



KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

## **International partnerships and institutional collaboration for capacity development in higher education (HE) and TVET in Africa**

### **Part 2: Including voices from African institutions in the creation of capacity development programmes**

#### **Intro**

The Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) expires in 2023, and will be succeeded by a new programme focused on strengthening higher education (HE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Africa, the Middle East, and in parts Latin America and Asia. In addition to OKP-specific evaluations, this is a good moment to reassess the broader nature, value and purpose of donor-funded interventions in HE and TVET. This will help to design a programme which fits the current context and contributes towards building more effective and resilient education systems. This is especially important given the shifts in the HE/TVET landscape and national development priorities due to COVID-19.

This report reviews capacity development programmes in HE/TVET, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, given the region's priority in Dutch development cooperation and the focus and expertise of the INCLUDE platform and network. In terms of scope, this is by no means a thorough analysis of all programmes and collaborations in the region. Rather, the goal is to provide insight into the main debates surrounding these partnerships and programmes (Part 1), support these with evidence and examples, and capture voices and perspectives from African institutions on what is needed moving forward (Part 2).

#### **Motivation for Part 2**

Context-specificity, local perspectives and participation are increasingly emphasised in development policy debates, but not always achieved in practice. Without complete information, accurate targeting and delivery of donor programmes cannot be guaranteed. In the context of HE/TVET, the assumption or expectation that donors know what beneficiaries need and how they operate has often led to programmes that are ineffective in building long-term capacity or do not produce the skills and knowledge that are relevant to local/national labour markets and development challenges.

By understanding the lenses and experiences of HE/TVET institutions in the global South, capacity development programmes can offer mutual benefits and have wider and more inclusive impacts. Strengthening participation and co-creation throughout the programme can further encourage local ownership to increase sustainability. With this in mind, a series

of interviews was conducted with experts and practitioners of African HE/TVET to add local perspectives to some of the core questions emerging from the literature review, and to help guide and tailor future capacity development programmes in this sector.

## Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of HE/TVET experts and practitioners in Africa, as well as the African Studies Centre in Leiden with sound knowledge of African institutions. The initial list of participants was acquired through suggestions and contacts of INCLUDE platform members, as well as outreach to authors from the supporting literature review. Thereafter, a snowball technique was used, for example, if an informant felt they did not know enough on a particular topic but could recommend someone who did. This method worked well in some cases, putting us in direct contact with institutions and experts we would otherwise be unable to reach, however, it also posed some difficult challenges such as dead ends<sup>1</sup>, and made the pool of participants slightly homogeneous since participants had connections mostly in the same country and the same field/level of work. This resulted in the HE/TVET sector in Ghana being over-represented, and most participants coming from the managerial level (university lecturers and TVET coordinators) rather than end beneficiaries of capacity development programmes themselves (youth and students). The total number of participants was 11. The name, affiliation and experience of those who were willing to be mentioned in this report can be found in Appendix 1.

The interviews used a semi-closed question method, where the conversation was structured around 3 main questions and 3 cross-cutting questions (see below), but room was given to deviate on issues that respondents felt were important. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately one hour. Those based in the Netherlands were done in person, while the others used an online format. In two cases, it was not possible to arrange a face-to-face or online meeting. In these cases, participants shared their reflections on the research questions in a typed document. Responses were then pooled to give a nuanced answer to each of the questions.

## Research questions

Three main questions were addressed in the interviews:

- What are the current **needs, goals and aspirations** of HE/TVET institutions in Africa?
- What really works in capacity development programs, and what are common **mistakes, shortcomings or misconceptions** that inhibit positive outcomes?
- Which **model or components** of a new or adapted donor programme would provide the right kind and level of support for generating capacity in HE/TVET institutions?

Additionally, reflections were asked on three cross-cutting/sub questions:

- **Participation** - to what extent are local partners and stakeholders consulted in (or lead) capacity development programmes?
- **Sustainability** - what are the most important things to consider for continuity and long-lasting benefits of capacity development programmes?
- **COVID-19** - how has the pandemic reshaped needs and priorities within HE/TVET?

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<sup>1</sup> In many cases, contacts showed initial interest and willingness to support the project, but later gave no response to set up a call or provide input. One participant failed to turn up to the scheduled interview without notice. This made it hard to gain momentum with the snowballing approach.

