

3.3. TOWARDS A COORDINATED VISION OF EUROPE-AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN AFRICA

Outcome report of the second workshop of the Access to Success project, Oslo, Norway, 24-26 February 2010

The second workshop, which took place on 25-26 February in Oslo, Norway, addressed Europe-Africa higher education partnerships and the policies and programmes that contribute to institutional capacity building. It gathered 90 participants from a wide pool of different actors (universities in Africa and Europe, national development cooperation agencies, governments, the European Union and African Union Commissions, private foundations and donor organisations) to examine how they can work towards common objectives and complementary practice in North-South university cooperation. Participants shared partnership experiences, existing capacity building programme models, and national and regional policies, all of which aim to valorise universities as significant drivers of socio-economic development. The bi-regional dimension of the event highlighted the current role of the European Union and African Union in higher education for development, both on policy and programme level, in particular with regards to the evolving EU-Africa Partnership.

3.3.1. Thematic highlights

The role of universities in development cooperation

The first day of the event contextualised the **role of higher education in driving development cooperation**, a concept that at one time was detrimentally dismissed by the World Bank, but has come back on the agenda in the past decade (*Damtew Teferra, International Network for Higher Education in Africa*). While some major donor organisations still focus exclusively on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in framing the development cooperation programmes, most actors acknowledge that the MDGs cannot be achieved without empowering universities: Universities train the highly skilled workforce needed to foster local development and generate research required to redress issues such as health, environment and poverty reduction. Most European higher education programmes for

development do not explicitly align to the MDGs (the British DelPHE and European Commission programmes being an exception) though this can be contingent upon their source of funding. It should be considered that what drives universities to cooperate may not be equated with the rationale of donors. What is important is that there are a range of creative and flexible approaches in university cooperation programmes, which develop with consideration of but not solely according to MDGs. This range should reflect the differing needs across African universities, but also across European universities who must be incentivised to undertake such collaboration (*Ad Boeren, Nuffic*).

Cooperation programmes for capacity building: European models

With regards to current programmes and practices that are to a large extent driven by European national agencies and governments, three principal models exist: Research capacity building, institutional development programmes, and capacity building in specific areas such as university management training, ICT and infrastructure, etc. Intervention can be at various levels: academic, organisational, or institutional. In some cases, cooperation programmes may be implemented through the conduit of individual academics, yet translated into a broader institution building vehicle. This is the case with the VLIR-UOS and the CUD, the development cooperation branches of the regional rectors' conferences in **Belgium**, who finance long-term partnerships that conflate the training of academics with transversal measures to build the university holistically, from infrastructure to staff capacity. **Denmark** focuses on long-term strategic research and provides competitive funding for African researchers to identify a Danish (or, if necessary, non-Danish) counterpart, thus prioritising the needs of the Southern research partner. For Danish-Africa partnerships, research should not simply comprise the production, but also the use of outputs. Thus the Danish backed 'Africa Commission' initiative would focus on contextually

apposite research and linking universities with the private sector and employment (*Dariann Riber, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*). The **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**, who has a well-resourced and complementary portfolio of activities, funds a variety of programmes via different models and levels of intervention: individual scholarships, institutional strengthening through quality assurance training, post-graduate courses for professionals dedicated to development, mobility grants for Germans towards Africa, training for how to apply for research grants, and North-South-South ‘excellency’ research clusters in certain fields (*Anette Pieper de Avila, DAAD*).

At **regional level**, the **European Commission** supports Europe-Africa university cooperation as an element of the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership, articulated through several programmes run by different directorates (DGs): The DG Research supports the ‘Science, Information, Society and Space’ pillar of the strategy, which includes a series of projects proposed by the African Union, funded by a combination of sources (European development Fund, FP7 programme, and AU and EU Member State funds). The EuropeAid Cooperation Office of the European Commission, in conjunction with the ACP Secretariat, implements development cooperation programmes with Africa, and explicitly supports university partnership through the Edu-Link programme and the Erasmus Mundus programme (external cooperation window – multi-country partnerships for mobility) which highlight capacity building and regional integration in African higher education. The ACP Science and Technology programme promotes networking in applied research and instruments for research collaboration. The added value of such programmes lays in the fact that universities and other actors from several countries, both in Africa and Europe, are encouraged to enter into consortia, thus promoting regional cooperation (*Mary Kavanagh, DG Research, José Valente, EuropeAid Cooperation Office*). On the African regional level, plans for a Pan-African University with five thematic research poles delivered by satellite institutes in the five regions of Africa was presented by the **African Union**, which also suggested that stronger stakeholder mobilisation was needed to make the initiative successful and supported by African universities (*Thameur Chaimi, African Union Commission*).

