

CALL FOR PAPERS

Digital Humanities and Artificial Intelligence in African Studies: Towards Sustainable and Equitable Practices

A DFG Programme Point Sud Workshop

21–24 September 2026 · STIAS, Stellenbosch, South Africa

About the Workshop

The integration of digital humanities (DH) and artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the production of knowledge in African Studies, offering new opportunities for innovative analysis, dynamic visualisation and cross-cultural research. Yet this shift raises urgent questions regarding equitable access, the representation of African languages, and the suitability of methodologies. Current large language models underrepresent African languages, digital scholarly infrastructures remain optimised for English, and digitisation pipelines that produce AI-ready data are themselves shaped by political choices about what to digitise, how to describe it, and who controls access. While recent initiatives on digital sovereignty in Africa have centred on policy and regulation, this workshop shifts attention to methodological practice. It asks how DH methods and AI transform research in African Studies, and how we can design, evaluate, and sustain these methods under African conditions. By bringing together scholars, independent researchers and practitioners from Africa, Europe, and beyond, the event will foster North–South and South–South dialogue at the intersection of African epistemologies and digital methods, moving from description to design.

Convenors

- Frédérick Madore, University of Bayreuth
- Vincent Hiribarren, King's College London
- Emmanuel Ngue Um, University of Yaoundé I
- Menno van Zaanen, South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR)

Thematic Axes

The programme is structured around the following thematic axes:

1 Transforming Research Methods through AI and Digital Tools in African Studies

This axis asks a fundamental question: how are AI and DH methods changing the study of African cultures, languages, and histories? Participants will present concrete uses of AI to analyse multilingual texts, employ computer vision to study visual culture and historical artefacts, and develop digital mapping to trace cultural movements and connections. We will evaluate what works for different kinds of African cultural materials, identify adaptations required for local contexts, and specify where computational approaches can complement—rather than replace—interpretive scholarship. The goal is clear: practical guidance for integrating these methods while preserving the interpretive richness that defines the humanities.

2 Building Sustainable Research Infrastructures from African Perspectives

Moving beyond policy discourse, this axis asks what it takes to build and sustain digital research capacity within African institutions and communities. We will examine practical obstacles—limited connectivity, unstable funding, and scarce training data for local languages—and showcase South–South collaboration models that have navigated these constraints. Participants will share strategies for developing tools that utilise available

resources rather than assuming high-end infrastructure. Key questions include how to keep research outputs accessible to the communities being studied, how to train the next generation of African DH scholars, and how to secure sustainable funding that does not depend solely on institutions in the Global North. The focus is on concrete, scalable approaches to durable capacity.

3 Centring African Knowledge Systems in Digital Research Design

This axis poses a methodological challenge: how can digital research tools respect and incorporate African ways of knowing? Rather than retrofitting existing techniques to African materials, we explore how African epistemologies can shape the tools themselves. Case studies will show community knowledge informing database structures, oral traditions testing text-centred analytical frameworks, and local classification systems improving standard metadata schemas. We will consider protocols for culturally sensitive materials, interface design that does not privilege European languages, and criteria to ensure that AI systems trained on African data primarily serve African research needs. Here, decolonisation moves from critique to construction.

Workshop Format & Language Policy

The workshop will run in a hybrid format to maximise participation and impact. In-person sessions at STIAS will be paired with remote access via Zoom for those unable to travel. Participants will pre-circulate draft papers in English or French one month in advance, each with a bilingual abstract to support preparation. To address language barriers, the workshop will operate bilingually in English and French. Presenters may speak in either language; where possible, a bilingual chair will moderate discussion and provide brief consecutive interpretation where needed. Recent advances in AI speech recognition and machine translation now enable near-real-time captioning; we will deploy these tools in the room and on Zoom. All presenters will supply slides with bilingual titles and key terms, and a one-page terminology handout in both languages. Together, these measures encourage meaningful participation in Africa's Anglophone and Francophone communities, which are often divided by institutional and linguistic boundaries, and provide immediate, practical benefits for multilingual colleagues.

Submission Guidelines

We invite proposals for individual papers (20-minute presentations). Submissions may be in English or French. Proposals of up to 500 words should be emailed to the convenors by 30 April 2026. Each submission must include: (i) a title; (ii) an abstract outlining the context, central question, and methodological approach; and (iii) a 100-word biographical note indicating the applicant's discipline and institutional affiliation.

Please send your proposals to the following addresses:

Frédéric Madore: frederick.madore@uni-bayreuth.de

Vincent Hiribarren: vincent.hiribarren@kcl.ac.uk

Emmanuel Ngue Um: ngueum@gmail.com

Menno van Zaanen: menno.vanzaanen@nwu.ac.za

Publication

Our goal is to publish selected papers from the workshop as a special issue in the Journal of the Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (JDHASA), subject to agreement with the journal's editorial board. All submitted full papers will undergo peer review. Authors whose papers are selected for the special issue will be expected to revise their manuscripts in line with reviewer feedback before final publication.

Selection Criteria & Inclusivity

Selection will prioritise gender equity, support for early-career scholars based in sub-Saharan Africa, and balance across disciplines and regions. In addition to scholars, we will include practitioner-developers by directly engaging the teams behind DH tools. Their participation will help us to assess user needs and the feasibility of embedding African ways of knowing in tool design. DH remains gender-imbalanced; accordingly, the open call will explicitly encourage applications from women and weight gender equity in review. We will intentionally include Africa-based, diasporic, and returning scholars. Recognising uneven DH capacity, particularly in several

Francophone regions, we will aim for a majority of Africa-based participants and amplify Francophone voices through targeted outreach and reserved places for early-career researchers. The workshop will uphold equal opportunity regardless of gender, religion, or other sociocultural differences.

Funding & Logistics

The DFG Programme Point Sud will cover transportation, accommodation, visa costs, catering and local transport for all selected participants. However, vaccinations, health insurance and meals during travel days to and from Stellenbosch cannot be covered.

Key Dates

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

- **30 April 2026**

NOTIFICATION OF ACCEPTANCE

- **15 May 2026**

DEADLINE FOR FULL PAPERS

- **31 August 2026**

WORKSHOP DATES

- **21–24 September 2026**

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