

Commission on African Studies Inaugurated

The University of Namibia (UNAM) in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) hosted the inaugural conference of the International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on African Studies conference last week from 17-18 May at the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management (NIPAM).

This is the Commission on African Studies' first ever Annual Conference following a decision of the IGU to create a platform for African and experts on Africa to examine African challenges and attempt to provide African responses. The aim of the conference is to promote African and Africanist scholarship on issues around and in Africa, ranging from social sciences to natural sciences, but informed in the main by geographical, multi and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Speaking at the event, the Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, Dr. Itah Kandjii-Murangi expressed the importance of ensuring that Geography is considered to strengthen understanding of relationships between humans and physical processes upon which regional and national development is anchored.

The UNDP Resident Representative in Namibia a.i., Izumi Morota-Alakija, emphasised the need for robust research in order to understand the issues surrounding poverty and inequality. Furthermore, she stated that Namibia is one of the most unequal countries in the world with a Gini Coefficient of 0.56 in 2016 despite it being classified as an Upper Middle-Income Country. Additionally, she stated that one of the reasons for the slow decline of poverty rates in Africa is due to limited decent employment opportunities because Africa's growth has not succeeded in creating labour demand that is sufficient to meet the supply.



The UNAM Pro Vice Chancellor of Research, Innovation and Development, Prof. Kenneth Matengu read the welcoming remarks on behalf of the Vice Chancellor of the University Prof. Lazarus Hangula. He emphasised that Africa's response to global problems should be on the agenda of universities because Africa's problems and the global problems for which Africa are intertwined.

During the Inauguration, Dr. Innocent Moyo, the Chairperson of the Commission introduced the IGU Commission on African studies, stating that it was formed in May 2017 and is based at the University of Zululand, South Africa. The commission, which has established its own academic sessions namely, Africa and Climate Change, Migration in Africa, and Migration Development also collaborates with other IGU Commissions that exists. Furthermore, he stated that more collaborations with other stakeholders are planned as the commission is still young and plans to have annual meetings.

The participants presented their abstracts on researches that they have undertaken with possible solutions. Martha Naanda, the Head of UNDP Namibia Programme Unit presented an SDG poster titled: "An SDG Poster Snapshot: Namibia towards ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all" which included statistics about Namibia's status and targets.

Prof. Detlef Müller-Mahn from the University of Bonn in Germany held a presentation titled "Future Rural Africa - a new collaborative research center and its conceptual background". Moreover, a presentation that links Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Inequalities and Rural poverty in Namibia and Southern Africa by Michael Schnegg (University of Hamburg) and Michael Bollig (University of Cologne) was held, which sparked conversation from the audience.