UNU INRA

UNU-INRA AT A GLANCE

Counting What Africa Keeps from Its Natural Resources

Africa is not poor.
Africa is uncounted.

United Nations University
Institute for Natural Resources in Africa
Accra, Ghana · 2026 edition



A fishing canoe heads out to sea off the coast of Ghana.

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Africa is not poor. Africa is uncounted.

Count It. Keep It.
Convert It. Circulate It.

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Dr Richard Munang

Director, United Nations University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Africa is not poor. Africa is uncounted.

The world counts what Africa produces: tonnes of gold, bags of cocoa, barrels of oil, catches of fish. Almost no one counts what Africa keeps: the wages, taxes, local firms and jobs that remain once the cargo has left. What is not counted cannot be managed, defended or grown.

So we count it. We build the body of evidence that drives a knowledge system, policy and impact. Country by country and commodity by commodity, we measure what stays at home, and each government sees its own figure first. Then we stay with the work and keep measuring, as we help countries count it, keep it, convert it into jobs, wealth and prosperity for all, and circulate it to millions of people.

This matters most for young people. Every year about 11 million young Africans enter the labour market, and only about 3 million find formal jobs.

Our evidence shows them where the work pays. In one town, young people clearing plastic from blocked drains earned about 63 times less than those collecting sorted plastic at the door. Once the evidence showed this, the work moved to the door.

We are a research institute first. Every question we take on produces a peer-reviewed paper, a contribution to master's and doctoral research, an executive course for decision-makers and teaching material for students. Three flagships carry this work: Critical Minerals and Just Transitions; Climate-Resilient Food, Land, Water and Energy, including the blue economy; and Natural Resource Data and Responsible AI.

The work is open to everyone. Through the Innovative Affiliation, a student, trader, farmer, fisher or researcher can bring evidence from where they stand and learn the method by doing it. Through the College of Research Associates, experts in Africa and beyond write and review our flagship work.

Count It. Keep It. Convert It. Circulate It.
I invite you to read on.

Dr Richard Munang, Director



Students explore a solar-powered processing machine at a UNU-INRA field event.

WHO WE ARE

The United Nations University's institute for Africa's natural resources, and its only institute in Africa.

Africa's Heads of State asked for the Institute in 1985, and the United Nations University established it in 1986. From Accra, Ghana, we serve all African countries. We are one of the 13 institutes of the United Nations University, the academic arm of the United Nations.

We are a research institute first: rigorous evidence, scholarly papers and a knowledge system that teaches what it finds. Our research does not stop at the report. It drives policy, policy drives action, and action shows in jobs and value kept at home. We keep measuring while the work is being done.

We work with partner universities and institutes across Africa, with our College of Research Associates, and with everyone who brings evidence through the Innovative Affiliation.

1985
Asked for by Africa's Heads of State

13
UNU institutes worldwide; we are the one in Africa

3
Research flagships

4
Outputs from every research question

OUR VISION

UNU-INRA becomes Africa's most trusted research institution on natural resources and the green and blue economy, so that Africa's natural resources are counted, kept, converted into jobs, wealth and prosperity, and circulated for the collective benefit.

OUR MISSION

We build the body of evidence and the knowledge system that drive decision intelligence, policy, action and impact on Africa's natural resources, and we keep measuring until the value stays at home.



Mangrove forest meets the sea in The Gambia: land, water and ocean in one view.

Africa is not poor. Africa is uncounted. The world measures what Africa produces; we measure what Africa keeps.

Count It

Measure what Africa's natural resources produce and what stays at home.

Keep It

Propose the policy that keeps more of that value at home.

Convert It

Work with government, business and communities to turn it into jobs and prosperity.

Circulate It

Help the earnings keep moving in the local economy, and measure again.



From UNU-INRA's critical minerals research.

FLAGSHIP 1

CRITICAL MINERALS AND JUST TRANSITIONS

Africa holds about 30% of the world's critical mineral reserves. The question is how much of their value stays at home.

What we measure

The keep rate: how many cents of every mineral dollar stay in the country as wages, taxes, local firms and jobs, from the pit to the port.

Who uses it

Ministries of mines and finance, revenue authorities, regional bodies, investors and mining communities.

Just transitions

The minerals behind solar panels, batteries and power lines must leave jobs and income where they are dug, not only holes.

Anchored by

The Africa Minerals Governance Report.

USD 29.5 trillion

Mine-site value of Africa's mineral endowment, about 20% of the world total. Africa Finance Corporation, 2026.

About 30%

Africa's share of the world's critical mineral reserves. UNU-INRA, Africa Redefining Critical Minerals for a Shared Future, 2026.

