



UGent  
Human Rights  
Research Network



## Voices, Rights, Justice in Africa

### International Conference GAPSYM19

Tuesday 8 December 2026 at De Krook in Ghent, Belgium

#### 1. Call for papers

The [Ghent Africa Platform](#) (GAP) is pleased to announce its 19<sup>th</sup> annual symposium (GAPSYM19), themed "*Voices, Rights, Justice in Africa*". The symposia organised by the Ghent University Association (AUGent) Africa Platform have been trendsetting in the Belgian academic landscape over the last 19 years, providing a unique interdisciplinary forum to showcase academic research conducted in collaboration with African-based partners. These gatherings have fostered meaningful dialogue and collaboration across disciplines, contributing to a deeper understanding of Africa's complexities and opportunities.

This 19<sup>th</sup> multidisciplinary conference of the Africa Platform will be co-organised by Ghent University's Human Rights Research Network and Conflict Research Group. *Voices, Rights & Justice* in Africa remain highly relevant today due to ongoing challenges related to human rights, environmental rights, rights to health & education, access to legal systems, etc. across the continent. Studying these issues academically will inform policymaking, activism, and international engagement to promote accountability, equity, and sustainable development in African societies.

The conference encourages cross-disciplinary and innovative approaches to the following sub-themes:

#### 1-Human rights

Within this sub-theme, we welcome proposals that critically engage with the multiple dimensions of the human rights landscape in Africa. We invite contributions from all disciplines that explore how human rights law, discourse, and practice are shaped, contested, and defended across the continent.

Contributions may address, among other topics, the achievements, challenges, and future directions of the African human rights system, including analyses of the impact of its jurisprudence within and beyond the continent, as well as the obstacles that affect its effectiveness. We also welcome examinations of the pursuit of justice amid past and ongoing human rights violations, including how communities and institutions engage with transitional justice processes, including historical dialogue, truth, memory, reparations, documentation, and accountability. Finally, we encourage studies that examine the dynamics of collective action under adverse structural conditions, including weak or failing institutions and situations of armed conflict. We particularly welcome analyses of the strategies local groups develop to sustain resilience and advance claims in diverse human rights struggles, such as efforts to secure access to food, land, water, and other essential resources.

## **2-Right to health**

Many African states have taken important steps to embed the right to health in national constitutions, expand universal health coverage, and strengthen primary health care systems, reflecting growing recognition of health as a legal entitlement rather than a discretionary service. At the same time, profound disparities in access, financing, and quality persist, shaped by historical legacies, ongoing underinvestment, and global health governance structures that often prioritise external agendas over locally defined needs.

This sub-theme invites contributions that critically interrogate how legal norms, health governance, and global health politics shape the realization of the right to health in African contexts, and how more equitable, participatory, and accountable health systems can be built to fulfil this fundamental human right.

## **3-Land rights**

Land lies at the heart of many pressing questions of rights and justice across Africa. It shapes livelihoods, belonging, political authority, and economic opportunity, while reflecting both historical legacies and contemporary transformations. This theme explores how struggles over land illuminate broader debates about rights, justice, citizenship, and community across the continent.

We particularly welcome papers examining the relationship between land, property, and citizenship, including how access to land structures claims to belonging, recognition, and participation. Contributions may also address the links between land governance and conflict, including disputes over ownership, access, and use, as well as efforts to reclaim historical justice in postcolonial contexts.

The stream invites interdisciplinary perspectives on the legal, political, social, and ecological dimensions of land rights in Africa. Possible topics include land restitution and historical justice; customary land tenure systems; gendered land rights; land grabbing and large-scale acquisitions; urban land and informality; environmental governance and climate pressures; and the role of courts, social movements, and international norms in shaping land justice.

## **4-Environmental justice**

Environmental justice has become an important focus in debates on rights and justice in Africa, particularly in the context of global responses to climate change and broader ecological crises. These responses often frame environmental action in terms of socio-ecological transitions, yet such transitions take place within unequal global political and economic structures. Initiatives such as conservation programs, carbon markets, and the expansion of green energy infrastructures shape access to land, resources, and knowledge, raising questions about sovereignty, participation, and distributive justice. At the same time, African perspectives remain underrepresented in global environmental governance despite the continent facing significant environmental and social impacts. These dynamics also highlight issues of intergenerational justice, as current environmental decisions shape future ecological and development pathways. This sub-theme invites empirical, theoretical, and interdisciplinary contributions from the natural and social sciences examining the social, ecological, and governance dimensions of environmental change, and exploring how more inclusive and equitable sustainability transitions might be advanced in African contexts.