## What are the current needs, goals and aspirations of HE and TVET institutions in Africa?

### **Goals and aspirations:**

It was apparent from the interviews that HE and TVET institutions in Africa share a fairly consistent and common vision of developing a skilled, employable and mobile workforce, and driving innovation and transformation. Their goals clearly go beyond the education sector by contributing to broader societal development, enhancing leadership and helping to solve development challenges. Their aspirations also frequently surpass their national contexts. A respondent on the board of a TVET college in Ghana stated that their institution aspires to be the leading educational institution in practical skills and training in Ghana and beyond, and that Africa's TVET sector as a whole seeks to become more globally competitive in offering industry-relevant knowledge and skills. Another respondent spoke about the desire of African universities to produce more world-class thinkers and thought-leaders, and have a seat at the table in tackling global challenges. Many institutions are therefore looking to expand (in both size and reputation) and to modernise, if they can overcome certain barriers. Another strong goal that emerged relates to deepening inclusion, and in particular greater gender equality, among staff and learners - not only in terms of staff ratios or enrolment rates which has often been the focus, but in the subjects studied and a working environment which is conducive to women's lifestyles and aspirations.

### **Needs:**

Contrary to their shared goals, respondents emphasised that the needs of HE and TVET institutions are diverse, differing between countries, between public and private institutions, and between subjects (e.g. STEM- versus humanity-focused institutions). One respondent argued that the unique dynamics between actors in conflict countries such as the DRC, Cameroon, Mali, and Burkina Faso limit what is possible when it comes to cooperation in education. Another respondent found that institutional needs can be grouped regionally, such as the similar constraints faced by HE/TVET institutions in most West African countries. There was general consensus that approaches in capacity development projects should reflect this diversity and vary accordingly, but that the end objectives should be comparable to reflect shared long-term goals.

Some common needs were cited for HE and TVET institutions at the macro (system) level, at the meso (institutional) level, and at the micro (individual) level. System-level needs include infrastructure (particularly digital infrastructure for connectivity, like reliable electricity, internet and low bandwidth solutions) and financing to subsidise the costs of training and procurement. Institutional-level needs include predominantly learning materials (appropriate and updated books, journals and equipment), and more active partnerships with employers to align curricula with current skill needs and to support transitions from education and training to work. Individual needs relate to enhancing human capacities through teaching and research skills that are fit for purpose, particularly digital skills and skills in technology-related sciences.

In addition, various needs were specified for HE and TVET institutions separately:

### **TVET-specific needs**

Participants in the TVET sector felt that the resource needs of TVET institutions are greater than the needs of traditional HEIs. For example, with TVET programmes being generally more costly to run (due to large amounts of equipment and more hands-on learning), the financing needs of these institutions tend to be greater. Procuring adequate and relevant tools and training materials, as well as workshop and laboratory spaces, is considered particularly challenging for TVET centres, as is accessing infrastructure that supports more technical education. Staff needs were also seen as more urgent in the case

of TVET. Class sizes remain too large to enable supervised learning of students (which is crucial given the practical nature of TVET courses), and many TVET providers lack the technical background and training to deliver high-quality TVET. One respondent shared that agricultural TVET (A-TVET) teachers commonly have a masters in agriculture but no formal TVET qualification, giving them theoretical knowledge but a lack of applied practical knowledge which is fundamental for successful TVET. Respondents agreed that a strong teaching core should be central to TVET programmes and systems, and that stronger incentives are needed to motivate staff to acquire the appropriate skills and qualifications.

**There was a clear distinction between needs of TVET institutions that should be addressed locally/regionally, and needs that can be addressed through donor programmes.** Bringing TVET instructors to European TVET institutions was argued as counterproductive and a waste of resources, since the gap with African institutions is currently too large and the training therefore unapplicable (unlike with universities where there is more overlap). Institutions also do not need to be given (old/used) training materials, which quickly run out or are outdated and leave fundamental capacities un(der)developed. Where European institutions *can* add significant value is by offering technical advice to TVET operators, as well as information and guidance on how to approach formal knowledge exchanges, dialogues, co-creation, knowledge dissemination, and communities of practice, which have been found to generate lasting and locally-driven change.

**Another point of discussion was the need to develop and formalise TVET curricula.** Despite reforms in the past two decades to develop national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms for TVET, these have been done in fragmented and unsystematic ways, and this has not yielded results in terms of the performance of TVET institutions.<sup>2</sup> Solidifying regionally comparable qualifications frameworks was seen as a key prerequisite for expanding African TVET. Moreover, in order to remain relevant, curricula must be developed and regularly revised by local stakeholders to help match skill needs in local economies and to promote a greater balance between STEM and humanities subjects.<sup>3</sup>

