity. GAPSVM18 will delve into how resources - through their economic, political and social significance - shape Africa's socio-economic, environmental, and cultural landscapes and define Africa's position in today's capitalist globalisation.

The conference encourages cross-disciplinary and innovative approaches to the following sub-themes:

#### **1-Histories and contemporalities of extractivism of African natural resources**

The extraction of ever-greater amounts of natural resources from the earth, propelled by commercial interests, is leading to increasing exploitation and destructive activities in Africa. Capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by a deepening extractivism, defined as the accumulation of wealth through extraction of a broad range of natural and human resources from colonies and ex-colonies and the exportation of this wealth to the centres of global capital. As a colonial legacy, extractivism (and the absence of processes of structural transformation through exportation of primary commodities like mining, oil, gas, water, land etc) today remains a dominant feature of most African economies. The commodification of nature and privatisation of resources entailed has led to serious environmental damages, and forced African countries into a subservient position in the global economy, thereby sustaining and deepening global inequalities.

We welcome papers that critically examine:

- Socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of extractivism in Africa;
- Historicity and coloniality of contemporary resource extraction from Africa;
- Historical and contemporary forms of African resistance against extractivism.

## **2- Contested resources, politics and war**

In Africa, as in most other parts of the world, access to natural resources such as land, minerals, water and forests is vital for one's basic survival. Control over these resources, therefore, implies control over people's livelihoods, turning these control mechanisms into a valuable asset to obtain political power. Since access to resources is central to (colonial as well as postcolonial) politics of state-building in Africa, natural resources become particularly contested in those contexts where state authority is challenged by political instability and violent conflict. As such, resources can turn into a crucial political asset in contemporary (violent and non-violent) internal and cross-border conflicts in Africa. Within this larger topic, we welcome papers that:

- Analyse the politicisation of resource access;
- Study local complexities of daily contested resource governance;
- Study the relation between access to resources and public authority;
- Critically analyse the contested notion of 'resources wars'.

## **3- Land rights and the consequences of land acquisition in Africa**

As elsewhere in the Global South, land rights continue to be a source of widespread contention on the African continent. Against the backdrop of ongoing land reform and restitution programs, land grabs, occupations and expropriations of various scales regularly occur. These land contestations give rise to a series of pressing questions: How are these actions directed and mediated by African states? How are land-related issues contested by various actors at the grassroots level, such as local communities, NGOs, and civil society organisations? What is the role of the private sector, including international multinational companies? What are the environmental, cultural and economic impacts of these developments? Is land ownership in these contexts regarded as an asset, container of natural resources, symbol of historical (in)justice, or a combination of all these factors?

## **4-Africa and the race for critical raw materials**

Africa holds 30% of the world's mineral reserves, many of which are critical to renewable and low-carbon technologies including solar, electric vehicles, battery storage, green hydrogen, and geothermal. Africa's resources are central to the continuing rise in global demand for minerals and metals such as lithium, graphite and cobalt to meet 'clean energy' and 'decarbonisation' objectives. Many of these so-called 'critical minerals' are also increasingly taking centre stage in global geopolitics, especially in the increasing competition between the US and China. Competition for access to the continent's critical materials will only continue to increase, placing Africa at the heart of the green energy future, both in environmental and geopolitical terms. This thematic angle hopes to further elaborate not only on the emerging vulnerabilities and negative local effects of this rush for African minerals, but also on the perspectives of African-initiated forms of "green justice" for a sustainable, fair and just energy transition.

## **5-Renewable energy and energy transition**

Africa has unique opportunities and specific challenges for the development and implementation of renewable energy. With its vast and diverse natural resources, including abundant solar, wind, hydro and geothermal potential, the continent is well-positioned to lead in the transition to sustainable energy. The growing demand for energy and energy access, coupled with the need for economic development and environmental sustainability, makes a fair energy transition a critical challenge for Africa's future. This call for papers invites researchers, practitioners and policymakers to contribute their insights and findings on renewable energy in the African context.

### *Suggested topics:*

- Technological challenges in solar, wind and hydro energy: Innovations in photovoltaic technology, solar thermal applications, and off-grid solar solutions. Wind resource assessment, turbine technology advancements, and integration of wind power into national grids. Small-scale hydro projects, environmental impacts of hydropower, and community-based hydro initiatives.
- Geothermal and Bio Energy: Exploration of geothermal resources, technological developments, and case studies of geothermal projects. Biomass and biofuel production, sustainable agricultural practices, and waste-to-energy technologies.
- Energy Storage: Advances in battery technology, energy storage systems, and their role in stabilising renewable energy supply.
- Grid Integration: Challenges and solutions for integrating renewable energy into existing power grids, smart grid technologies, and grid resilience and stability.
- Policy and Regulation: Analysis of renewable energy policies, regulatory frameworks, and incentives for renewable energy adoption. Fair energy transition.
- Economic and Social Impact: Economic benefits of renewable energy, access to energy, job creation, and social implications of energy transitions.

