

Symposium | Call for Papers

Higher Education Engagement Work in Support of the Sustainable Development Goals

Comparative Perspectives from South Africa, Tanzania and Germany

26-27 June 2026, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg

In Cooperation with: Nelson Mandela University & University of Dar es Salaam

Universities around the world are increasingly called upon to engage actively with society and to translate knowledge into meaningful social, cultural, and economic impact. In this context, engagement, cooperation and knowledge transfer have become central dimensions of academic practice, complementing research and teaching, and this is increasingly viewed as part of the social responsibility agendas of higher education institutions.

There are, however, different modes of thinking about what engagement and knowledge transfer mean in different national, institutional, disciplinary and cultural contexts. At the same time, there is increasing emphasis on the need for multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary (MIT) and intergenerational collaboration, and for the bridging of gaps that may otherwise impede impactful and transformative work by universities in and with larger society.

This symposium brings together colleagues from South Africa, Tanzania, and Germany to reflect on diverse understandings, experiences, and institutional approaches to higher education engagement, cooperation, and knowledge transfer that supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By sharing perspectives shaped by different historical, social, and political contexts, we aim to learn from one another and to explore how universities can strengthen their role as responsible and responsive societal actors.

The symposium provides a space for dialogue, critical reflection, and the exchange of best practices in the South and East African and German contexts. It seeks to foster sustainable international partnerships and to develop new ideas for collaborative engagement that address local challenges while contributing to global conversations on the role of universities in society.

Day 1: Presentations and round-table discussion (hybrid)

Day 2: On-site visit (coast) and workshop (in person)

Topics

- Conceptual understandings of engagement and knowledge transfer
- Historical, political, and social context shaping institutional structures for engagement work that supports the SDGs
- The role of multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary collaboration and research in advancing the SDGs
- Personal reflection and legacy
- Intergenerational perspectives and capacity building
- Impact and evaluation
- International collaboration and future directions

Call for Papers

Closing dates:

Abstract submission of 200-300 words: **20 April 2026**
(cermesa@uol.de)

Full paper submission:
31 August 2026

Full papers will be peer reviewed and published in a special journal edition. Limited funds for supporting travel and subsistence costs for on-site participation are available through the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK), the DAAD, and University of Oldenburg own funds.

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Chairs

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