**A final overarching need for TVET institutions is to become more recognised and integrated within systems of HE, and receive input and support from a more diverse range of stakeholders.** After decades of underinvestment in a sector which is key for job creation, entrepreneurship and innovation, a more committed effort to develop and promote TVET (by governments, employers and donors) was viewed as important by the respondents. In particular, they stated a need for more coherent and consistent TVET policies, and more dialogue between education and sector-specific ministries (e.g. trade and agriculture). Private sector involvement to help fund programmes, but also set curricula and continuously develop skills, was repeatedly mentioned as a huge opportunity for institutions and employers alike that has received much lip service but limited action. They also expressed the challenge of altering public perceptions of TVET to recognise opportunities for enhancing work/income prospects. Institutions require branding and strategies to acquire funding and become more appealing to youth.<sup>4</sup> International cooperation could help to develop these marketing skills and build the reputation of TVET providers.

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<sup>2</sup> A multitude of quality assurance practices exist (such as exit assessment and certification; programme approval and provider quality improvement; or provider accreditation and assessment moderation) and there is a lack of robust evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches.

<sup>3</sup> This is linked to the perception of TVET, and how to make Bachelor of Technology programmes accessible and attractive to African youth. In Ghana, a goal of 60% science and 40% humanities enrolment was set in 2015/16, but the ratio declined from 44% and 56% in 2015/16, to 37% and 63% in 2018/19, with more students pursuing business and arts and less demand for science and engineering TVET courses. This poses a challenge to the objectives of TVET institutions and feeds into the graduate unemployment problem.

<sup>4</sup> This is slowly changing. A campaign in Ghana to promote young women in TVET led from a single female enrolled to 40 women the following year, showing that the right publicity can work. In Kenya, there is a trend of students who qualify for university choosing to enrol in TVET courses, showing the growing appeal of TVET.

### ***HE-specific needs***

**Most of the needs of higher education institutions (HEIs) raised in the interviews relate to boosting research capacity, improving the position of African scholars within the global knowledge system, and increasing the use of HE output for policy and development.** For research, this means improving the environments that facilitate the production of high-quality research: manageable workload, fair pay and working conditions, access to good quality journals, administrative support, and linking researchers across disciplines. It also includes breaking down research capacity within projects to hone in on specific skills such as theorising, analysing, technology, writing, publishing and networking. According to respondents, many HEIs in Africa currently cannot provide technology-related skills, making it a key area for donor support along with quality assurance.

**To position African HE globally, top scholars must be retained through virtual connections with African diaspora, and the work of African scholars must be made more visible.** Strengthening alumni activities can help to build partnerships between international institutions, and also help to counteract brain drain effects, since scholars migrate but can still continue to develop (research) capacity in their home institutions. There is also a need to recognise, promote and disseminate indigenous knowledge within global knowledge systems. Part of this is altering the way we collectively view capacity (by revisiting whose knowledge counts and how it is used), as well as the transfer/distribution of capacity between partner institutions (from 'data collectors' and 'theory makers' to co-producers of knowledge). 5 African scholars now sit in the Futures of Higher Education commission led by UNESCO and IESALC, which has been created to stimulate creative and imaginative thinking and ideas about the futures of higher education to 2050. The open access journals movement with peer review is also changing the presence of African scholars in global knowledge systems. These are steps in the right direction to putting African HEIs on the map.

**To strengthen the link between HE and development, institutions must focus their research agendas on current needs and knowledge gaps and strengthen relationships beyond academia, particularly with employers and policymakers.** Respondents found that research in many HEIs has become repetitive and concentrated in certain over-researched areas. They said that HEIs should front critical thinking and creativity instead of the reproduction of knowledge, and felt that more Centres of Excellence could be established and strengthened which link to specific policy questions / social problems, and to increase the uptake of research through policy dialogues and translation to usable evidence. Discussions on this topic always boiled down to the need for champions and leaders to initiate and follow-up on these processes. Respondents also stressed that the future of HE lies in stronger industry links, not just for giving input on research agendas, but for applying knowledge through internships and work experience to support job creation and employment

**Two respondents pointed out that the needs of HEIs have changed over time.** The capacity gap 15 years ago was in developing individual capacities and populating research institutions with researchers and teachers. Subsequently, a focus on scholarship programmes and university enrolment has created an ever-increasing pool of research graduates and scholars. It was noted that individual capacity is now strong in many HEIs. The current gap is in embedding this individual capacity within institutional structures and processes, and altering the environment that constrains broader institutional development. There seems to be a lack of mentorship and resources dedicated to knowledge transfer between young and experienced academics and to support early career (in particular female) researchers. African HE also requires a reorientation (or 'vocationalisation') to not only produce thinkers but also people who take action (to create jobs, innovate solutions and deliver efficient services), which has implications for content and how it is taught. A major challenge is that people stay in the system a long time and have limited knowledge on business or the operating landscape.



