



Dear Colleagues and Friends of Future Africa

Future Africa: The First Five Years, 2019–2024 and leadership transition

This year we are celebrating five years of Future Africa at the University of Pretoria (UP). Since its launch in March 2019, we have come a long way. Predictably, there have been teething problems, compounded by the challenges of a pandemic. Navigating through this required flexibility, creativity, and determined teamwork. Since early 2022 and building on the foundations put in place by Future Africa’s former leadership, we have made significant strides to secure key organisational development gains. We have

- developed and articulated a persuasive narrative about Future Africa’s unique purpose, mode of operation, and value proposition;
- strengthened our capacity to communicate and to organise and host national and international events; and
- added substantive content to the magnificent [infrastructure and space](#) that we are privileged to occupy, demonstrating Future Africa’s value as a vibrant [pan-African platform](#) for research, international collaboration and engagement.

If there were to be a definitive statement about the direction of change that we have pursued over the past five years, it would be understanding transformations – in society and in science – and developing the initiatives needed to affect positive change in both. This singular focus on transformations is reflected in Future Africa’s [four overarching objectives](#):

- Leading transformative research in and for Africa
- Developing Africa’s transformative research leadership capacities
- Building transformative global partnerships for African research
- Fostering a culture of dialogue and action for change in African research.

Today, [five interactive ‘challenge domains’](#) structure what we do to deliver on each of these objectives, with Future Africa chairs leading the innovations needed to advance transformative research for real-world impact. Our domains include:

- People, Health, Places (One Health), led by Wanda Markotter from UP’s Faculty of Health Sciences
- Sustainable Food Systems, led by Frans Swanepoel, from our Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship
- Sustainability Transformations, led by Maano Ramutsindela, from the University of Cape Town and UP’s Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

- Global Equity in Africa, formerly led by Dire Tladi from our Faculty of Law, with a new Chair to be announced in due course
- African Science and Technology Systems, led by myself as Future Africa's Director

Our priority this year is to launch a new domain on issues of youth education, employment and empowerment; in this regard, we are grateful for the support and guidance of Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu, Dean of UP's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences.

Work in each of our challenge domains is complemented by cross-cutting activities, including a new Futures Literacy Incubator, a series of Future Africa Impact Dialogues and international events like the biennial Africa Week science leadership summit inaugurated in 2021.

Taken together, the progress made in a relatively short span of time is significant. We have worked as a team to put in place new, high-profile initiatives that connect collaborators from within and beyond the world of science, that convene new African and broader global networks of expertise and influence, and that bring new resources and talent to further enhance our portfolio and reputation.

By all accounts, Future Africa can look back on the last five years and talk about success for what is, after all, still a young organisation. This, of course, raises the question of how we evaluate and measure the influence and impact of Future Africa's endeavours as a pan-African platform; one that not only combines research with conferencing and accommodation functions but is also not subject to formal reporting requirements on conventional metrics. Figuring this out and crafting a robust monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting system for Future Africa is now a priority. It is an exercise that must, amongst other things, serve to demonstrate the strategic value, for UP, of continued investment in inter- and transdisciplinary research and capacity development for the benefit of the University, the country and the continent.

In the interim, here are some facts and figures that illustrate our achievements to date:

- Due to a determined focus on rapid activity development, particularly in the last two years, our portfolio of work now includes **30 distinct projects and programmes**. The multiplier effects are potentially significant. The African and broader global partnerships that each activity involves – including new partnerships with South African and African universities and international bodies like the International Science Council – are serving to position Future Africa as a go-to Platform for inter- and transdisciplinary research innovation and collaboration. Many of the collaborative projects in which we are involved – including the new *Africa-Europe (ARUA- Guild) Cluster of Excellence*, the *Feed, Protect, Care Global Collaborative PhD Platform*, the *Future Earth Africa Hub Leadership Centre*, the *Institute for Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness* and a *Futures Literacy Incubator* were (co-) initiated and are now co-led by Future Africa.
- We have dedicated significant effort to supporting training and mentoring programmes aimed at cultivating the transdisciplinary leadership abilities of early to mid-career researchers. Among our initiatives, we are proud to host the *Africa Science Leadership Programme (ASLP)*, which will be celebrating its tenth anniversary in October this year. Over the years, this programme has successfully trained over **205** researchers from 21 different countries. We are equally proud of our *Future Africa Research Leadership Fellowship (Far-Leaf)* programme, which currently supports **24** fellows from nine African countries, and *FSNet-Africa*, a flagship

project under ARUA- SFS, which supports **20** fellows in enhancing food systems research and advancing actionable policy solutions for Africa's SDG targets.

