



**AFRICALICS**

## **CONCEPT NOTE FOR AFRICALICS RESEARCH CONFERENCES**

**(Revised version, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2026)**

The African network of researchers in learning, innovation and competence building systems (AfricaLics) aims to hold a research conference every two years at a minimum since the launch of the network in 2012. The focus is primarily on the current state of research on African Innovation and Development, specifically for the academic community, but also targeting policy makers and the business community. It aims to bring together leading scholars (between 150 – 200) working on innovation and development in Africa with the foremost scholars from outside Africa, as well as policy makers and the business community interested in this field.

The 2026 AfricaLics Research Conference is to be hosted by Wits University from 10 – 12 November 2026.

What follows are details of why the conferences are held, the potential outputs arising from the conferences, as well as details of some of the major logistical and practical issues that must be considered when agreeing to host an AfricaLics conference.

### **Conference objectives and potential outputs**

The objectives of the conference are:

1. To determine the state of the art within the research community in Africa working in the field of innovation and development.
2. To provide a much-needed arena for researchers in Africa, particularly early-career researchers, to build capacity in presenting and networking skills as well as learning about new methods and theories.
3. To promote networking and create space for new collaborations amongst researchers in the field of innovation and development, focusing on Africa, as well as policy makers and the business community passionate about Africa's development.
4. [To build capacity to teach high-quality, fit-for-purpose curricula in the field of innovation and development in Africa – if a teaching and learning track is included]

Organising an international conference is no small task. It requires commitment from all organising partners and dedicated personnel to manage and organise the event. However, if organisations are willing to put in the effort, the rewards are enormous.



The opportunities from hosting the conference include:

**1. National and international exposure of innovation and development, training, and research taking place in the host country.**

AfricaLics has found that holding open symposia organised by the local organising committee in the host country enables media coverage and policymakers' attention to the partner organisation's innovation efforts. It may include an exhibition of new locally developed and produced product innovations for participants to view and ask questions about.

**2. New collaborations which potentially lead to new funding streams.**

Previous AfricaLics conferences have provided opportunities for PhD students from host countries to apply for the AfricaLics Visiting Fellows Programme. This, in addition to other networking and capacity-building opportunities provided by AfricaLics, Globelics, and partner networks.

**3. Capacity to run large conferences.**

New or further experience in running international conferences which provide a well-tested means of attracting new funding, collaborations and students.

## Conference organisation

The AfricaLics Research conferences are usually held over three days towards the end of the year. The local organisers may opt to hold an open symposium or colloquium to showcase innovation and development in the host country on the first morning of the conference.

The usual format for the meeting is as outlined below:

Day 1	
AM	Opening Session, including an open symposium on innovation and development in the partner country
	Paper parallel session series A
PM	Roundtable sessions on 'hot topics'
	Poster presentation ('gong show' for emerging research ideas)
Day 2	
AM	Paper parallel session series B
	Special sessions A and B
PM	Paper parallel session series C
	Paper parallel session series D OR Conference trips to local STI-related businesses



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### Day 3

<b>AM</b>	Paper parallel session series D/E
	Book presentation and announcements
<b>PM</b>	Special sessions C and D
	Closing session

The different types of sessions that are usually held are:

*Open Symposium* - This is a dedicated session open to anyone who wishes to register (for free). The aim of this session is to increase awareness of innovation and development issues in the host country and provide the host organisation a chance to interact with relevant policymakers and other stakeholders.

*Paper parallel sessions* – the majority of participants will be expected to present a paper outlining research findings from a recent project/ work in progress. Each session lasts 90 minutes.

*Roundtables* – 2 or 3 senior scholars discuss the hot topics within the field and field questions from the audience for 60 – 90 minutes.

*Poster presentation* – for PhD students to showcase their research in a less formal environment, using a poster to illustrate their work

*Gong show* - similar to a ‘talent’ show, individuals have one or more minutes to pitch a research idea, which is ‘graded’ by a panel of experts and the audience

*Book presentation and announcements* – a session where key news and events are shared with participants.

*Visit to local STI establishments* – the conference delegates like to get a sense of local STI infrastructure, and so trips are often organised, if time and logistics permit.

Day 1 usually includes a welcome reception in the evening, and Day 2 usually includes a conference dinner. During the conference dinner, the Best PhD Student Paper Award is usually presented.

Participants usually arrive the day before the conference starts and depart the evening of Day 3 after the conference closes. Traditionally, all those with accepted paper presentations, special session participants, and keynote speakers have their accommodation covered on a bed-and-breakfast basis for three nights by the conference organisers.



