



KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

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

Part 3 - Conclusions and recommendations

The findings below have been drawn from the literature scan (Part 1) as well as the interviews conducted with experts (Part 2). Where necessary, recommendations for TVET and higher education (HE) are given separately, otherwise it can be assumed that they apply to programmes in either sector.

It is useful to compare the findings from both parts of the report to see if the academic literature (often written by scholars from Europe and North America) is aligned with experiences and realities on the ground, and how those perspectives can be merged. In fact, there were numerous common conclusions, such as the need for more co-creation between Northern and Southern institutions, greater participation of youth and the private sector in programme development, and continued alignment with national development agendas to develop critical skills for growth and transformation. Broadly speaking, the objectives of capacity development programmes found in the literature and programme documents match the goals of the institutions we spoke to, in terms of increasing skills and contributing to development. However, one mismatch in priorities was apparent, where the focus of Northern donors has often been on transferring technical capacity, but African partners seek equal partnerships and capacities linked to network building and knowledge exchange.

It was clear from both the desk research and the interviews that international collaborations between institutions can help to realise and embed key capacities for research, teaching, infrastructural development and professional skills, however, this is only possible if some adjustments are made to the assumptions and approaches used within these programmes. Below is a list of these considerations.

- 1. Continuing with programmes that focus on national development agendas of partner countries, as well as national implementation plans for the UN SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063**
 - It is important to keep pursuing research that links to current policy needs and knowledge gaps, and producing skills which serve partner countries' priority development sectors. Given the current pressures on aid budgets, this may look like more concentrated support in a limited number of sectors.
 - Centres of Excellence (such as the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) or the African Centres of Excellence (ACE) impact development project by the World Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD)), focusing on industry-

relevant knowledge and skills, as well as innovation and leadership, are working well. Staying on this trend would help to maintain the relevance of capacity development programmes, and increase their impact on economic growth and transformation, youth employment and sustainable development.

2. Finding your added value as a donor for supporting capacity in HE and TVET.

- Look at the range of old and existing programmes led by national governments, private actors, NGOs and other donors – how do they fit together, what gaps do they not cover where Dutch support and cooperation could be valuable?
- Identify programmes that offer skills and knowledge in areas where Southern institutions are lacking capacity, where Dutch institutions excel, and which have been found to generate lasting impact and in-country driven change:
 - Technical advice (e.g. for online learning tools and learning management systems), technology adoption and usage, and digital skills
 - Knowledge exchange and dissemination activities, such as communities of practice, policy dialogues, and network building (with other educational institutions as well as ministries and the private sector)
 - For TVET, teaching quality, professional development of practitioners, curricula updating, research on TVET, procurement and marketing, and identifying common standards of practice.
 - For HE, research capacity, alumni activities, and mentoring and training programmes that transfer knowledge from the current generation of professors and university leaders to the next.
- Also support reforms to the enabling environment for HE/TVET: infrastructural development (particularly ICT, research and teaching infrastructure); quality assurance systems, policy guidelines and regulations, (particularly for TVET); and research environments with fair working conditions and incentives.

3. Revising the approach to partnerships

- Revisit assumptions that create inequalities between Northern and Southern and prevent mutual benefit, uptake and ownership. This includes assumptions to do with existing capabilities, roles and responsibilities, the needs and values of African institutions, and the way in which capacity should be developed.
- Invest in longer-term partnerships that allow for base capacities to be developed, and for programmes to be adapted and improved, to a point where they can continue self-sufficiently and drive capacity development elsewhere.
- Become open to more demand-led partnerships. Donors should be prepared to invest not only in existing partners with proven success and minimal risk, but also in new institutions that have a lot of ambition, need and potential.

4. Strengthening co-creation and participation

- Allow African institutions to state their own needs and share their experiences of what works. Finding joint solutions for content, structure and management helps to stimulate ownership and integrate the programme within a faculty rather than as a separate course by an outsider.
- Meaningful and diverse participation of youth was cited as a common challenge that is important to rectify. There is an opportunity to build on the work already being done at the Dutch MFA to engage young people in discussions on youth employment, and expand this to issues linked to HE/TVET programmes.
- Another major challenge is the involvement actors outside of academia. For example, employers should be involved from the start in programme design and evaluation processes, as well as creating opportunities for thesis topics and work experience, in order to strengthen the link with labour markets. Equally, involving national ministries can help link programmes with policy goals and discussions.

5. Other important components/considerations.

- Recognise prior learning and qualifications, and reduce skills barriers to HE/TVET. This could take the form of additional courses to prepare youth for HE/TVET who dropped out, missed school, or had poor quality secondary education.
- Accessibility for girls and women has improved significantly in terms of enrolment in STEM courses and conditions and networks for female researchers. Take caution that this trend is not reversed due to the gendered impacts of COVID-19.
- Do not focus solely on digital / distance partnerships. There is still a great need for face-to-face learning and interaction, and programmes must also be accessible to marginalised groups who lack digital means.
- Make evaluations holistic by expanding criteria from enrolment, grades and completion to include things like use of ICT, gender empowerment and relevance.
- Before injecting new models into a country's education system, there should be a careful assessment of existing models and initiatives, and what has (not) worked. Context assessments should also take care to situate a prospective programme within broader labour market trends, including the informal economy.
- Focus on graduation/follow up. Make programmes manageable, not so large that institutions cannot cope after the programme ends, and plan to embed capacity within institutions and gradually reduce support to enable self-sufficiency.