



## ENERGY AND MINERALS INSTITUTE

# Launch proves enthusiasm for UWA's new Africa Research Cluster

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**The vision of developing high quality and ethical Africa-focused research at UWA to help address the continent's challenges and harness its opportunities, promote the University's research and build new**

**collaborations with Africa has been the driving force behind the establishment of a new Africa Research Cluster, formally launched on the 'Africa Day' anniversary, 25 May.**



(<http://www.emi.uwa.edu.au/sites/default/files/images>

[/Petra%20Tschakert-Africa%20Cluster%20Launch-25th%20May%202015%2019\\_0.jpg](http://www.emi.uwa.edu.au/sites/default/files/images/Petra%20Tschakert-Africa%20Cluster%20Launch-25th%20May%202015%2019_0.jpg))

Professor Kent Anderson, UWA Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Community and Engagement) opened the two-part event and welcomed a large audience including dignitaries of several African countries, members of Perth's African communities, industry stakeholders operating in Africa, and University researchers and students.

Co-ordinator of the [Africa Research Cluster \(http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa\\_Research\)](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa_Research), Dr David Mickler set the scene for the formal part of the event, outlining the local context and relevance of the cluster: "With a combined population of more than one billion, a quarter of the world's states, a natural resources boom and rapid economic growth in many countries, Africa's influence on the world stage is rising," he said.

"There are more than 330,000 African-born people residing in Australia, and UWA's location in Perth, looking west as Australia's Indian Ocean capital, makes it well-placed to develop a strong research focus on Africa. Through the Cluster we aim to develop a range of collaborative research, teaching and community engagement projects with different stakeholders in Australia, Africa and beyond."

Following Dr Mickler's introduction, UWA student Tinashe Jakwa critically reflected on the meaning and significance of 'Africa Day' particularly for the lives of ordinary people on both the continent and in the African Diaspora.

The focus on Africa's peoples was further sharpened in the keynote speech presented by UWA's newly appointed Centenary Professor in Rural Development, Petra Tschakert. Her presentation '*Understanding Structural Vulnerability (to Climate Change) in Africa*' illustrated the powerful interrelationship between people's vulnerability and the structure of a society.

"Vulnerability, to climate change and other stressors, is often oversimplified by overemphasising inherent inequalities and disregarding structural and relational dimensions," explained Professor Tschakert. "But the impacts of climate change are funnelled through uneven power relations, which marginalise people and keep them vulnerable. In short, climate change stressors interact with non-climate stressors and entrenched structural inequalities to shape vulnerability and worsen their impacts."

Professor Tschakert said she is looking forward to contributing to the Africa Research Cluster with the data, expertise, and connections gathered in her community-based adaptation and artisanal mining projects which aim to support and empower Africa's ordinary and marginalised people and enhance their capacities to protect their livelihoods. To access Professor Tschakert's full speech, visit the cluster website.

The audience was clearly captivated by the talk which concluded with a lively question and answer session and was followed by an equally popular networking opportunity among refreshments and dancing to African music by the upbeat five-piece local band 'Shangara Jive'.

"The launch was a fantastic start to the Africa Research Cluster and I would like to thank our speakers, attendees, band and the team from the Energy and Minerals Institute for their support," said Dr Mickler. "The members of our cluster are working to develop collaborative research projects and other public events and we would like to invite interested people to join us."

Information on upcoming events and projects will be available on the [Cluster's website](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa_Research) ([http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa\\_Research](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa_Research))

## Media reference

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