## **What really works in capacity development programmes, and what are common mistakes, shortcomings or misconceptions that inhibit positive outcomes?**

### ***What works?***

A few participants felt unable or unwilling to share precise modalities or components of capacity development programmes that work in every case, emphasising that it is not a quick or simple process and clearly depends on the context. Although this is largely true, certain aspects of programmes emerged from the interviews that seem to be effective across the board and should be a fundamental part of any HE/TVET programme.

**The first aspect to emerge strongly was the facilitation of local knowledge sharing and network building.** This has generated a lot of growth in TVET institutions, often exceeding the results created by injecting capital and even by training staff. Local knowledge sharing at the managerial level has been transformative by improving leadership. Examples were given of field visits between institutions in the same or bordering countries (with similar contexts, resources and constraints) that inspired managerial staff to enact changes that they see to improve processes and results, and encouraged them to develop communities of practice which outlive the initial programme. Another example of successful local knowledge sharing has been the creation of networks of female scholars and researchers within some African universities. This has generated a space for them to develop research skills and challenge gender barriers in academia. It is clear that grounding and embedding capacity development programmes in local networks can spur ownership and lasting change.

**The second aspect that has proven successful is co-creation, with partner institutions jointly identifying skills and knowledge gaps and jointly finding solutions.** European institutions have cutting-edge research compared to Africa, but they need to contextualise the findings and actively involve partner institutions rather than doing it for them (a 'try and apply' approach rather than 'watch and learn'). It was felt by the majority of participants that when Northern partners carry out scoping research on Southern institutions, they sometimes miss important lenses, local voices and case studies. In one of the programmes interviewed, Northern partners acted as facilitators, adding the leadership component to the programme and helping to develop the core framework, but the content was filled in and the programme executed by the Southern partner, which proved successful.

**The third aspect that has been found to work well is having a structure that fit the sectors and target groups you are working with, and that form a holistic programme.** In the TVET sector, modularised content has proven an effective way for students, and particularly young people trying to join the labour market, to acquire specific skills they are lacking or refresh/update certain skills. Short course qualifications are also being used to build up certification to enrol in formal TVET courses, or to gradually achieve full set of skills/qualifications. A good example was given of a TVET programme targeting different activities within the pineapple value chain, with modules dedicated to planting, growing and maintaining, packaging, marketing and other entrepreneurial activities. This programme structure is transferrable across countries (in both HE and TVET), for students and also for training teachers; it can be more inclusive of those who cannot complete a full-length TVET course, for example, women with household responsibilities or individuals who are working whilst studying or training. It is also conducive to new ways of learning following the COVID-19 pandemic, with the potential to hold some modules online and some in-person. It must be noted, however, that short courses alone cannot generate capacity at the institutional level, but must be connected as part of a more holistic programme which includes longer courses for, for instance, teachers who want their PhDs or entrepreneurs seeking more complex skills. We therefore need the entire spectrum of options, with a focus on quality delivery and contextual relevance.

**A final aspect that arose in multiple conversations was continuity.** Continuous supervision and outreach by well-trained capacity development teams can maintain the intent of the programme and enhance learning and adaptation. Regular support to upskill teaching staff through pedagogical training, attachment to industry and attending seminars or workshops is deemed important for the adoption and embedding of new technology and teaching methods which are constantly evolving. According to respondents, this helps with buy-in and uptake within the institutions, making them more confident about sustaining projects after they end, and making impacts spiral out beyond the individuals directly affected by the programme.

### ***What are common mistakes/misconceptions?***

**Many problems that capacity development programmes run into stem from the assumptions that underpin them.** Some false assumptions came up from both the 'capacity providers' and the beneficiaries. It was often felt that providers assume that whatever they are bringing is the right stuff, in particular tools and approaches that work in their home country. They also assume that they are addressing some pressing needs that they (or a set of 'experts') have observed, when in fact the needs and priorities of beneficiaries should be understood through a consultative process. In one of the programmes interviewed, they assumed that heads of TVET institutions knew how to run modern TVET centres, and missed this managerial aspect out of the initial design. One respondent (with experience of both the Netherlands and African sides) counterargued that partner institutions often struggle to understand their own demands and ask for what they want, and that outside perspectives are useful to highlight ineffective and inefficient curricula or ways of working. Meanwhile, beneficiaries perceive that the donors have come to solve their problems, which can lead to exaggerated expectations and disincentives to contribute or adopt change. All of this reinforces the need for co-creation to avoid harmful assumptions and work towards a solution that all stakeholders can commit to and that reflects their needs and interests.