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### **Logistics and practical organisation of the conference**

The conference in 2027 is co-organised by Wits University and partners and the AfricaLics Secretariat, based at NACETEM in Nigeria, with support from the RCS team at ACTS. At the beginning of the organization process, a division of responsibility for activities was agreed on and outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Wits (host) organization and ACTS (former host of the AfricaLics Secretariat). In future conferences, similar MoUs will have to be developed and signed by the AfricaLics Secretariat and the host organization selected by the AfricaLics Scientific Board for each conference.

Local hosts of AfricaLics conferences have traditionally taken a big part of the responsibility for organizing AfricaLics conferences and are also expected to do so in future. The AfricaLics Secretariat at NACETEM in Nigeria is unable to organise day-to-day on-the-ground activity in preparation for the conferences. The host organisation therefore takes on these responsibilities, including local fundraising when AfricaLics funding is insufficient. Regular (usually monthly) meetings take place between the AfricaLics Secretariat and the host organisation, and appropriate committees are developed to ensure a smooth organisation process. If funding allows, the AfricaLics Secretariat will ideally visit the host organisation before the conference to enable more effective planning and coordination. It is, however, possible to conduct all organisation online but this often requires more regular meetings and communication (i.e. more than just monthly meetings, especially in the last 6-8 months before a conference takes place).

The AfricaLics RCS project, run by ACTS in Nairobi, is expected to receive moderate funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to cover some travel costs for AfricaLics Alumni with accepted papers for the conference. The RCS project will also co-host the 2026 PhD Academy at Wits University, the week before the conference, and the PhD students at the Academy will present at the conference. This will further increase the number of conference participants who receive a small amount of travel support.

By accepting to host the Conference, the host organisation commits to supporting the Conference through an in-kind contribution (details to be outlined in the bid) and through local fundraising. Both the AfricaLics Secretariat, the host organisation, and the AfricaLics Impact Fund will be expected to seek additional funding from other sources to cover some costs.

### **Timeline for conference organisation (based on 2026 conference timeline)**

Activity	Completed by
Identification of local partners (host university)	This was part of Wits' original application to host the conference in 2026.
Logistics (formation of various committees, conference programme, speakers, budget, venue, etc.)	January – October 2026
Additional fundraising	January – September 2026
Call for papers/Participation	January – July 2026



Selection of participants/Papers	July/August 2026
Logistics, including travel support	August – October 2026
Conference held	10 – 12 November 2026

A detailed action plan template outlining all the key tasks needed to achieve a successful conference is provided in Appendix 1.

### **Background to AfricaLics**

The African network of researchers in learning, innovation and competence building systems (AfricaLics) is the African regional network for researchers involved in innovation and development research with a specific interest in promoting learning, innovation and competence building systems approaches. The network currently includes scholars from Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania.

AfricaLics is the African Chapter of the Global Network for Economics of Learning, Innovation, and Competence Building Systems (GlobeLics), an international network of scholars who apply the concept of "learning, innovation, and competence building system" (LICS) as a framework for promoting inclusive and sustainable development in developing countries, emerging economies and societies in transition. Other regional chapters of GlobeLics have been developed in Asia, Latin America, the Mediterranean region and Europe (AsiaLics, Lalic, MEDALics and EuroLics). In some big countries, national networks have been established (CICALICS in China and IndiaLics in India).

AfricaLics was founded during an 'All Africa Innovation and Development Workshop' in March 2012 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The workshop was co-organised by the GlobeLics Secretariat and the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research organisation (STIPRO), a Tanzanian independent think tank.

The formation of AfricaLics was centered on the following two rationales:

- A need to understand innovation and learning in the context of Africa, both from theoretical and practical perspectives.
- Given the fact that Africa lacks adequate capacity for the above purpose, a need for capacity building arose.

It was envisioned that the AfricaLics network could become a strong dynamo for capacity building in the field of innovation and economic development, at the individual, institutional, and country levels. This can allow African countries to design policies that are suitable and responsive to their own needs, and to instigate corrective measures to ensure the smooth production, dissemination, and use of knowledge for economic development, including poverty alleviation.

Since 2012, AfricaLics has received funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) to conduct research capacity-building activities to build research capabilities in the field of innovation and development. This funding has included funding to general support for three research conferences between 2017 and 2021. As from July 2025 onwards, Sida does not longer provide general support for the conferences, but is expected to continue providing limited travel support for AfricaLics VFP and Academy alumni with approved papers for participation in



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AfricaLics and Globelics conferences happening in the 2025 to 2029 period. As stated above, this travel support is administered by the AfricaLics RCS project administered by ACTS (one of the AfricaLics spokes and the grant holder of the Sida funds for this particular project).