FLAGSHIP 1 · OUR WORK

WHAT SITS UNDER THIS FLAGSHIP



Young panellists at a UNU-INRA session on youth engagement and just transitions.

C-MINK

The Critical Minerals Information and Knowledge Hub brings researchers and decision-makers together to write and share evidence on Africa's critical minerals.

Stranded Assets

Four years of research on what the move away from fossil fuels means for Africa's oil, gas and mineral wealth, and how to plan for it before value is lost.

AFTER Carbon

The African Facility for Transitions Research brings scientists, civil society and public officials together on Africa's low-carbon development priorities.

JUSTIS

Just Energy Transitions in the Informal Sector studies how the energy shift reaches Africa's informal workers, most of them women, and how they can benefit.

Dare to Share

With Utrecht University, a knowledge platform where scientists, civil society, entrepreneurs and communities debate just transitions as equals.

Earth-Shattering

Traced how modern slavery links to gold and cocoa in Ghana's Ashanti and Western Regions, and what banks and governments can do to stop it.

Every finding goes first to the government it concerns. Then it goes to the Africa Minerals Governance Report, so one country's lesson becomes a continental reading.

FLAGSHIP 2

CLIMATE-RESILIENT FOOD, LAND, WATER AND ENERGY

Almost half of Africa's jobs are in farming, forestry and fishing. When the rain, the soil or the fish fail, livelihoods fail with them.

What we measure

How much value food, land, water, energy and ocean resources keep at home, and what a climate shock costs before it hits.

Blue economy

Oceans, lakes and fisheries are part of this flagship, from the landing beach to the fish smoker to the mangrove.

Who uses it

Ministries of agriculture, water, energy and environment, disaster agencies, farmers' and fishers' groups.

Anchored by

The Africa Resource Nexus Assessment.

48%

Share of Africa's jobs in farming, forestry and fishing, 2021. FAO.

"The Warning Has Come. Now Comes the Work."

Our El Niño commentary on getting ready before the shock, also published by the United Nations in Ghana, 12 November 2026.



Cassava processing in Ghana. UNU-INRA field research.



INFoCAT training workshop for young women in clean agritech.



Young technicians assemble a clean-energy processing machine.

FLAGSHIP 2 · OUR WORK

WHAT SITS UNDER THIS FLAGSHIP

INFoCAT

Innovate for Clean Agricultural Technologies backs low-cost, clean-energy machines that cut hard labour and raise income for women and young farmers. In Gomoa, Ghana, a smallholder tested a renewable-energy groundnut pod plucker.

Gari processing centre

At the UNU-INRA RE Gari Processing Centre, cassava becomes gari, one of West Africa's everyday foods. Our team reported on its field visit in September 2026.

REDAA

Reversing Environmental Degradation in Africa and Asia: a scoping study naming the research-to-action priorities that do most to restore damaged land in West and Central Africa.

Global Goal on Adaptation

The African Technical Workshop on the Global Goal on Adaptation, October 2026, worked on indicators for disaster risk and health.

Blue economy

Evidence from fish landing beaches, fish smokers and mangroves along Africa's coasts: what the catch earns, and what stays with the people who land it.

Climate readiness

Before a drought, flood or heat wave, we count what it will cost and what to do first, so governments act before the shock, not after.

Clean energy, kept value, paid work.



A writeshop of C-MINK, the Critical Minerals Information and Knowledge Hub.

FLAGSHIP 3

NATURAL RESOURCE DATA AND RESPONSIBLE AI

Africa cannot keep what it cannot see. We build one open record of what its natural resources produce and keep.

What we gather

Field readings from people on the ground, public records, trade data and satellite images, checked against each other.

Responsible AI

AI helps us read records and images faster. People check every figure before it is used.

Who uses it

Governments, statistics offices, regional bodies, researchers, students and the public.

Anchored by

The Africa Natural Resource Data Observatory and the annual Africa Natural Resource Outlook.

88 vs 1,486

Researchers per million people: Sub-Saharan Africa, as low as 88; the world, 1,486 in 2023. United Nations, SDG Report 2026.

9

UNU-INRA working papers with permanent DOIs, free to read on Zenodo since November 2026.

FROM A READING IN THE FIELD TO A DECISION

Field readings

Public records and trade data

Satellite images

→

Checked by people
Every figure traced to its source and date.

→

The Observatory
One open record, country by country.

→

Decisions
Briefs, the Outlook and policy.

Data Observatory

Being built: the Africa Natural Resource Data Observatory, one place for the figures behind our briefs, by country and by commodity.

