

HIGHLIGHTS

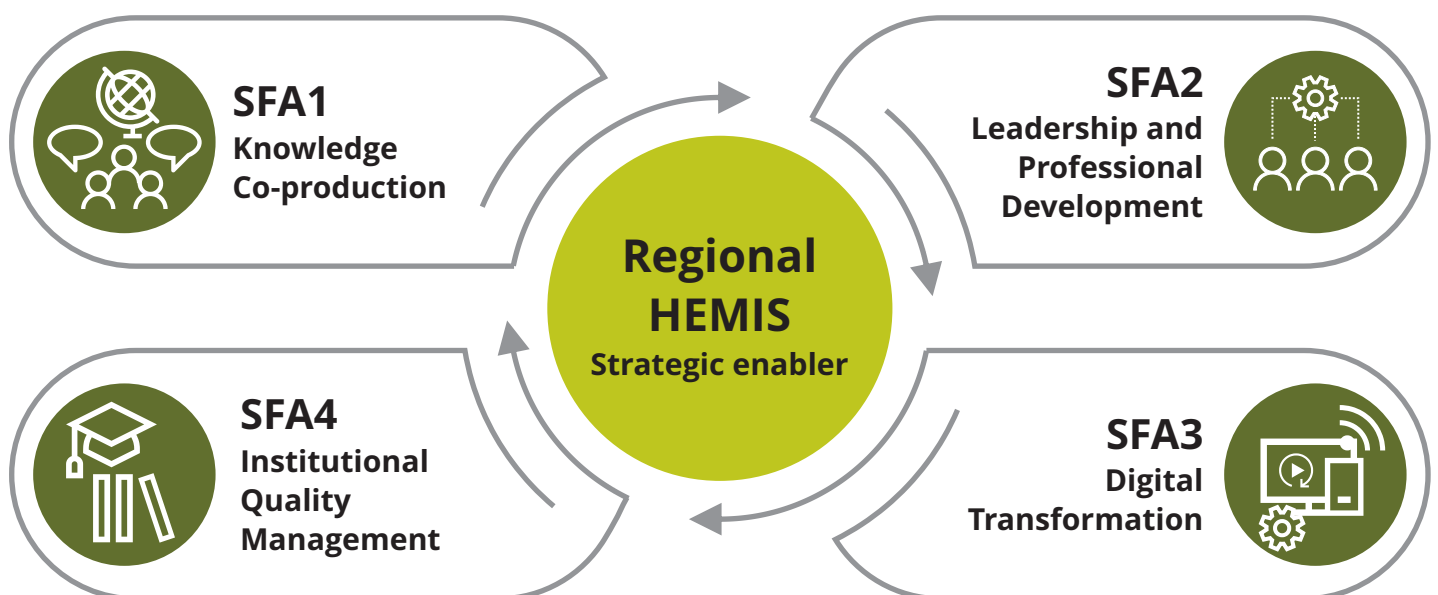


SARUA 2023 Highlights: Strengthening Higher Education in Southern Africa

The Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) made significant strides in 2023, ensuring that we are able to realise our strategic purpose of contributing to higher education innovation and resilience in the SADC region, so that our higher education sector makes its full contribution to regional development. This report encapsulates SARUA's progress, challenges and future outlook.

Governance and Planning

- **Governance:** A revitalised governance framework was established, including a revised draft constitution and the development of comprehensive policies for financial management, human resources, information governance and data protection.
- **Strategic Plan:** SARUA finalised its draft Strategic Plan for 2024–2028. Drawing on the concepts of the engaged university and Education 5.0, the plan delineates six strategic goals that emphasise operational efficiencies, networking capability, institutional capacity-building through digital transformation and institutional quality management, and societal impact through collective sensemaking and knowledge co-production. These strategic goals are operationalised through four strategic focus areas for knowledge co-production, leadership and professional development, institutional quality management and digital transformation of higher education (<https://sarua.africa/strategic-focus-areas/>).



Membership and Membership Engagement

- **Membership Growth:** Membership increased to 58, reflecting growing confidence in SARUA's value proposition. Eight new members were welcomed, and four former members renewed their membership.
- **Webinar Series:** Successful webinars were conducted on topics such as the sustainable development goals (SDGs), gender equality and the HAQAA 3 Initiative (*Harmonisation of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in African Higher Education*). In 2024, we plan to hold various webinars on higher education engagement, institutional quality management and digital transformation, as well as on gender equality.
- **Communication and Collaboration Solutions:** SARUA overhauled its website, turning it into a compelling platform to communicate the Association's future-focused vision, its strategic focus areas, programmes and projects and network membership (www.sarua.africa). Our social media presence showed a dramatic increase, with our LinkedIn followers climbing by an astonishing 500% (to 674 followers) as we rolled out a systematic and well-crafted campaign to communicate consistently and clearly with our stakeholders in the SADC. Preliminary work was done on the development of an academic repository to provide access to a range of information materials that support our four strategic focus areas.

