

7th INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE (7th ISJC) 2026

CALL FOR PAPERS | CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE | FACULTY OF LAW | STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Date: 24 August 2026

Venue: Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), Stellenbosch, South Africa

Format: Hybrid (In-person and virtual participation)

Conference Theme: *Decoloniality, Constitutional Transformation and Social Justice in the Global South: Indigenous Systems, Food Sovereignty and Pathways to Substantive Equality*

Conference Overview

The 7th International Social Justice Conference (7th ISJC) invites scholars, jurists, researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, indigenous knowledge scholars and civil society actors to critically engage questions relating to constitutional transformation, decoloniality, indigenous systems and social justice within the Global South.

Thirty years into constitutional democracy in South Africa under a Constitution that entrenches social justice as one of the pillars of the blueprint the Constitution seeks to establish, social justice and related equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms on a level playing field seem elusive.

The structural inequalities that undermine social justice are not unique to South Africa but are part of a broader global context marked by persistent and intergenerationally transmitted forms of inequality, socio-economic disadvantage and exclusion, food insecurity, ecological vulnerability, and governance. Such disparities remain shaped by histories of colonialism, dispossession and legalised injustice. This is despite constitutions

hailed as blueprints for transformative governance undergirded by transformative constitutionalism and socially just sustainable development.

One of the enduring structural inequality legacies of previously legalised injustices such as colonialism, is systemic inequality between the Global North and the Global South impacting on equal enjoyment of political, economic, social and cultural rights on an equal footing within and between societies, with the Global South visibly continuing to bear the yoke of colonial developmental barriers, reflected in epistemic hegemonies, culturally unfit legal systems and the marginalisation of indigenous systems of governance and production, including food production.

These realities raise important questions regarding the extent to which constitutional democracies and governance systems have meaningfully advanced substantive equality, social justice and equitable development, particularly within contexts characterised by structural inequality, food insecurity, ecological vulnerability, and unequal systems of production and distribution.

The conference further recognises that persistent inequality, poverty and food insecurity cannot be attributed to a single cause. Rather, these conditions emerge through a complex interaction of historical dispossession, structural inequality, governance failures, institutional weaknesses, and broader systemic challenges that continue to shape material lived realities across many societies within the Global South.

Across these interrelated concerns, the conference seeks to foster critical engagement with distributive, reparative, restorative and recognitional dimensions of justice, focusing on social justice, particularly within contexts shaped by histories of colonialism, dispossession, structural inequality, food insecurity, ecological vulnerability and unequal systems of governance, production and resource distribution.

Within this context, the conference positions decoloniality not merely as an abstract or purely epistemic project, nor solely as a process of decolonisation in the formal political or institutional sense, but as a critical framework for interrogating the enduring structural effects of colonialism and the material conditions that continue to shape inequality, exclusion, food systems, local economies, governance structures, resource distribution and lived realities within the Global South. Particular attention is given to the extent to which

constitutional democracies and governance systems meaningfully confront historical injustice, structural inequality and persistent forms of exclusion.

The conference further recognises that questions of constitutional transformation and social justice are inseparable from the broader political economy of inequality, including the organisation of food systems, systems of production and distribution, governance accountability and the extent to which constitutional implementation meaningfully transforms material conditions and lived realities. Particular attention will therefore be given to the relationship between constitutional implementation and lived realities, including questions relating to poverty, food insecurity, food sovereignty, ecological sustainability, indigenous systems, governance accountability and transformative development.

As part of epistemic decoloniality, the conference will also examine the place of indigenous philosophical grounding of society, including the African philosophy known as ubuntu and similar shared humanity philosophical thoughts from the Global South. In this regard, the conference recognises an important distinction between colonialism as a historical and structural system of domination, decolonisation as processes of political and institutional transformation, and decoloniality as an ongoing critical engagement with the enduring effects of colonial power, inequality and exclusion.

Subsequently, the conference seeks to foster critical engagement with restorative and redistributive approaches to constitutional transformation, including the restoration and regeneration of historically marginalised systems of governance, production and knowledge, alongside more equitable distribution of opportunities, resources and social goods. For example, this may include critical engagement with the constitutional recognition and adaptation of indigenous and customary governance systems, such as traditional leadership institutions, community-based land governance, customary dispute resolution mechanisms and indigenous participatory decision-making processes, particularly where these systems have historically been displaced or subordinated through colonial and apartheid governance arrangements.

