

Empowering the Global Brain Economy: African Leadership through the Yaoundé Declaration

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“Brain health is central to who we are as individuals and is increasingly appreciated as necessary for a healthy economy.”

—The Lancet Neurology Editorial, December 2024¹

The Yaoundé Declaration for the Brain Economy, Brain Health, and Brain Capital has received support from the President of Cameroon^{2,3}. It provides a platform for radical, cross-sectoral innovation in global brain health, led by Africa. The goal is to boost economic productivity and well-being. This declaration is timely given that Cameroon was the President of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (September 2024).

Brain Health Beyond the Health Sector

We commend the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in advancing the brain health position statement⁴ and brain health in the context of the “Intersectoral Global Action Plan 2022-2031 implementation toolkit”⁵. Solving brain health challenges will require major reprioritization and transitions across most major sectors — a systems approach. Incremental change will not be sufficient. There are few silver bullets. No technology, policy, or actor alone can achieve these critical shifts. It will take a community of people working together across the globe and across systems to employ innovative solutions and accelerate change.

There is an urgent need for holistic change in how we manage mental and neurological disorders and how we protect or optimize brain functions. The global prevalence and cost of these disorders are among the highest of any medical condition and are projected to rise even more in the coming years⁶. We have now transitioned from an era of brawn to the era of the brain, where good brain health is essential for smooth skill-based economic transitions. It is evident that transitions such as the green transition, digital transition, and the bioeconomy transition are necessary for global wellbeing and sustainability⁷. It is clear that optimal human brain functioning is essential to navigate the modern world successfully.

Advances in brain science highlight new ways of nurturing better brain health and diagnosing and treating brain malfunction quickly and effectively⁸.



Under the very high patronage of the President of the Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Paul Biya, Brain Research Africa Initiative (BRAIN) and the Cameroon Government organized the First High-Level African Science Summit on Brain Economy, Brain Health & Brain Capital in Yaoundé.

Alongside rapidly evolving medical approaches, there are also a range of established and novel non-medical approaches to address the variety of stressors assaulting the brain, including managing the impact of environmental challenges on brain health^{9,10}.

The benefits of advancing brain health go far beyond managing brain disorders. Protecting the brain structure, function, and wellbeing with protective factors such as adequate sleep, psychologically and physically safe environments, good nutrition, etc., allows for optimal brain skills essential for economic and societal progress.

The Road to the Yaoundé Declaration

The Yaoundé Declaration's story outlines a systems-based framework for dealing with such challenges and promoting a brain-positive economic transformation, also known as a brain economy. The brain economy transformation is a global goal to stop and reverse the loss of brain capital, an economic asset encompassing social, emotional, and cognitive brain resources¹¹⁻¹⁴.

The Yaoundé Declaration for the Brain Economy, Brain Health, and Brain Capital marks a milestone in advancing global brain health and economic resilience for societal transformation. This declaration provides a roadmap for the transformation of the brain economy.

In Box 1 we outline the key steps in the development of the Yaoundé Declaration.

Box 1. The Development of the Yaoundé Declaration

March 13, 2024

Barcelona, Spain

**Africa's Key Role in the Brain Economy,
Euro-Mediterranean Economists
Association Webinar**

This webinar involved a broad range of experts from the African, European and global contexts, as well as from across academic, health, business and finance communities.

July 22, 2024

Yaoundé, Cameroon

Scientific Technical Meeting

Organised by the Brain Research Africa Initiative and was part of the Brain Week in Cameroon and Africa. The event was hybrid, featuring national, regional, and global stakeholders from health care, economics, business, and policy.

August 22, 2024

Yaoundé, Cameroon

Diplomatic Meeting

Led by the Prime Minister, Head of Government, His Excellency Chief Dr. Joseph Dion Ngute, and Representative of the President of The Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Paul Biya. The presentation of the Yaoundé Declaration to the Cameroon Government resulted in the commitment of the latter to move it further to the 79th United Nations General Assembly (79UNGA), which Cameroon chaired.