**Around half of the respondents found that there is still an inadequate understanding of the notion of capacity, and that there lacks specificity when it comes to which capacities each programme (and the combination of programmes) is trying to develop, at what level, and for what purpose.** They also felt that there remains a hidden assumption that Africans lack the potential to develop capacity rather than the environment to nurture it. One respondent pointed out that African scholars who 'lack capacity' in Africa seem to thrive when they go to teach in foreign institutions like Colombia or Michigan in the United States. They brought that capacity with them - it was produced in Africa. This perception is tied to structures that emerged through colonialism, including the structure of global aid and global knowledge systems, that still persist today and are slow to change.

**The other set of problems mentioned in the interviews that prevent successful programmes are to do with the set-ups and constraints within which they operate.** The stop-start nature of individual capacity development projects, with a short time frame and limited follow-up, was deemed a major problem.<sup>5</sup> Respondents felt that when activities are terminated, there is a hope or assumption that they will organically grow on their own and become self-sustaining, but instead they fizzle out to a stock of old interventions. It was stressed that there needs to be more time for relationships to evolve, for partner institutions to take ownership and build on projects initiated by donors. This is linked to the continuity or gradual reduction of funding. It was also stressed that there needs to be more overall alignment between programmes, with plans based on longer-term strategies and more nuanced evidence rather than knee-jerk policy reactions based on current political trends.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the Niche programme was replaced with the Orange Knowledge Programme, and just as mistakes are being learned from, it changes again.

Some other common mistakes that were raised include:

- Programmes are too grand that institutions cannot manage when the project ends
- Short-term training modules and courses don't work as stand-alone, but need to be analysed holistically to see how they fit within national qualification frameworks, education policies and labour market trends
- There is a lack of standardised assessment indicators and evaluations of capacity development programmes. Reporting is still often done for accountability purposes rather than for long-term impact, despite this being in the ToR of many projects
- Insufficient cultural considerations at the planning stage. It was noted that donors are often very skilled at conducting economic analysis, but fail to take into account the African way of working, for example, informal processes and indigenous knowledge.

### **Which model or components of a new or adapted donor program would provide the right kind and level of support for developing capacity?**

As with what works, respondents found it difficult to identify with certainty a generally appropriate model for capacity development. According to most respondents, none of the past or existing models has succeeded in yielding a satisfying and lasting solution to HE/TVET challenges in Africa. However, there were a few lessons to be drawn on what approach or would be of great value in a new programme.

**One key observation was that capacity development models have more often than not been developed by an exogenous source rather than by or with beneficiaries, and that a more demand-driven approach would be the right way forward.** A respondent shared that *'programmes that introduce new vehicles for delivery and marginalise existing and long-standing African institutions get launched with so much fanfare but ultimately leave no trail – because the interventions do not reflect national policies and objectives'*. Programmes that are designed elsewhere and transferred wholesale to Africa are the most dysfunctional and least effective, but unfortunately remain the most prevalent approach. Programmes where donors take the lead but local stakeholders participate (e.g. the DAAD support for PhD training) have done better at increasing institutional capacity (in this case, for doctoral training) across the continent. North-South and South-South partnerships to support capacity development interventions based on nationally conceptualised policies tend to have the broadest level of acceptance and impact, though they are fewer. A key example of this would be domestically applying the AU continental strategies through national leadership and relevance.<sup>6</sup> Locally-derived models were conclusively deemed the best way forward, particular in terms of ownership and relevance.

**A related approach involves looking at what can be done within existing systems rather than always introducing new things.** For example, Ghana has a vibrant apprenticeship programme within the informal sector (with masters in the appropriate trade). It could be more effective to work on formalising and scaling this, rather than importing approaches which have false assumptions or give one or two workshops in a given skill instead of enabling continuous learning.

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<sup>6</sup> It was suggested by a few respondents to open the call for institutions to specify what support they need, though it was also mentioned that in order for demand-driven approaches to work, African HE/TVET institutions must have a good understanding of what they need and how it would work, and be able to formulate this in a proposal, which is not always the case. This returns to the idea of co-creation and the supporting/facilitating role of donors and Northern partners.



**Another observation was that many of the older models had successful elements but were phased out for constantly new ideas, and that future programmes should revisit and reincorporate these elements.** A plethora of initiatives and projects have been initiated over the past couple of decades at national, regional and continental levels, with an emphasis on postgraduate training and research. All indicators show that various initiatives are now bearing fruit, showing the need for patience and proper evaluation and reflection. One respondent suggested creating a mapping of capacity development programmes that have been initiated and stopped in a given country, and finding out what happened to them, what resources were put in, and what were the outcomes. Another respondent suggested looking at all the programmes currently being funded, and working to integrate them and stimulate them to work together. A third recommended a follow-up exercise to assess the impact of beneficiaries of different types of programme on their communities or workplaces.

