

## THE CONFERENCE

### Global Alliance of Leading Edge Schools for Sustainability (GALESS)

#### (Enhancing Knowledge and Collaboration: Unveiling the Significance of GALESS Conferences for African Youth)

GALESS conferences have played a pivotal role in driving innovation, fostering academic exchange, and nurturing collaboration among students and their societies. While GALESS events have attained global recognition within the academic and research spheres, my team and I achieved a significant milestone as pioneering African participants in these conferences. Being part of GALESS provided me with valuable insights into the unique context of research conferences, and I deeply regret not discovering GALESS sooner. Over the past decade, GALESS has made remarkable strides in engaging young minds to predict and shape sustainable societies in the near future. Unfortunately, Africa has been underrepresented at such critical conferences. Today marks a turning point, as Africa is poised to become an essential contributor to harnessing the full potential of these gatherings. This article delves into the significance of GALESS research conference experiences for young African students, highlighting their transformative impact. Moreover, it explores ways to enhance inclusivity and extend these opportunities to more Africans and individuals from various backgrounds.

*After the presentation, as we gathered for a photograph, an overwhelming sensation swept over me, as if I was on top of the world. Yet, beyond the pride I felt, this profound emotion served as a reminder that my opinion truly holds value and significance in the world.*



## **The conference (*How was Poland?*)**

Over the past few weeks, one question has been constantly asked by friends: "How was your trip to Poland?" To sum up, the answer I keep telling them is that "Poland was great!" but it was more than that. Even before I embarked on the journey, I couldn't help but wonder what the GALESS conference had in store for me. As the night before my flight approached, I found myself restless, pondering what the conference in Poland would be like for someone like me – a child born in the DRC and raised in Uganda as a refugee. It was unreal to imagine myself flying over European clouds and standing on a podium, addressing an international research conference.

The morning of my flight brought a mix of excitement and nervousness. I felt the weight of this opportunity and the support of my mentors, school peers, and family, who all believed in me. Despite their confidence, I still had doubts about being a good fit for such an esteemed event. But the significance of the GALESS conference, which brought together young minds to tackle global challenges through research and practical approaches, particularly on my favorite topic "energy transitions," reassured me. Winning a competitive innovation challenge about energy, clean water, and sanitation in Africa in the past added to my confidence.

Finally, on June 24th, 2023, my team and I arrived in Poland, and the experience surpassed my dreams. The atmosphere exuded inspiration and motivation, filling me with a sense of potential to make a difference in my community and the world. As I sat in the conference I realized It was worth the rigorous preparation prior to the conference. That included over three months of engaging with research and critical idea development on energy transitions. On the next day, I come across GALESS participants who were from seven different countries, including Thailand, South Africa, Singapore, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland, all gathered to share their knowledge and insights. I was so excited to meet students from countries I was dreaming to reach, and from here the conference started getting fun for me.

The conference's structure was designed to foster creativity and free expression. Each student had a host student and family while teachers and mentors stayed in the hotel. This unique approach allowed free interaction and learning among peers. Workshops, interactive sessions, and practical experiences formed an integral part of the conference. This was because they

further enhanced the fun, and interactivity, and enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

For me, the conference was a dream come true, but I also recognized it as a privileged opportunity for others, as one participant from Singapore pointed out. The event was warm from the beginning to the end with special snacks, reflecting the diverse and idealistic atmosphere. The exchange of information and ideas during meals made the experience enjoyable. The conference planted seeds of friendship and dialogue, making us more aware of global issues and motivating us to take impactful action in our own communities. Trips and museum visits enriched our knowledge of the host country and provided diverse scientific experiences. The GALESS conference was a transformative experience that left a lasting impression on me. The opportunities for growth, collaboration, and learning went beyond my expectations. It solidified my belief that through collective efforts, we can create positive change in the world.



*To foster a profound connection among young students, cultivating friendships and open dialogue, while nurturing their awareness of global issues*



*affecting humanity. This endeavor aims to empower them to take impactful action within their own communities, sowing the seeds of compassion and positive change.*

### **Global Alliance of Leading Edge Schools for Sustainability (GALESS)**

For over a decade, GALESS has been the host of an esteemed academic gathering, uniting scholars, researchers, professionals, and students from diverse disciplines and institutions. This event serves as a platform for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and innovations in specific fields of study on an international scale. The focus of these gatherings is to present and discuss research advancements, methodologies, and discoveries, particularly from young students aged 16-19.

The essence of GALESS conferences lies in fostering meaningful connections and dialogues among young minds, cultivating friendship, and nurturing a global perspective on the challenges humanity faces across continents. These conferences empower participants to take impactful action within their communities. The sharing of ideas takes place through oral presentations, poster sessions, workshops, and panel discussions. The topics covered are a wide range of subjects, including but not limited to sciences, humanities, social sciences, engineering, technology, and arts. Each year, the conference centers around a specific theme; most recently, the focus has been on energy transition.

For countless students, including myself, GALESS conferences have been a source of hope and motivation to persistently test our ideas and aspire to positive change. Credit goes to Dr. Lim Lai Cheng and her team of directors, Mr. Huib Schilling, Mrs. Leonor Clares, Dr. Huub van der Linden, and Mr. Francesc Rubio, for thoughtfully establishing GALESS, paving the way for the future. The founders and advisors have successfully nurtured a sense of pride, inclusion, and competence in young students, encouraging them to make meaningful contributions to global issues through scientific and social sciences research, evidence-based practice, and ethical thinking, all facilitated by participating in these impactful international conferences convened by GALESS.