September, 18, 19, 20, 2024

New York City

UN Brain Days

This was part of the 79UNGA Science Summit. This event involved key stakeholders from across the brain community — patients, scientists, clinicians, policymakers, industry leaders, economists — and other relevant actors, who presented on their work and co-created towards further action to place brain health and brain skills at the top of global policy agendas in the post-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) era. BRAIN presented the Yaoundé Declaration at this meeting.

November 16-18, 2024

Wenzhou, China

**World Young Scientist Summit (WYSS and
5th Oujiang International Forum on Brain
Health & Alzheimer's Disease**

These events brought together young scientists from all over the world, as well as other leaders in science, industry, economy, policy and government. The presentation of the Yaoundé Declaration exhorted participants to encourage their governments around the world to employ this instrument for neuroscience diplomacy and the promotion of brain health, economy and brain capital.

November 21, 2024

Yaoundé Declaration Pre-Print

Available Online

The paper is in pre-print via Neuroscience and includes coauthorship from over 20 high-level members of the Cameroon Government.

December 5-6, 2024

Bern, Switzerland

**Second Stakeholder meeting of the Swiss
Brain Health Plan**

This meeting engaged Swiss, European as well as global stakeholders in Brain Health, to review the roadmap and chart next steps. All presentations, including that of the Yaoundé Declaration highlighted the need to work together, sharing experiences and lessons learned for the promotion of brain health and brain capital.

Empowering the Global Brain Economy: African Leadership through the Yaoundé Declaration

"On behalf of the Head of State, the Government of Cameroon extends its congratulations to Brain Research Africa Initiative (BRAIN) and to all its global, regional and national partner organisations, as well as the leaders and experts who have tirelessly contributed over the past few months to the creation of this historical document."

*-His Excellency Chief Dr. Joseph Dion Ngute,
Prime Minister of Cameroon, at the official launch
of the Yaoundé Declaration, August 22, 2024,
Yaoundé, Cameroon.*

About the Yaoundé Declaration

The Yaoundé Declaration provides various stakeholders in the private and public sectors, policymakers, philanthropies, investors, advocates and global leaders with insights to drive policy, investment and action. Decisionmakers can use this paper to understand the state of play across each system, determine which challenges require the greatest attention, and determine which actions can accelerate change.

Key "Calls" Noted in the Yaoundé Declaration

The Yaoundé Declaration contains the following:

- Call for international frameworks for the transformation into a brain-positive economy and for country governments and stakeholders to develop and implement national Brain Economy plans. Lessons must be learned from clean energy transition and digital-artificial intelligence transition plans;
- Call for international data creation, curation, tools and frameworks to support and sustain the promotion of brain health and for country governments and stakeholders to develop and implement national/subnational brain Health plans;
- Call for the establishment of a Global Brain Council ("The Council"): Establish a council of leaders across the brain health space (e.g., researchers, philanthropists, funders, designers, and implementers), creating a potential charter and membership. The Council will identify and curate brain health innovations ripe for investment;

- Call for the creation and sustainable funding of a Global Brain Capital Centre/Institute of Excellence in Africa to build brain capital through research, innovation, capacity building and evidence-informed policy content development on education, science, culture, communication, built environment, economics, and information to foster mutual understanding and respect for our planet; and country governments and stakeholders to develop and implement Brain Capital plans. Work on a Brain Economy Hub has begun;
- Call on high-income countries (HICs) to work together with LMICs in the spirit of UNGA79 President's mandate theme "Unity in Diversity" within the above and other frameworks to reduce global, regional, and local disparities while preserving our rich human and planetary diversity;
- Call on the United Nations General Assembly to consider formalizing this Declaration to raise awareness for these issues across member states and the private and non-government sectors;
- Call to advance this agenda in the coming in major policy fora years such as the United Nations Summit of the Future, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP), World Economic Forum (WEF), the High-Level Meeting of the UNGA on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, G7, and G20.

