



# Resources in Africa

## International Conference GAPSYM18

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 (GAPSYM18), 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. GAPSYM18 will delve into how resources shape Africa's socio-economic, environmental, and cultural landscapes and define Africa's position in today's globalisation.

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

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

The extraction of natural resources has long played a central role in African economies, shaped by historical, political, and economic dynamics. In the 21st century, extractivism – broadly defined as the large-scale removal of natural and human resources, often for export – remains a dominant economic model in many African countries. This process, rooted in colonial histories, continues to influence patterns of economic dependency, environmental degradation, and socio-political transformations. 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-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. These 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. 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.

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

Natural resources such as land, minerals, water and forests are 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 politics of state-building, 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'.

### **4- Land rights and the consequences of land acquisition**

Land rights continue to be a source of widespread contention. 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?

### **5- 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.

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

The availability and quantity of natural resources (water, arable soil, timber, etc.) across the continent is highly unevenly distributed mainly because of strong north-south and east-west gradients in hydroclimatic conditions. 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. 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. 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 in a warming world.

### **7-Renewable energy and energy transition**

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. This call for papers invites researchers, practitioners and policymakers to contribute their insights and findings on renewable energy, focusing on topics such as technological challenges in solar, wind and hydro energy, geothermal and bio energy, energy storage, grid integration, policy and regulations, economic and social impact.

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

This theme examines how 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.

### **9-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. Efforts to address these challenges 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.

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

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. This involves acknowledging the rich cultural heritage and knowledge systems of source communities, promoting a holistic understanding of cultural resources.

## 11-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 monolingual assumptions about the language-community nexus, questioning the very foundations and monolingual biases of the field of linguistics as a whole. 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.

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

The continent'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.

## 2. Scientific committee GAPSYM18

Koen Bostoen (UGent), Inge Brinkman (UGent), Karen Büscher (organiser, GAP UGent), Piet Cools (UGent), Michel De Paepe (UGent), Joost Dessein (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.