Further cooperation models were explored through three break-out groups that addressed specifically **research cooperation, staff capacity building and universities as catalysts for change and local development**.

Research cooperation and staff capacity building

Both capacity to perform research and capacity to train and retain research and teaching staff in African universities are critical issues that can be addressed through strategic, long-term institutional partnerships. Training should be fit for purpose, whether training doctors, teachers or technical staff and universities should choose programmes and partners that address those needs. In order to attract and retain highly qualified staff, universities in the South need to cultivate professional academic environments and supportive research cultures. Partnerships schemes, such as the example given by Université Abomey Calavi, Benin and a consortium of Belgian francophone institutions, can help support infrastructure and technological development of the institution, enhancing its capacity to be an efficient long-term partner both equipped for research and teaching. Jimma University, Ethiopia, benefiting from the VLIR-IUC programme, is an example of a research partnership based upon a local environmental/community issue in Ethiopia that has generated positive spin offs for both the North and South institutions, such as research excellency, joint masters programmes, PhD sandwich training programmes and other cross-institutional benefits. The point was made that though training PhDs is a burning issue for staff and research capacity in Africa, most countries need many more PhDs to meet the demands of higher education massification than partnership programmes for doctoral training can produce. Thus there is no one size fits all approach and individual countries and institutions should assess the training needs of their societies and how to meet them.

Universities as catalysts for local development

Universities can play a central role in the development of a country through education, training and research. Partnerships programmes can and should be tailored to the strategic plans of universities to become local development engines.

However, it is not yet common practice that African universities have formulated such strategies. Moi University, Kenya, which benefits from a multitude of partnerships with Europe and the USA, provides some innovative examples of how a university can bring benefits to its local community. With a strategic plan that aligns to the Millennium Development Goals, its academic programmes are tailored to suit local market needs (it owns a textile factory to train local engineers, provides entrepreneurial training for young women and encourages engineering students to contribute to building university infrastructure). It has also set up satellite campuses to widen access and revive the local economy in the different communities. The point was made that Moi is not the only case of a university employing innovative approaches for local development and that more fora should exist for good practices to be shared and promoted.

Partnerships: guiding principles

Whether addressing research cooperation or institution building, participants agreed on certain principles, which were respected in different programmes and cooperation models in different ways:

- Programmes/initiatives should reflect the long-term strategic interest of the universities and should be approved by the institutional leadership.
- The need for management capacity should be acknowledged: resources are needed to train staff to manage cooperation projects and competitive funding. Some programmes address this.
- Partnership is difficult: one needs the right mix of partners to ensure complementarity and sustainable results. For example, it was suggested that combining resource rich but low capacity African countries with resource poor African countries and northern partners could be an efficacious approach (*Sibry Tapsoba of the African Development Bank (AfDB)*).

Challenges in design, implementation and evaluation of programmes are considerable. These challenges were identified not only by the African universities present, but also by national agencies and by multilateral donors:

- Organisations and institutions in the South need to be consulted systematically. It is not sufficient to simply consult government.
- However, government priority setting is critical: The AfDB, for example, brings together ministers of finance, education and science in Africa to advocate investing in higher education, but ultimately each government decides where the money from the Bank will be allocated and higher education, a long-term strategic investment, is not often prioritised.
- Most programmes state they are ‘need’ driven. However, who defines ‘needs’? In designing programmes, one must be clearer and more transparent about how this is done. Thus multi-level stakeholder consultation in Europe and Africa is critical. It was emphasised that initiatives such as the EU-Africa Partnership⁵⁸ and Pan African University should also consider universities and higher education organisations in the need identification and programming process, and not just as beneficiaries.
- The dilemmas faced by Northern partners should not be underestimated. Northern researchers are under considerable pressure to conduct fundamental research and to publish, and Northern universities are eager to enhance their international reputation. Currently, engagement in development cooperation is not regarded as a strategic priority in most universities.

3.3.2. Coordination between different development cooperation actors in higher education

The lack of coordination and fragmentation in development cooperation was an important issue raised by the participants of the workshop. As many programmes are linked to national priorities, coordination can become difficult. Generally, it was found that coordination and cooperation among the “people on the ground”, e.g. those colleagues who work for different agencies in the same countries and institutions, should be encouraged

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http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/development/african_caribbean_pacific_states/r12106_en.htm

and is relatively easy to establish. Furthermore, more can be done at national level to share university experiences and pool resources. The CUCS network in Italy is one attempt to bring Italian actors in university development cooperation together, to share practice, and avoid duplication of efforts (*Guido Zolezzi, Network on Universities for Development Cooperation, Italy*). An important issue that has to be entirely clear is what coordination means: Agencies made the point that they do not want anybody to coordinate them as such, but would rather look for innovative ways to share information and cooperate in a manner that does not stifle creativity and innovation in programme offer.