## **5-Indigenous rights**

From the Amazigh of Northern Africa to the Khoi and San people of Southern Africa, Indigenous people in Africa continue to face significant marginalization, whether related to land ownership, cultural recognition, or the ability to practice traditional modes of subsistence. The international discourse on Indigenous rights remains as contentious as the notion of Indigenous people itself. The attitudes of African governments range from lukewarm embrace to

vehement rejection. We welcome papers that analyse Africa's complex relationship with Indigenous rights. What are the arguments in favour and against applying Indigenous rights to African contexts? Who mobilizes Indigenous rights and on who's behalf? How are indigenous rights understood on a local, regional, and continental level? How do notions of Indigenous rights relate to other types of rights, such as minority or human rights, as well as conceptions of justice, such as social and environmental justice?

## **6-Linguistic rights**

The mandate of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is to adjudicate alleged infringements of the African Union's Charter, which commits member states to "to dismantle [...] all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion", and affirms that "every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms [...] without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language [...]". Yet, as observers, scholars, stakeholders, and victims of Africa's everyday linguistic realities have long noted, the effective eradication of language-based discrimination and the robust protection of linguistic rights and freedoms remains, to this day, more aspirational than actual. GAPSVM19 welcomes submissions that engage with linguistic rights and freedoms, with particular, though not exclusive, attention to the role of national and supranational legislation in shaping, enabling, or constraining their realization.

## **7-Migration, climate risk and socio-economic rights**

Across Africa, migration is increasingly shaped by climate risk, environmental degradation and unequal exposure to shocks. These dynamics raise fundamental questions about justice and rights: who is protected, who bears the costs of climate impacts, and how are rights to livelihood, health, social protection and mobility safeguarded in contexts of environmental stress? We welcome contributions that examine migration as both an adaptation strategy and a potential source of new vulnerabilities, including research on internal and cross-border mobility, access to services, and the distributional consequences of climate risk. Particular attention is invited to economically grounded analyses that assess welfare impacts, inequality, and the role of institutions in protecting socio-economic rights in the face of climate-related mobility. Interdisciplinary perspectives that connect migration, health, climate risk and development are especially encouraged.

## **8-Inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to the study of Voices, Rights and Justice in Africa**

Studying voice, rights and justice processes often requires that we cross disciplinary boundaries and collaborate with stakeholders outside academia. This sub-theme explores how inter-and trans-disciplinarity is practiced and how it shapes knowledge production in Africa. We invite papers that explore critically the potential and risks of inter- and/or transdisciplinary approaches in any thematic area, including co-creative, participatory and action research experiences. Submissions may address questions such as how inter- and/or trans-disciplinarity has been operationalized in research on voices, rights and justice in Africa? What theoretical, methodological and/or conceptual strategies facilitated the integration of different disciplinary and societal perspectives? How were concepts such as 'voice', 'rights' and 'justice' understood and defined? How do inter- and transdisciplinary approaches shape, enable, or constrain the potential for societal impact of research? Which challenges may emerge and how can they be overcome? What are lessons learned from collaborative, participatory and/or cross-disciplinary projects?

## 2. Scientific committee GAPSYM19

Karen Büscher (GAP UGent), Giselle Corradi (HRRN UGent), Amaury Frankl (GAP UGent), Laurence Hendrickx (UGent), Hanna Kozachenko (HRRN UGent), Michael Meeuwis (UGent), Emilie Peeters (UGent), Ilse Ruysen (CliMigHealth UGent), Rafaël Verbuyst (UGent), Annelies Verdoolaege (GAP UGent)

## 3. Abstract submission

Abstracts should not exceed 500 words and must be written in English or French. Submissions should be sent by e-mail and before June 1<sup>st</sup> 2026, to [Annelies.Verdoolaege@UGent.be](mailto:Annelies.Verdoolaege@UGent.be) mentioning "GAPSYM19 – abstract title – relevant sub-theme".

In addition to submissions for full papers, we also welcome submissions for populated round tables, panels, writeshops or workshops, with testimonies on specific cases or with a focus on the sharing of expertise.

This will be an in-person conference only.

The full programme of the symposium will be made available in August 2026 to allow participants to make travel arrangements.