**Overall, it was concluded that the best approach for a 'new programme' is in fact to not be new at all, but to build on what you have (and there is a lot to work with in Africa) and definitely involve networks to leverage existing skills and knowledge.** Ultimately, the best models are the ones that address the urgent needs of institutions and societies. A few additional examples were given of approaches that have proven effective in some capacity development projects that could be valuable to explore:

- The SIM (study, identify and model) development model, which allows a seamless blend of the intended project with the society of the beneficiaries
- The value-chain approach, which first selects sectors and skills to be developed, then chooses institutions who have the ability to deliver those sector-specific skills
- The competency-based approach (CBA), focusing on skills that local institutions cannot offer
- Models which are framed around the goals and objectives of AUC strategies and nationally articulated needs, such as Centres of Excellence (such as the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) or the ACE programme)
- Hubs where you institutionalise what you are offering and create knowledge exchange on new pedagogies, technologies, methodologies. This includes models where universities and TVET institutions are hubs for research and innovation in particular sectors, feeding people and solutions into industry with direct feedback
- A focus on mentoring (particularly for early career researchers) and connecting scholars to (co-)publish research (a core element of the Carnegie early scholars programme and Rokkafeller, Melon foundation mentoring schemes)
- Programmes with activities that result in products or services to the public for a fee, or that training institutions to develop effective fundraising strategies and gain autonomy over their cash flow

### **Participation - to what extent are African partner institutions and stakeholders consulted in / lead capacity development programmes?**

**The notion of participation has received a lot of lip service but has not been visible in practice.** It is widely acknowledged that all stakeholders should be involved from start to finish, not just in HE/TVET programmes, but across the board in development cooperation. But putting the ideas behind meaningful participation into practice, and systematising it as a core part of development programmes, has proven challenging. In some cases, respondents explained that participation looks like a one-off consultation with one or two experts of representatives (not even necessarily from the countries targeted in a programme) to provide an overview of the current state and needs of the sector or institution. In other cases, it is the involvement of one group of actors in decision-making at the exclusion of others.

**In a few cases, there is extensive stakeholder consultation in capacity development programmes throughout the design and implementation stages, from identifying key sectors, to developing curricula and training manuals to delivering specialised training and workshops.** Even in these cases, however, participation and involvement does not necessarily translate into any sense of ownership. As such, the sustainability, and subsequent development and continuity of the programmes beyond the period of support and collaboration, is compromised. Of course, this is not an easy task, but reflecting on what participation means in each country context and highlighting the steps to get there is crucial for forming stronger partnerships and more impactful programmes. It was also suggested to maximise diversity in these stakeholder consultations by involving, for example, smaller TVET organisations and representatives of different groups of young people.

### **Sustainability - what are the most important things to consider for continuity and long-lasting benefits of capacity development programmes?**

**When asked this question, one respondent said ‘it may simply be stated here that the needed component for sustainability and continuity is cultural ownership of the programme by the beneficiary’.** Not all respondents put it so simply, but the general message was the same – there needs to be more emphasis on embedding processes and practices within institutions, sharing and scaling lessons with others in the sector, and applying their own style that reflects their community / cultural ways of working. A key way to encourage this cultural ownership could be working with and through institutions that have widespread acceptance among the community of scholars and policymakers in partner countries.

**It was evident in the interviews that the old model of Northern institutions bringing technical expertise and teaching, then retreating with their knowledge, must be replaced by models that sustain knowledge and skills transfer.** Two examples showcased this point well. A respondent in Uganda shared a PhD programme developed with Wageningen University in the Netherlands in conjunction with universities in Tanzania and Kenya. Teachers were trained for one or two years and told what to do, then once EU funding ended, the course quality deteriorated and staff inevitably went back to their old way of working and teaching. The second and more recent example was that, despite decades of capacity development initiatives, medical and economics faculties in African universities did not have the adequate capacities to undertake needed research on COVID-19. When asked about solutions to this problem, three separate respondents referred to programmes that focus on mentoring or pedagogical leadership as being effective at creating cascading change and helping institutions to keep evolving.

**Another important component that is useful for sustaining capacity development programmes is in helping institutions to become financially self-sufficient, market themselves, manage their own cash flow and generate income.** This can be done through skills training on grant acquisition, through collaborative programmes with industry, or through entrepreneurial activities. In one TVET institution specialising in agricultural training, students started selling produce, they opened a restaurant next door, and reinjected the proceeds back into institution. Another institution found that seed grants go a long way in helping programmes run on their own.