A variety of very practical ways in which actors in Europe and in Africa can better align themselves have been suggested (*Kristien Verbrugghen, VLIR-UOS, Ad Boeren, Nuffic, Narciso Matos, Foundation for Community development, Brian O'Connell, University of the Western Cape*):

- Embarking on joint projects: The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, a US initiative of four private foundations including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was a ten year programme to pool development cooperation in Africa and avoid duplication of initiatives. Though The Partnership had some advantages, it was concluded that a more effective model going forward would be to continue to jointly launch specific initiatives (ICT and bandwidth projects were given as an example) where pooled funding was deemed advantageous, yet return to separate foundation programming, ensuring of course that programmes do not overlap significantly or compete (*Claudia Fritelli, Carnegie Corporation of New York*).
- Identification of priorities in countries where several donors are active. This might be an approach for East Africa, for example, where several European agencies have launched similar or complementary initiatives.
- Sector or thematic coordination: Addressing gender in higher education is one key component of all programmes, so sharing approaches on this issue could be envisaged.
- Identifying universities that benefit from multiple partnerships and promoting cost effectiveness (joint audits, reporting, etc). This could also palliate some of the administrative burden that the Southern universities take on.
- Joint evaluation and mapping exercises of certain regions would be desirable, as many donors do such exercises individually at present.
- Advocacy and transmitting political messages: agencies, institutions and other actors can set up a structure through which common political priorities can be advocated.
- Common portal for funding calls.
- Platforms for different networks to meet each other and a common network for consultation in programme design.

Finally, it is not simply about Northern partners coordinating their approaches, but about Southern institutions coordinating the various projects and partnerships in which they are involved. This is not a new concept, and the University of Dar Es Salaam was cited as an example of an institution that attempted to set up a strategy yet encountered difficulties in implementing and sustaining it (*Tolly Mbwette, Open University of Tanzania*).

3.3.3. Recommendations

1. First and foremost, building stronger African universities is considered crucial for the development of the continent. This is widely accepted amongst universities and many development cooperation actors, yet must be advocated by governments ultimately, and emphasised in international development agendas.
2. University partnerships are a strategic means to contribute to the overall capacity development of African universities. They can also enable universities in the South to become economic drivers and agents of knowledge transfer. However partnership implies mutual benefits. Cooperation programmes must look at both the challenges and the benefits that universities in the North receive in partnering with Southern universities.

3. Development cooperation can be an important element of institutional internationalisation strategies. Universities in both regions should consider their role as development actors and as partners in receiving development support, and institutional leaders should strive to integrate this into an overall institutional internationalisation strategy.
4. More information and better communication regarding the rich variety of Europe-Africa cooperation activities in the field of higher education and research is needed. Some efforts are being made at the level of national agencies, but there are many actors that are critical to the overall university cooperation process: universities and national and regional university associations in both regions and multilateral donors and foundations. A broad dialogue platform and future initiatives should address all of these stakeholders.
5. Staff development measures and capacity building to manage international cooperation are possible areas in which development agencies and governments can launch joint programmes. These are generic needs of Southern institutions that underpin all forms of cooperation.
6. There is a need to work on an 'African dimension'⁵⁹ to higher education similar to what has emerged in Europe under the Bologna Process and other regional integration processes. This does not entail repeating Bologna in Africa, but rather developing an intra African approach to enable cooperation and exchange between universities and university associations. As regional government bodies are important in this process, the African Union Commission should engage more with African universities and university organisations in the development of policies and initiatives in higher education and research. The EU-Africa Partnership could become a framework to address the need for regional higher education integration in Africa, provided that the proactive commitment of European and African universities can be ensured.
7. As such, the role of regional and sub-regional university associations in fostering cooperation and in influencing the bi-regional political process is critical. Associations like EUA, AAU, SARUA, IUCEA and others should continue to work together and support national agencies, universities, and both the African Union and European Union Commissions in developing and coordinating initiatives and in information sharing.

⁵⁹ Emphasised by general rapporteur, Pyushi Kotecha, Southern Africa regional University Association (SARUA)