## **6-Climate change, loss & damage to natural resources**

The availability and quantity of natural resources (water, arable soil, timber, etc.) across the African continent is highly unevenly distributed mainly because of strong north-south and east-west gradients in hydroclimatic conditions, i.e. the amount and seasonal distribution of rainfall. Meteorological records, historical documents and natural climate archives such as (ancient) lake sediments provide abundant evidence that hydroclimate conditions, and thus the carrying capacity of the natural environment for human use, have also been highly uneven through time, such that the cultural and economic history of most African nations is punctuated by diverse calamities caused by climate-driven environmental change. Evidently also the prospects for future living conditions, natural resource availability and economic development in any one region of the African continent depend on how continued global warming will impact the quantity and seasonal distribution of local rainfall. However, there is still great uncertainty in prognoses of future hydroclimate conditions at the regional scale, and thus which type and intensity of human activity, and associated density of human population, the local natural environment can (continue to) support. In recent years, poorly-founded prognoses of increasing future rainfall combined with development of drought-resistant crop varieties have stimulated commercial agriculture (and subsistence farming by employees) in regions ill-suited for such activities; while at the same time, an accelerating frequency of weather extremes (droughts, flooding) is causing debilitating disruption and conflict

between groups of people with different claims to the same limited land and water resources. Within this broad theme we invite papers investigating climate-human-nature interactions at any scale of space and/or time, with relevance to the future roadmap of African societies in a warming world.

## **7-Linguistic resources**

This theme explores the richness of African languages and their role in knowledge production, cultural preservation, and education. African languages – many of which still lack basic documentation and description – provide us with valuable resources, not only to improve and diversify our understanding of human language, but also to obtain new insights and internal perspectives on the past and present of their speakers, especially in conjunction with evidence from other disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, ecology, genetics, psychology, sociology, etc. In addition, one of the great strengths of Africa's intrinsic multilingualism at both community and individual levels is also its ability to fundamentally challenge bygone European monolingual assumptions about the language-community nexus, questioning the very foundations and monolingual biases of the field of linguistics as a whole.

Within the framework of Africa's power to reimagine conventional epistemologies, we invite papers addressing or dealing with all these themes, and especially how African language data can shed light on diverse and evolving knowledge systems regarding the exploitation of Africa's rich resources.

## **8-Culture as a resource for well-being in Africa**

We invite submissions exploring the role of culture at the intersection of applied museology and oral traditions in Africa, or at least focusing on one of these domains. Since the 1990s, international cultural policy has emphasized the "Culture for Development" (C4D) approach, recognizing the culture of developing and post-conflict countries as vital for social cohesion and overall well-being. This call seeks to examine how, in the context of decolonisation, restitution, reparation and development, the (re)valorisation of cultural resources can benefit communities, considering that these resources can still be divisive or damaging. We focus on the intersection between material cultural objects and oral traditions in C4D approaches, questioning how these can be valued without being reduced to a utilitarian framework.

Recent trends in museology highlight the need for museums with colonial histories to become more socially responsible and mediate between the needs of their source communities and global agendas. This approach critiques museums' complicity in Eurocentric decolonisation and neoliberal extractive power networks, calling for eco-decolonial approaches that emphasize community-based museology. We aim to explore how integrating Oral Literature for Development (OL4D) approaches with a deeper appreciation of African oral traditions and performing arts can foster more inclusive and equitable practices. This involves acknowledging the rich cultural heritage and knowledge systems of source communities, promoting a holistic understanding of cultural resources in Africa.

## **9– Cross-border resource management and regional cooperation**

Regional cooperation and resources are closely intertwined in two ways. Firstly, given the multitude of borders on the African continent, the management of natural resources, from waterways to forests, requires authorities to cooperate on a transnational level. Secondly, most African countries lack the scale to develop economic sectors to fully make use of their resources. Regional cooperation is therefore crucial to develop value chains, efficient energy production and distribution, as well as natural reserves. Thirdly, regional organisations such as the African Union rely on the pooling of national resources (personnel and money) by their members to carry out their mandates and produce regional public goods. This is valid for the budget and the administrative staff but also for military equipment and personnel in the case of regional peace operations. We welcome papers that examine different elements of cross-border resource management and regional cooperation on the African continent.