**The ultimate goal is to ‘develop the capacity to develop capacity’.** Overall, it was clear that we need longer-term perspectives which consider not only how programmes affect immediate capacity, but also how their impacts cascade throughout the system. Any project that seeks to be sustainable must enable critical thinking and creativity to navigate change and prepare for tomorrow, rather than mere comprehension of what works today.

## COVID-19 - how has the pandemic reshaped needs and priorities within HE/TVET?

**The pandemic found HE and TVET institutions across the continent lacking the necessary infrastructure, delivery tools and human capacity to deal with the first lockdown.** In many cases, zero teaching and learning occurred during this time. In other cases, it sparked a wave of innovation, encouraging the use of social media for training activities or the development of e-learning courses and learning management system (LMS). A great example was shared from Makerere University Business School, who has embraced online learning holistically in its teaching, assessment and graduation processes, among other things. Though these examples exist and there has been overall improvement in delivering education from a distance, the capacity of institutions to adapt and evolve has varied significantly. Interestingly, adaptability was not viewed as a core capacity required by HE/TVET institutions before the pandemic, but it could be a major determinant of how the sector develops.

**Respondents identified a whole list of opportunities emerging from the pandemic to boost capacity within HE/TVET institutions.** The increase in connectivity and technology use offers the chance to have stronger and more impactful alumni activity, greater enrolment and more cost-effective delivery of education. The need for adaptability could catalyse more regular curricula updating, spur the adoption of technology and boost engagement with the private sector. Despite recognising these opportunities, it was difficult to gauge the general impression around the possibility or likelihood of these changes occurring. Around half of the respondents seemed optimistic about undertaking these challenges and sparking transformation within Africa's HE/TVET sector, while the other half could not imagine the necessary leadership and risk taking that is required to seize these opportunities.

**In addition, respondents identified multiple problems in delivering HE/TVET courses and training in online formats.** One respondent said that good learning management systems are rare, while another found that they are there but are either dormant (created ten years ago but never fully adopted) or unused due to ill-equipped staff and students. Trainers and professors struggle to keep learners engaged and active, and often lack the skills to use the technology how it is intended. The content is sometimes not fit for online modes of delivery - even worse for the TVET sector, which involves mostly practical teaching. Assessment has also been a real challenge, with online examples being not properly designed, students lacking mostly computer skills, interfaces, stable connections and uninterrupted power supply. On the student side, the biggest challenge is having an affordable and stable internet access. Institutions do not currently have control over internet connectivity. In some countries, such as Uganda, Namibia and South Africa, governments are partnering with telecom companies to do zero rate internet for learning, but rural students still cannot access it, which challenges the inclusivity and diversity of institutions.

**What came out of the interviews was that this will *not* become the only way of working for everyone, that is, there will not be a huge modality shift, at least in the short-term.** In many ways, we have fast tracked the adoption of something that was always wanted or needed (accessing online journals, digitally submitting papers, catching up on lecture material, digital administration) and these developments should continue, but respondents felt strongly that interactive learning will not be permanently replaced by digital learning. This was particularly the case for TVET, where hands-on is still considered the best/only method of training, and also for students who lack access to the necessary technologies to learn this way. These limits to e-learning led most participants to believe that the future is blended.

**The biggest challenge for institutions is not only the delay in learning and getting things back running again, but continuing to form new partnerships.** When it comes to institutional partnerships, respondents felt that existing partnerships have been maintained relatively well throughout the pandemic, but that it has been harder for new partnerships and networks to form, partly due to trust building and the formality of online interactions.

**According to respondents, COVID has reshaped, re-prioritised and exaggerated the needs of HE/TVET institutions on the continent, but has not altered the overall goal.** The need for local knowledge production, infrastructure and domestic financing is even greater than before. An unexpected need is the urgency of training staff and students to use digital platforms. Notwithstanding the huge shifting of resources and reorientation of processes, respondents still believed in the core purpose and function of HE/TVET institutions in Africa to serve their societies and develop a stronger and better future.

## List of participants

### 1. Makerere University Business School, Uganda

Our contact at the Makerere University Business School is part of the committee for developing the institution's PhD programme. MUBS was established in 1997 as a college of Makerere University, and was created from a merger between the faculty of commerce (FOC) and the national college of business studies. In 2001, the structure of the school changed with the enactment of the University and other tertiary institutions Act, which made the school transform from a constituent college of Makerere to a public tertiary institution that could offer degrees, awards, diplomas and certificates under common standards.