*GALESS is driven by a strong commitment to sustainability, the holistic education of the younger generation, and the untapped potential, intellect, and creativity of youth. By providing comprehensive and empowering education, GALESS aims to nurture proactive individuals who embody the essence of sustainability, becoming the torchbearers and shaping a brighter future for the world.*

## **Advancing Knowledge and Collaboration: Unraveling the Meaning of GALESS Conferences for Young Students in Africa.**

As previously indicated, the profound potential of GALESS conferences resides in active engagement with the African continent. Extending the reach of GALES conferences to Africa would facilitate not only Knowledge Sharing and Networking, but also serve as a dynamic platform for African students, scientists, and experts to disseminate their breakthroughs, innovations, and concepts to a global audience. This platform holds the promise of fostering a rich exchange of insights, with the potential to catalyze future partnerships and collaborations between African nations and the international community. The GALESS conference platform stands to offer African students a valuable opportunity to acquire novel methodologies, acquaint themselves with cutting-edge approaches, and remain abreast of the latest advancements in their respective fields. This amplification of research capabilities across the continent is underpinned by the pivotal concept of knowledge transfer. Moreover, these conferences would actively promote Inter-Disciplinary Cooperation, addressing the unique and multifaceted challenges that arise from Africa's diverse cultural, social, and environmental contexts.

### **Recommendations to GALESS**

**Improving Accessibility and Inclusivity at GALESS Conferences:** GALESS should prioritize increasing accessibility and inclusivity at its conferences, particularly from an African perspective. To achieve this, organizers should consider various factors that promote inclusivity. One essential step is to open up the application process to individuals, not just school-guided applications. Many schools in Africa have not adequately supported students in accessing such opportunities, making it crucial to reach out to individual applicants. Additionally, GALESS should actively consider the less privileged, such as refugees and disabled individuals, by securing scholarships or grants to provide them with the chance to participate.

Moreover, to make attendance feasible for individuals from low-income backgrounds, GALESS should offer travel grants or scholarships and ensure affordable registration fees. Furthermore,

organizing events in easily reachable locations for participants from different regions will encourage wider representation and participation.

**Language considerations:** Considering the linguistic diversity across Africa and other parts of the world, GALESS should make efforts to accommodate multiple languages during conference presentations and materials. This ensures that language barriers do not hinder participation and knowledge exchange. While aiming to incorporate various languages, GALESS should primarily focus on hosting conferences in English and French, as these are widely spoken and understood globally. These two languages can serve as a foundation while exploring other languages to foster inclusivity.

**Collaboration with Institutions and Young Leaders:** To enhance the impact of GALESS conferences within the African context, collaboration with institutions and young leaders is essential. Partnering with local universities, research centers, and organizations will facilitate the organization of conferences and encourage ownership and sustainability. Employing young leaders who share similar experiences and perspectives with the participants can contribute to a more comfortable and inclusive environment.

**Establishing a Long-lasting Alumni Network:** GALESS should create a strong and long-lasting alumni network to track the progress of past conference participants. Understanding the achievements and impact of these individuals in their respective fields can highlight the success of GALESS conferences. Inviting alumni to future conferences as mentors and facilitators will provide valuable guidance and insights to current participants, fostering knowledge transfer and encouraging personal growth.

**Support for Participants' Ideas and Research:** To nurture and support impactful ideas presented at GALESS conferences, the organization should consider publishing research papers and offering mentorship opportunities. Students with groundbreaking ideas should receive assistance in implementing their projects, including financial support through grants or implementation funds. By actively promoting and supporting these ideas, GALESS can contribute to addressing global challenges and transforming concepts into reality.



By implementing these strategies, GALESS can create a more accessible, inclusive, and sustainable platform that empowers young leaders across Africa and beyond.

### **Closing remarks**

Research conferences like GALESS serve a dual purpose beyond just disseminating knowledge. They provide an excellent platform for young students to showcase their research findings and projects. This experience not only hones their communication and presentation skills but also bolsters their confidence as aspiring researchers. For instance, Sibusiso, a young researcher from South Africa, presented his renewable energy solutions research at an international conference. Though nervous initially, the encouraging feedback from seasoned academics boosted his confidence and motivated him to pursue further research in the field.

Participating in these conferences fosters a sense of belonging to a broader academic community. Students often connect with like-minded peers who share their research interests, leading to the formation of supportive networks that extend beyond the conference itself.

Research conferences play a significant role in building networks and communities among young researchers in Africa, promoting collaboration and shared learning, as indicated by a survey conducted by the African Union Scientific Technical Research Commission (AU-STRC).

Overall, research conferences play a pivotal role in fostering innovation, collaboration, and the academic fabric of various fields of study, making them indispensable in the scholarly world. In the African context, understanding the unique needs and implementing inclusive and collaborative approaches can significantly contribute to the continent's development and strengthen its position in the global academic community.

By continuously improving accessibility, inclusivity, and representation, research conferences can become transformative platforms for Africa's growth and progress. These gatherings hold profound meaning for young students, providing exposure, inspiration, and valuable learning experiences. Through interdisciplinary learning, networking opportunities, and mentorship, these events empower the next generation of African scholars and innovators. By supporting and investing in research conference initiatives, Africa can harness the full potential of its youth and pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for the continent.



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