The Declaration's Catalytic Effects

This Declaration reflects its African leadership and has received generous support from global actors¹⁵. The Yaoundé Declaration has recently been echoed by the Vice President of the European Brain Commission, Prof. Claudio Bassetti, to the European Parliament Health Committee, emphasizing the call of the Declaration for the uptake of "brain health" into all national, regional, and global policies¹⁶. It was also noted in a recent European Policy Centre publication that explored the role of the brain economy in boosting European economic competitiveness¹⁷.

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025, G20 South Africa, and G7 Calgary are ideal



Presentation of the Yaoundé Declaration at the 2024 World Young Scientist Summit (WYSS) and 5th Oujiang International Forum on Brain Health & Alzheimer’s Disease, as part of the International Brain Initiative Delegation, in Wenzhou, China.

platforms to utilize the Yaoundé Declaration for driving transformative progress in brain health and advancing brain economies worldwide. We must rapidly transition from a brain-unhealthy economy to a brain-healthy economy, to unlock greater wellbeing, productivity, and creativity. This transition means investing in the brain capital of nations. ●

¹ The Lancet, N., *United action is needed to prioritise brain health*. Lancet Neurol, 2024. 23(12): p. 1169.

² Njamnshi, A.K., et al. The Yaoundé Declaration. Lancet Neurol. 2024 Oct;23(10):966-967. doi: 10.1016/S1474-4422(24)00364-8. Epub 2024 Aug 22. PMID: 39182501.

³ Njamnshi, A.K., et al, *African Leadership in Brain Diplomacy: The Yaoundé Declaration Advances the Global Brain Economy Playbook for Better Brain Health*. Neuroscience, 2024. Pre-print; Under Review.

⁴ WHO, *Optimizing brain health across the life course: WHO position paper*, W.H.O. Brain Health Unit, Editor. 2022: Geneva.

⁵ WHO, *Intersectoral global action plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031: implementation toolkit*. WHO, 2024.

⁶ Brain Health Atlas, www.brainhealthatlas.org

⁷ Nail-Beatty, O. and e. al, *Brain health is essential for smooth economic transitions: towards socio-economic sustainability, productivity and well-being* Brain Communications, 2024. 6(6).

⁸ Ibanez, A., M.L. Kringelbach, and G. Deco, *A synergetic turn in cognitive neuroscience of brain diseases*. Trends Cogn Sci, 2024. 28(4): p. 319-338.

⁹ Eyre, H.A., et al., *Brain capital is crucial for global sustainable development*. Lancet Neurol, 2024. 23(3): p. 233-235.

¹⁰ Ibanez, A., et al., *Neuroecological links of the exposome and One Health*. Neuron, 2024. 112(12): p. 1905-1910.

¹¹ Eyre, H.A., Graham, C., Njamnshi, A.K., et al., *4 ways to make our economy brain healthy*. The Brookings Institution Policy Paper Series 2024.

¹² Moose, A., K. Enomoto, and H.A. Eyre, *Brain gain: How improving brain health benefits the economy*. Agenda, World Economic Forum, 2024.

¹³ Eyre, H.A. and E. al, *The Brain Economy: Advancing Brain Science to Better Understand the Modern Economy*. Malaysian Journal of Medical Science, 2024.

¹⁴ Smith, E., et al., *A Brain Capital Grand Strategy: toward economic reimagination*. Mol Psychiatry, 2021. 26(1): p. 3-22..

¹⁵ DAC. *Davos Alzheimer’s Collaborative Applauds Africa’s Leadership on Brain Health*. 2024 12/12/24; Available from: <https://www.davosalzheimerscollaborative.org/news-press/davos-alzheimers-collaborative-applauds-africas-leadership-on-brain-health>.

¹⁶ EBC. *EBC Invited to Address the European Parliament Public Health Committee*. 2024 12/12/24; Available from: <https://www.braincouncil.eu/ebc-invited-to-address-the-european-parliament-public-health-committee/>.

¹⁷ Swieboda, P., E. Kuiper, and H.A. Eyre, *Brain economy: Novel Approach to Europe’s Growth*. European Policy Centre, 2024.



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