Strategic Focus Area for Knowledge Co-production



- **Programme on Climate Change:** SARUA successfully completed the two-year programme on climate change mitigation and adaptation, which was funded by the EU and administered by the SADC under the Inter ACP Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+) Programme. The programme drew a network of SADC climate change experts together to develop open access curriculum materials to support SADC higher education institutions for the development of climate change programmes at the master's level, as well as for the development of short learning programmes in climate change. The climate change materials are available on our website in English, French and Portuguese (Climate change materials).
- **Industrial Pharmacy Fellowship Programme:** SARUA was contracted by the GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation) to provide supervisory and advisory services for the development of a regional industrial pharmacy fellowship programme, addressing a significant gap in the development of regional capacity for drug manufacturing, particularly in the production of anti-retrovirals to combat the impact of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Given that approximately 67% of global HIV/AIDS infections occur in sub-Saharan African, it is crucial that the SADC forms industry–university linkages to reduced dependency on imported drugs. (<https://sarua.africa/industrial-pharmacy/>).
- **EngageSDG Project:** In another significant milestone, for the first time in its history SARUA successfully applied for an Erasmus Plus grant from the European Commission. In terms of this grant, SARUA will lead a consortium of SADC and EU partners in the development of participatory approaches for knowledge production. The purpose of this grant is to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions in the SADC to partner with their local communities to create impactful knowledge. (<https://sarua.africa/sdengage/>).
- **Engagement Survey:** To support the *EngageSDG* project, SARUA conducted two surveys and held three webinars on approaches to engagement amongst higher education institutions in the SADC. The report is available on our website (Engage SDG Report).
- **Research for Societal Impact:** In 2024, SARUA looks forward to conducting an exploratory project on research for societal impact. Funded by the IDRC (International Development Research Centre) in Canada, this project will explore the factors within the science and innovation systems of various SADC countries that incentivise or disincentivise academic staff from doing societally impactful research.

Strategic Focus Area for Institutional Quality Management

SARUA's focus area for Institutional Quality Management supports SADC higher education institutions in establishing robust internal quality management systems aligned with international and continental good practice standards. SARUA's 2023 report on the State of Play of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) in SADC, based on research from 2021–2022, offers insights into the internal quality management systems among SADC higher education institutions. It underscores the need for monitoring IQA implementation and for a SARUA community of practice for continuous dialogue and support among regional QA practitioners. The full report is available on the SARUA website. (IQA State of Play Report).

During 2023, we established a community of practice for institutional quality management and collaborated with the University of Potsdam in Germany to present the second iteration of the TrainIQA programme, an internationally acclaimed programme developed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to strengthen institutional capacities in internal quality assurance. The second iteration of TrainIQA, conducted in 2023–2024, included face-to-face workshops in South Africa and Germany, focusing on quality assurance tools and approaches.

Furthermore, SARUA's involvement in the HAQAA 3 Initiative, in partnership with OBREAL Global, focuses on various work areas including IQA, EQA, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA), and the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS), aimed at enhancing quality assurance and accreditation in African higher education. Through our active participation in the HAQAA 3 Initiative, SARUA will represent the voice of higher education in the SADC in important decisions relating to the establishment of the PAQAA and the development of the ACTS. (<https://sarua.africa/haqaa/>).



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Strategic Focus Area for Digital Transformation of Higher Education

In 2023, SARUA focused on the impact of generative AI, especially ChatGPT, on students, lecturers and institutional leaders in higher education. SARUA issued a guidance statement advocating for proactive engagement with generative AI in universities across the SADC region. The statement emphasised embracing new technologies and initiating relevant discussions at universities. SARUA also utilised social media to keep its community informed about global adaptations to these changes, promoting a culture of adaptability and continuous learning. (<https://sarua.africa/higher-education-digital-transformation-dx/>).

However, SARUA acknowledges that digital transformation in the SADC higher education sector extends beyond AI. It encompasses enhancing student learning experiences, improving access and success, fostering collaborative opportunities, managing information efficiently and creating operational efficiencies. This broader understanding is crucial for developing a comprehensive approach to digital transformation. In 2023, SARUA conducted preparatory work to roll out an extensive programme to support its strategic focus area for digital transformation during 2024.

Partnerships

During 2023, SARUA collaborated with the SADC Secretariat on two major projects: establishing the SADC University of Transformation (SUT) and developing a regional higher education database. SARUA assisted the SADC Secretariat to arrange a consultative meeting for regional vice-chancellors on the SUT by preparing three concept papers to support the meeting, and then by facilitating the discussion at the meeting on the SUT's conceptualisation, its operationalisation and governance model. In this manner, SARUA demonstrated its strengthening relationship with the SADC Secretariat and its role in representing the voice of higher education in the SADC.



Additionally, SARUA laid the groundwork for the development of an SADC Higher Education Database, which is set to play a key role in supporting data-based planning and decision-making in the SADC. Activities included preparing a concept paper on the database and participating in a consultative workshop, with plans for further development in 2024.

Future Outlook

SARUA is poised for a compelling future, with plans to strengthen partnerships and expand its programme portfolio. Priority will be given to enhancing communication strategies and broadening membership across the diverse linguistic and educational landscapes in the SADC. Financial sustainability through diversified funding sources will be a key focus to support strategic objectives.

SARUA's journey in 2023 marks a significant step towards realising its vision of a revitalised regional higher education system, poised to make a substantial impact on societal development and the quality of life in Southern Africa.

Why Join SARUA?

SARUA provides all higher education institutions in the SADC with the opportunity to be part of a dynamic regional network focused on innovative solutions that embrace the opportunities of a rapidly changing higher education environment. We embrace collaboration and cooperation, based on our belief in the power of collective sensemaking in order to influence regional higher education planning and policy development. Our growing portfolio of programmes and projects offer compelling opportunities to build the capacity of our network members so that they may be innovative, resilient and responsive, and serve as bastions of hope in our regional context.

Please get in touch with us!
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