12th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa: "Pathways to Peace: Economic Sovereignty and Geopolitical Transformation"

Sub-theme Vice Chancellors' Dialogue

"From Knowledge Consumers to Knowledge Producers: The Role of African Universities in Shaping Africa's Future"

I. Background

The 12th Tana Forum theme advances the notion that economic sovereignty and geopolitical shifts directly drive peace, rather than just accompanying it. African universities sit at the center of this process, acting as upstream catalysts for stability rather than passive, downstream outcomes of development.

The mechanism runs through knowledge production. A continent that imports the frameworks, curricula, validation standards, and research agendas through which it understands its own economies, conflicts, and governance challenges cannot fully own the transformation it seeks. Economic sovereignty presupposes epistemic sovereignty: the capacity to generate, validate, and apply knowledge on one's own terms, in service of locally defined problems.

II. Objective

By focusing on this dual mandate, the sub-theme invites discussions on various aspects, such as:

A. Research Agenda Ownership

1. Who currently sets the research questions African universities pursue such as funders, foreign partner institutions, domestic industry, or the universities themselves?
2. What institutional changes would shift incentive structures toward locally defined research priorities by maintaining international rigor or collaboration?

B. Publication, Validation, and Epistemic Standards

3. To what extent does the pressure to publish in internationally indexed journals shape which questions are asked and how findings are framed in research?
4. Are there viable regional or continental validation mechanisms that could reduce dependency without sacrificing quality control?

C. University–Industry Linkages as the Delivery Mechanism

5. Where do current university-industry partnerships on your campuses sit on a spectrum from extractive to co-generative?
6. What institutional or policy barriers prevent African universities from capturing the economic value of research conducted on campus?
7. What would a genuine innovation ecosystem require of university leadership, industry partners, and government simultaneously?

D. Partnerships and Sovereignty

8. When international partnerships are structured, who retains authorship of the research agenda? What terms should Vice Chancellors insist on as a baseline for partnership design going forward?
9. How can African Universities lead on AI, data ownership, digital infrastructure?

III. Expected Outcomes

The dialogue is expected to produce four outcomes. Firstly, a diagnostic of who currently sets research agendas across African universities and why. Secondly, recommendations for realigning promotion, tenure, and funding incentives toward locally defined priorities without sacrificing rigor or collaboration. Thirdly, recommendations to look into continental validation and publication mechanisms that reduce dependency on external gatekeepers; and agreed baseline terms, on agenda authorship, intellectual property, and data rights, that Vice Chancellors can require in future international partnerships. Fourthly, it will produce a typology of university-industry linkages that identifies replicable

co-generative models, a preliminary continental position on university leadership in AI and data governance, and a named follow-through mechanism to track implementation after the Forum.