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## Appendix 1: Detailed action plan template for organising an AfricaLics Research Conference

Abbrv	Full name	Description
LOC	Local organising committee	Main team organising conference based in the host organisation
COC	Conference organising committee	The core coordinating team is made up of the LOC head and the deputy, plus members of AS
SC	Scientific Committee	Leading researchers who agree to review papers and help shape the programme
AS	AfricaLics Secretariat	Comprises the Secretary-General and other staff who manage the AfricaLics network
RCS	AfricaLics RCS project team	The team at ACTS that runs the Sida-funded Research Capacity Strengthening project for AfricaLics.

AfricaLics Research Conference - Action Plan Template				
Task	Timing	Responsible	Comments	Status
<b>Administration and budgeting</b>				
Preparatory visit to host location		AS and LOC		
Sign MOU between AfricaLics Secretariat (NACETEM) and host organisation		AS and LOC	Includes discussion of registration fee	
Local Organising Committee (LOC) set up		LOC		
Agreement on who the members of COC are and the regularity of meetings		AS and LOC	Monthly meetings are usually recommended	
Forward draft budget and proposals for venues to AS		LOC		
Agreement on handling of funds		COC		
Agree on names to be approached for SC		COC	SC usually members of AfricaLics Scientific Board (ASB), wider AfricaLics	



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			community, host organisation senior scholars, representatives from ministries etc.	
Establishment of SC		AS		
Fundraising strategy developed		Local organisers		
Update on fundraising progress		Local organisers	COC to discuss at regular intervals	
Potential keynote speakers' list developed		COC	In discussion with ASB and LOC	
A progress visit to be held to host organisation		AS and LOC	To finalise practical arrangements	
<b>Call for Papers, registration and related tasks</b>				
Post info on dates for conference on AfricaLics (and host organisation) website		AS and LOC		
Select conference organisation system ie. Conftool		COC	Decision on whether an online conference registration tool is to be used	
Establish a website for the conference		LOC or AS		
<b>Call for papers developed and advertised</b>		LOC		
Preparation of formats for the online conference system (including testing)		LOC (with support from AS)		
Publish call for papers + launch of website		AS and LOC		
Process for paper review and list of reviewers agreed		AS and LOC		
List of reviewers updated in conference management system (if using)		AS		
Deadline for submission of papers		Applicants/interested participants	Give extension if necessary/ possible	
Review of papers submitted by review panel members		SC members		
Final selection of papers		AS and LOC with ratification by ASB		
Information to authors about selection/rejection of papers		LOC or AS		



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Final skeleton programme agreed		SC	COC prepares proposal for approval	
Final programme uploaded to website and conference system (if using)		AS or LOC	Includes paper presentations	
Final programme ready for printing hard copies – if providing		LOC	Local printing of programmes in host country, if possible	
Conference registration. Invitation letter sent after registration and fee paid (generated by conference system if using?) - for visa purposes		LOC	With support from AS	
Last date for upload of the final version of papers		Participants with papers accepted		
Raise funds for the best award prize		AS and LOC	100 USD * 2	
Organise the selection of the best PhD student paper award prize		SC (Scientific Committee)		
<b>Travel Support-related tasks</b>				
Deadline for application for travel support		AS and LOC		
Submit application for travel support (PhD students and AfricaLics VFP and academy alumni)		PhD students		
Response to applicants for travel support grants		RCS + AfricaLics Fund raising arm	Only provision with Sida funds to those from LDCs/ low- or low-middle-income countries	
Submission of original documents reimbursement travel costs		AS and LOC		
Reimbursement according to responses for travel support		RCS and AfricaLics Fund-raising arm and other funders if relevant.		
<b>Venue and related tasks</b>				
Decision regarding venue (conference and lodging)		LOC		
Clarification re. Requirements for delegate entry requirements (visa, health insurance, etc.) received		LOC		
Accommodation arrangements for delegates		LOC		



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Catering arrangements at venue		LOC		
Welcome reception		LOC	If applicable	
Conference dinner		LOC		
Venue set up and equipment (laptops, PowerPoint facilities, speakers/ mics)		LOC		
Registration and help desk at venue		LOC		
Student volunteers to assist during conference		LOC		
Wifi access and an IT help desk at the venue		LOC		
Airport transfers		LOC		
Supplementary tourism options for delegates		LOC	Recommend asking a travel agent to provide these services	
Certificates for participants		LOC	Registration desk to be equipped with competent personnel and equipment to enable the production of revised certificates.	