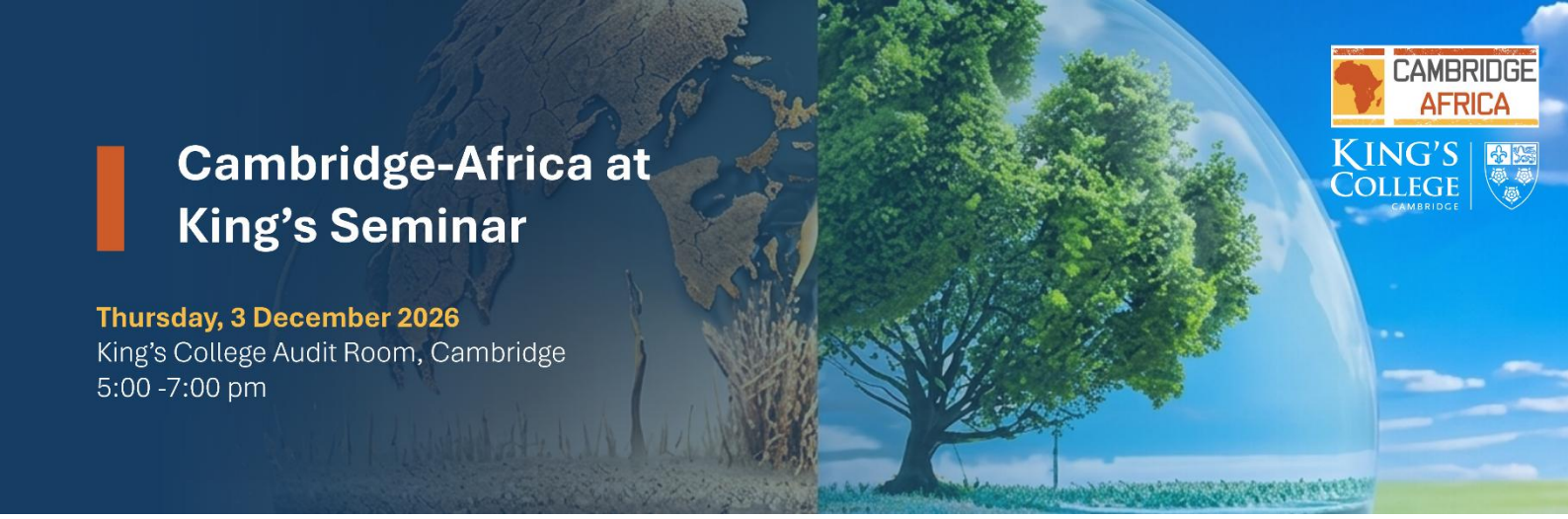



**CO-CAT: Assessing and Strengthening African Universities' Capacities for Climate Adaptation Research** – Insights from the University of Goma, DR Congo

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**Synopsis**

African universities play a critical role in generating knowledge, developing locally relevant solutions, and supporting climate change adaptation. However, their contributions are often constrained by limited institutional capacities, research funding, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. Strengthening these capacities is essential to advancing African-led, socially inclusive, and impact-oriented climate adaptation research.

The project Understanding African Universities' Capacity for Climate Adaptation Research: Co-Creating and Implementing a Climate-Focused Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (CO-CAT) addresses these challenges through a participatory approach involving 20 African universities. Implemented under the Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CLARE) initiative, a UK–Canada research programme, the project aims to co-create and pilot an organisational capacity assessment tool that enables universities to identify institutional strengths, capacity gaps, and priorities for improvement. The CO-CAT tool assesses ten interconnected dimensions: (1) climate science and technical capacities, (2) adaptation science and systems thinking, (3) interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration, (4) gender equality and inclusion, (5) policy and institutional engagement, (6) communication and stakeholder engagement, (7) leadership and strategic planning, (8) monitoring, evaluation and learning, (9) organisational capacity strengthening, and (10) resource mobilisation.

This presentation introduces the CO-CAT project and its ten assessment dimensions before examining the University of Goma's experience as one of the 20 participating institutions. Located in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the University operates in a country of global significance for climate change mitigation and adaptation, particularly because of the Congo Basin rainforest's extensive carbon storage capacity and its role in regulating regional and global climate systems. This environmental context presents

important opportunities for locally grounded climate research. The pilot assessment identified several institutional strengths, notably the existence of specialised postgraduate schools, including the School of Volcanology and Disaster Risk Management and the School of Gender and Development. These structures provide an institutional foundation for interdisciplinary research, capacity development, and socially inclusive approaches to climate adaptation.

However, the assessment also revealed significant gaps in climate science knowledge and technical capacities, alongside weaknesses in research funding mobilisation. In response, the University of Goma was paired with the University of Lomé and the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL) programme to facilitate institutional learning, knowledge exchange, and capacity strengthening in these priority areas.

The University of Goma's experience demonstrates how CO-CAT can move beyond institutional self-assessment to inform targeted capacity-strengthening initiatives. By identifying both existing strengths and areas requiring improvement, the tool provides a practical basis for institutional learning, strategic partnerships, and more effective engagement in climate adaptation research.