- Future Africa has enhanced its visibility and **influence** in important **global policy** fora, both through the high-level advisory roles held by Future Africa colleagues and new collaborations within the UN system. Highlights include Wanda Markotter's reappointment as *co-chair of the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP)* for a second term, advising the World Health Organisation, World Organisation for Animal Health, Food and Agricultural Organisation, and the UN Environmental Programme. She also serves as an *expert in the Lancet-PPATS Commission for the prevention of viral spillover*. In 2023 I was privileged to be appointed as *co-chair of the Climate and SDG Synergies expert group*, a project convened by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to consolidate evidence on synergies and provide concrete policy advice on the pursuit of synergistic actions. Belinda Reyers from UP's Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences has worked closely with me on this UN task. We also take pride in the achievements of our former Future Africa chairs, Dire Tladi, who was appointed as a judge of the International Court of Justice in February 2024, and Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, who assumed the role of Board Chair of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research's (CGIAR) System in 2022.

Our **advisory contributions** extend to shaping other important UN initiatives, such as the *UN Guidebook for developing Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Roadmaps*. Additionally, we participate in shaping the *STI Coalition for Africa*, providing technical support to this coalition, which is led by South Africa's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, in collaboration with representatives from Morocco, Ghana, and Cameroon.

- By the end of 2023, our small and agile team grew to about **60 members**, with 8% holding tenured positions at the university and the rest in short-term, externally funded roles. The dedication of our staff, the guidance of our international advisory board, and the contributions of 9 visiting fellows from five continents—as of the first quarter of 2024—have significantly enriched our global perspective and capabilities, increasing the impact and influence of our work.
- Additionally, we have also seen a significant **increase in external funding** for our transformative research and engagement activities. From 2019 to 2023, funding grew by **30%**, from R7.9 million to nearly R60 million, accounting for 42% of our total income during this period.
- Future Africa's conference and accommodation facilities **welcomed about 66 000 delegates** during this period and **hosted** close to **3 000 events**.

Future Africa is clearly coming into its own. It is also clear that we have reached a turning point, one that makes it important for us to now focus on consolidating the rapid gains made, to learn from successes and shortcomings, and to develop a persuasive agenda of strategic priorities for the next five years of Future Africa. This agenda and associated resource mobilisation opportunities will be outlined in the longer-term strategy (2025–2030), which we will be developing in the course of 2024

and which we look forward to engaging with you about. Please find more information on the many achievements of which we are proud [here](#). We also enclose Future Africa's new corporate brochure, a key element in our communication and business growth strategy.

On behalf of Future Africa Chairs and all other members of the Future Africa team, allow me to express heartfelt thanks for your support and contribution to building the foundations of Future Africa during these first five years and helping us to become what we are today.

In conclusion, I am both sad and excited to inform you that I have accepted a new position as Chair in Science Futures at the University of Stellenbosch and will be leaving UP in June this year. I leave with confidence, knowing that Future Africa has built a strong basis for continued strategic growth, and that the Platform will benefit greatly from the leadership of Prof Wanda Markotter, our One Health Research Chair, who has been appointed as Interim Director from 1 July until at least the end of this year. Her appointment, combined with the commitment of our other two Chairs, Prof Swanepoel and Prof Ramutsindela, will ensure continuity and the development of exciting new opportunities.

It has been a privilege to contribute to realising the vision of this unique and vibrant Platform.



Heide Hackmann

Director, Future Africa (March 2022 – June 2024)