## **10-Life, viability, and social resilience in Africa's resource landscapes**

We invite submissions that explore the concept of viability in the context of Africa's resource landscapes, focusing on how communities sustain life amidst socio-economic precarity, ecological transformations, and shifting political conditions. Drawing on the Latin *viabilis*, meaning “capable of life,” viability here refers to the active reconfiguration of networks, relationships, and practices that enable life to flourish under uncertain conditions.

Africa's material and immaterial resources not only sustain livelihoods but also shape social resilience, cultural belonging, and the possibilities for future-making. This panel examines how African communities navigate and negotiate access to resources, forging pathways toward more viable and sustainable futures. We ask: What forms of social, political and cultural reconfigurations emerge in response to resource instability or abundance? How do different actors, from local communities to transnational organisations, imagine, construct and contest viable (resource) futures? We seek to explore how networks of survival, cooperation, and adaptation are built, maintained and challenged across different scales, from the household to the state, from grassroots activism to global policy frameworks. Special attention will be given to the verticality of resource politics, examining which networks are empirically considered more viable, how they function, and whose interests they serve. We invite papers engaging with these questions across diverse African contexts, including but not limited to:

- How do communities adapt their social, political and economic ties in response to resource scarcity, environmental change and socio-political disruptions?
- Case studies of localised networks that sustain life amidst resource precarity/abundance - how are they forged, maintained or contested?
- How, more generally, do cultural expressions of viable life intersect with the broader uncertainties of the Anthropocene?

## 11-Knowledges as resource

Today, rapid population growth is occurring worldwide, both in urban and rural areas, with this trend being particularly noticeable in large cities and metropolises. In these regions, migration and natural population growth are major drivers, creating significant challenges regarding the use and availability of natural resources such as land, freshwater, and food, often at the expense of cultural and social values. Efforts to address these challenges, particularly around the optimal use of natural and cultural resources, have often been led by experts, with academic and policy authorities taking the lead in finding solutions. This approach has frequently overlooked the potential of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) – a broad term encompassing traditional, local, ecological, cultural, and lay knowledge – as a valuable tool for navigating conflict resolution and decision making. While IK is often recognised for its intrinsic value, the integration or clash with expert or academic knowledge can still result in conflicts. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how this diversity of knowledge systems can optimise production and governance processes, by examining the roles of various actors and how their knowledge and values could enhance peacebuilding and production efforts. This theme explores how Indigenous Knowledge can provide solutions to local challenges in areas such as spatial planning, agriculture, social issues, culture, and policy.

## 12-From biobanks to breakthroughs: Unlocking Africa's biomedical potential

Africa's rich genetic and microbial diversity holds immense potential for driving biomedical breakthroughs in global health. The establishment of African-led biobanks and genomic repositories is critical for equitable research on infectious diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and reproductive health. From characterising region-specific microbiomes to advancing precision medicine, biobanks play a central role in harnessing Africa's biological resources for scientific innovation. This call for papers invites contributions that explore the development, governance, and ethical frameworks of biobanking in Africa, as well as its applications in diagnostics, vaccine development, and AI-driven predictive medicine. We welcome interdisciplinary research on the role of pathogen surveillance, microbiome diversity, and genetic epidemiology in shaping the future of life sciences in Africa.

### 2. Scientific committee GAPSYM18

Koen Bostoen (UGent), Inge Brinkman (UGent), Karen Büscher (organiser, GAP UGent), Piet Cools (UGent), Michel De Paepe (UGent), Joost Desein (UGent), Amaury Frankl (organiser, GAP UGent), Ine Lietaert (UGent/UNU-CRIS), Michael Meeuwis (UGent), Nick Rahier (UGent and KULeuven), Vicky Van Bockhaven (UGent), John Vandaele (Mo\* Magazine), Rafaël Verbuyst (UGent), Annelies Verdoolaege (organiser, GAP UGent), Dirk Verschuren (UGent)

### 3. Abstract submission

Abstracts should not exceed 500 words and must be written in English or French. Submissions should be sent by e-mail and before June 1<sup>st</sup> 2025, to [Annelies.Verdoolaege@UGent.be](mailto:Annelies.Verdoolaege@UGent.be) mentioning "GAPSYM18 – abstract title". In addition to submissions for full papers, we also welcome submissions for round tables, panels, writeshops or workshops, with testimonies on specific cases or with a focus on the sharing of expertise.

The full programme of the symposium will be made available in August 2025 to allow participants to make travel arrangements.