Natural Resource Outlook

Planned: a yearly reading of what each African country keeps from its natural resources, published as the Africa Natural Resource Outlook.

Working papers

9 papers with permanent DOIs on the UNU-INRA community on Zenodo, free for anyone to read and cite.

WASCAL CONCERT

With WASCAL, mapping land use and land cover across West Africa and testing ways to cut greenhouse gases while growing more food. Includes PhD training.

WASCAL LANDSURF

Climate indicators for land and farming drawn from satellite and model data, feeding a West African Earth System Model. Includes PhD training.

Why it matters

A figure a government can trust is a figure it can act on. Ours carry their source, their date and a right of reply.

HOW WE WORK

Every study starts with a decision that needs to change, and ends only when the change is measured.



African Technical Workshop on the Global Goal on Adaptation, October 2026.

1
Ask

A question that names the decision, who takes it, and the date we measure again.

2
Gather

Field readings, public records and satellite images, each with its source and date.

3
Check

Internal quality review, then peer review by our College of Research Associates and journals.

4
Government first

The government reads its own figures first, with a right of reply, before anything is public.

5
Act

We work with government, business and communities as the policy is put into practice.

6
Measure again

Jobs created, income earned and value kept at home, on the date we set at the start.

Three locks on every figure: internal quality review, peer review, and the government reading its own figures first with a right of reply.

Every research question produces four outputs

1 A peer-reviewed paper

2 A contribution to master's and doctoral research

3 An executive course for decision-makers

4 Teaching material for students

PUBLICATIONS

Evidence written for the person who has to decide, and checked before it goes out.

Our briefs, reports and papers are free to read. Each brief is written for one decision and one decision-maker, and the government concerned sees its figures first.

Scan to read them all
unu.edu/inra/publications

Policy briefs

The UNU-INRA Policy Brief series, 2026: short, decision-ready briefs, each naming the decision it informs and the date it will be measured again.

Reports

Africa Redefining Critical Minerals for a Shared Future (2026)
Counting the Costs: From Extraction to Green Transition
Africa's Development in the Age of Stranded Assets
Blind Alleys and Bright Prospects: Africa Navigating Stranded Assets and Just Transitions
Earth-Shattering: Opportunities for Financial Sector Engagement at the Nexus of Modern Slavery and Natural Resources in Ghana

Working papers

9 papers with permanent DOIs on the UNU-INRA community on Zenodo, including The Keep Rate: A Formal Definition of Natural Resource Value Retention in Producer Economies.

Commentaries

The Warning Has Come. Now Comes the Work. (November 2026; also published by the United Nations in Ghana)
Africa's Priorities in Antalya, and the Pillar the Climate Talks Keep Missing (November 2026)

WORK WITH US

There is no employment without experience.

Every door below is open to everyone. You gain skills by doing real research, a record of work for your CV, and your name on what we publish together.

11 million

young Africans enter the labour market every year; only about 3 million find formal jobs. African Development Bank, 2026.

Innovative Affiliation

Student, trader, farmer, fisher or researcher: bring evidence from where you stand and learn the method by doing it.

College of Research Associates

Write and review our flagship reports. Open to everyone; no publication record needed.

Work With Us

For governments, universities, businesses and funders: see what each partner gains.

Learning and the Academy

The Africa Natural Resource Value Academy: courses for decision-makers, taught on their own country's numbers.

UNU-INRA Tally

Our monthly newsletter: new briefs, research, events and ways to take part.

You belong from your first piece of evidence. Send a weekly card for three months without missing a week, and the Director signs your recognition letter with the title Innovative Affiliate.

Scan a code with your phone camera, or visit unu.edu/inra

AFRICA IN NUMBERS

What is not counted cannot be kept.



A floating market of dugout canoes at Nacala, Mozambique.

USD 29.5 trillion

Mine-site value of Africa's mineral endowment, about 20% of the world total.

Africa Finance Corporation, 2026

About 30%

Africa's share of the world's critical mineral reserves.

UNU-INRA, 2026

48%

Share of Africa's jobs in farming, forestry and fishing.

FAO, 2021 figures

28%

Share of the world's people under 25 who live in Africa.

Pew Research Center, 2026

11 million

Young Africans entering the labour market each year; only about 3 million find formal jobs.

African Development Bank, 2026

88 vs 1,486

Researchers per million people: Sub-Saharan Africa, as low as 88; the world, 1,486 in 2023.

United Nations, SDG Report 2026

The wealth is here. The young people are here. What is missing is the count, and the count is our work.

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Africa is uncounted.

Count It. Keep It. Convert It. Circulate It.

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