### 2. Emmanuel Okalany, RUFORUM

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), established by ten Vice Chancellors in 2004 and hosted by Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, is a consortium of 129 African universities operating within 38 countries spanning the African continent. The organisation evolved from its predecessor, the Forum on Agricultural Resource Husbandry (FORUM) program of the Rockefeller Foundation. RUFORUM is registered as an International Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and has mandate to oversee graduate training. They support universities to address the important and largely unfulfilled role that universities play in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and economic development of countries throughout the sub-Saharan Africa region. The consortium has several unique features for building Africa's innovation capacity and for engaging universities in development process and practice.

### 3. PASGR

The Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) is an independent, non-partisan pan-African not-for-profit organisation established in 2011 in Kenya. PASGR works to enhance research excellence in governance and public policy that contributes to the overall wellbeing of women and men in 12 African countries. In partnership with individual academics and researchers, higher education institutions, research think tanks, civil society organisations, business and policy communities both in the region and internationally, PASGR supports the production and dissemination of policy relevant research; designs and delivers suites of short professional development courses for researchers and policy actors; and facilitates the development of collaborative higher education programmes.

### 4. AUDA NEPAD

AUDA NEPAD has two active programmes in capacity development in higher education and TVET, one of which focuses specifically on young women. These have been running since 2012, as part of the African Union's response to the continental framework. The level of intervention is different in each of the 12 countries in which they operate, but the overriding objectives are the same, and all country programmes have activities in the areas of policy strategy and dialogue, institutional strengthening, human capacity, curricula development and cross-cutting thematic issues.

### 5. Prof. Emerita Takyiwaa Manuh, University of Ghana

Prof. Emerita is Professor and Director of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. She is also a member of multiple organisations linked to the development of higher education and research in Africa, including the Scientific Committee of the Association of



African Universities (AAU), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and the Futures of Higher Education commission led by UNESCO and IESALC. She is active in the women's movement in Ghana and is Board Chair of ABANTU for development, and a member of the Steering Committee of NETRIGHT, the coalition for women's rights in Ghana.

6. Prof. Baba Insah, Dr. Hilla Limann Technical University, Ghana

Prof Baba is the interim vice chancellor of the Dr. Hilla Limann Technical University in Ghana. The university is a public tertiary education institution that was converted from a Polytechnic to a Technical University in April, 2020. The institution has faculties in applied science and technology, applied art and design, engineering, and business.

7. Ibrahim Oanda (PhD), CODESRIA

Ibrahim Oanda is the Senior Program Officer and head of the Training, Grants and Fellowship program at CODESRIA. He was formerly a professor at Kenyatta University, Kenya, where he taught courses in Higher Education, Sociology and Philosophy of Education. He has published many articles on the political economy of higher education transformations in Africa and the Sociology of knowledge production and consumption.

8. Ho Technical University, Ghana

Ho Technical University was established in 1968 with the primary objective of providing pre-technical education. By 1972, the institute had expanded to deliver courses in Basic Engineering, Agricultural and Mechanical Engineering, Building Technology, Fashion, Hospitality Management and Business Education. The passage of the Technical Universities Act 2016 (Act 922) provided mandated the university to award degrees, diplomas, certificates and other qualifications to the highest level in Engineering, Science and Technology based disciplines, TVET, Applied Arts and related disciplines. The institution's vision is to become a reputable Technical University contributing actively to national and international development. It has a mission to train highly competent human resource to the highest level possible through career-focused education, skill training and research in partnership with stakeholders.

9. Madi Ditmars, African Studies Centre, Leiden

Madi Ditmars is the Coordinator of Education and Student Affairs at the ASC in Leiden. She coordinates the LDE Minor African Dynamics as well as the LDE Minor Frugal Innovation for Sustainable Global Development. Madi has an in-depth understanding of the challenges surrounding education and capacity building in contemporary Africa. Her experience ranges from customising curricula and material design, to the development of assessment strategies and quality control systems. She has a particular interest in local knowledge, sustainable human development practices, and integrated and inclusive planning. Through her ongoing work for the University of South Africa, she has expanded her expertise to the electronic learning environment.

10. Ton Dietz, African Studies Centre, Leiden

Ton Dietz is Professor Emeritus of the Study of African Development at Leiden University. He was director of the ASC until September 2017, and is still active as co-chair of the Leiden African Studies Assembly. Ton has extraordinary knowledge of African higher education and knowledge systems, and coordinated the Africa Knows! conference in 2020 which focused on decolonising knowledge and repositioning African scholars in global knowledge systems.