Within this broader framework, the conference seeks to create an interdisciplinary and comparative platform for engaging constitutional, legal, governance and developmental questions relating to:

1. Constitutional governance and transformative constitutionalism for equality and social justice;
2. Transformative governance under a social justice and human rights anchored Constitution;
3. Indigenous legal and philosophical systems, access to justice and multicultural governance;
4. Food sovereignty, food security and sustainable development;
5. Restorative and redistributive dimensions of social justice;
6. Governance accountability and transformative development in the age of AI;
7. Constitutional political economy, local economies and systems of production; and
8. Decoloniality and constitutional futures;

Considerations of gender equality, sexual orientation, nationality and other yokes of inequality that intersect to exacerbate the social injustice experiences of certain social groups in society will be mainstreamed across all thematic discussions.

The conference further seeks to foster Global South-centred scholarship and dialogue on pathways toward equitable, restorative, sustainable and socially just futures grounded in constitutional transformation, substantive equality and transformative governance.

Contributions engaging with Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 13 (Climate Action) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), as well as Agenda 2063, particularly within Global South constitutional and governance contexts, are especially encouraged.

Thematic Conference Streams

Abstracts are invited in, but are not limited to, the following thematic areas:

1. Transformative Constitutionalism, Structural Inequality and Social Justice

Indicative topics include:

1. transformative constitutionalism and substantive equality;
2. restorative and redistributive constitutionalism;
3. constitutional governance, social justice and socio-economic rights;
4. constitutional accountability and implementation;

5. law, inequality and structural exclusion;
6. constitutionalism and lived realities; and
7. judicial approaches to transformative justice.

2. Decoloniality, Constitutional Futures and Epistemic Justice

Indicative topics include:

1. decolonial constitutionalism;
2. epistemic justice and legal knowledge systems;
3. decoloniality, governance and development;
4. decolonial political economy and systems of production;
5. decolonising law and public institutions;
6. constitutional futures in the Global South; and
7. law, power and structural transformation.

3. Indigenous Systems, Governance and Legal Pluralism

Indicative topics include:

1. indigenous knowledge systems, constitutional governance and democratic accountability;
2. indigenous systems, constitutional transformation and food sovereignty;
3. legal pluralism, customary law and substantive equality;
4. traditional leadership, governance and constitutional accountability;
5. customary law, gender justice and intersectional equality;
6. indigenous systems, sustainability and transformative development; and
7. critical perspectives on indigenous systems within constitutional democracies.

4. Food Sovereignty, Food Justice and Sustainable Development

Indicative topics include:

1. food sovereignty and constitutional rights;
2. right to food and transformative constitutionalism;
3. food justice and socio-economic inequality;

4. indigenous food systems and ecological sustainability;
5. climate justice and sustainable livelihoods;
6. local economies and community resilience; and
7. governance, food systems and constitutional political economy.

5. Governance, Institutional Accountability and Transformative Development

Indicative topics include:

1. governance and constitutional accountability;
2. local government and transformative development;
3. public institutions and socio-economic rights;
4. governance failures and structural inequality;
5. social justice impact assessment and policy design;
6. governance innovation and transformative governance; and
7. governance systems and socially responsive development.

6. Restorative and Redistributive Pathways to Social Justice

Indicative topics include:

1. restorative constitutionalism and substantive equality;
2. redistributive justice and substantive equality;
3. recognition and redistribution;
4. ubuntu and transformative governance;
5. reparative approaches to historical injustice;
6. access to justice and social inclusion; and
7. pathways toward equitable, sustainable and socially just futures.

Interdisciplinary, comparative, and practice-oriented contributions grounded in social justice constitutional principles are particularly encouraged.

Submission Guidelines

- **Theme under which the submission is made**
- **Abstract Length:** 300–400 words

- **Author Details:** Include full name, institutional affiliation and a short biography (maximum 150 words)
- **Submission Email:** socialjustice@sun.ac.za
- **Abstract Submission Deadline:** 21 July 2026
- **Notification of Acceptance:** 30 July 2026

Accepted papers will be considered for inclusion in a post-conference peer-reviewed publication in partnership with JUTA.

Participation

- **Format:** Hybrid (In-person and virtual participation)
- **Venue:** Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), Stellenbosch, South Africa
- **Presentation Mode:** Accepted presenters may participate either in person or virtually
- **Attendance:** Open to registered delegates nationally and internationally

Registration Fees

- **In-Person Attendance:** R800 per person (includes meals and conference materials)
- **Virtual Attendance:** Complimentary / To be confirmed

Enquiries

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