African Universities and the New Dynamics of Internationalization: Building Capacities for Strategic Responses and Resilience

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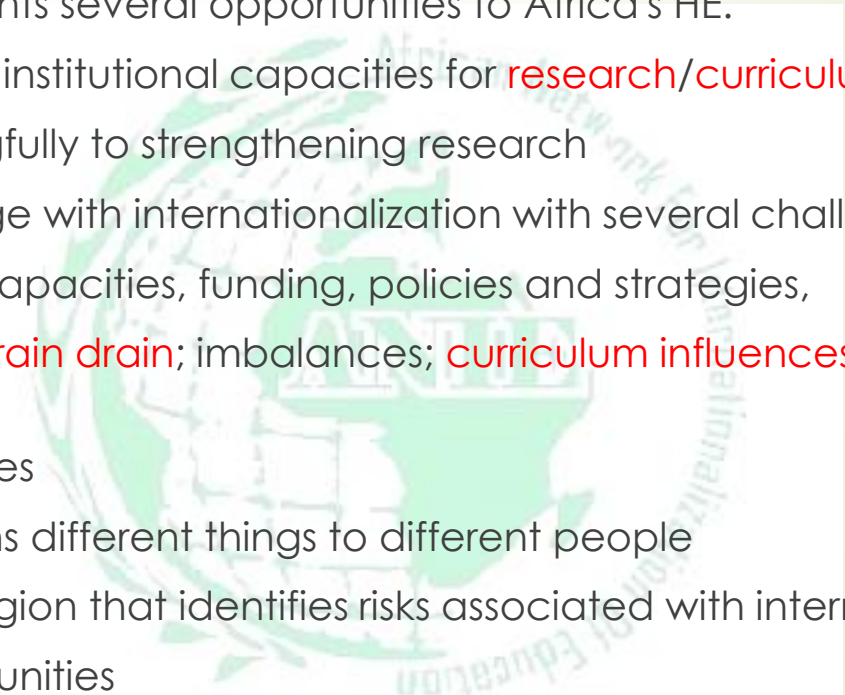*17th-19th Oct 2022, Egerton University, Kenya*

Introduction

- Internationalization is at the core of higher education (IAU, 2010)
- Africa's higher education is largely an offshoot of internationalization initiatives
- Internationalization has continued to shape & characterize Africa's HE
- Africa engages with internationalization in ways peculiar to its context- history, economy, geography.
- Main rationale – enhance research capacity, academic quality, curriculum strengthening, new generation of academics (IAU, 2010)
- Needs to produce, seek & adapt knowledge to overcome its developmental challenges
- Must be part of global knowledge economy – locally relevant and globally competitive
- Because of limited resources, this can only be achieved by collaboration among African countries & their HE systems
- Hence the need for a strong continental HE 'space' & partnerships

African Universities in the Global Knowledge Society

- Universities are important societal organizations

- Key role in seeking solutions to challenges facing humanity (through their research/innovations/skills/community engagements) key for societal transformation

- The developmental role/societal pact of the African universities

- HE in Africa is recent but has developed/expanded exponentially (makerere celebrated 100 years last week)

- Exponential growth in number and diversity of institutions (Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria)

- Experienced myriad challenges (research, quality, governance, funding, institutional capacities)

- Has several new opportunities that need to be tapped into (youth boom, new technologies, renewed interest in HE)

- African HEs are at the periphery of the global knowledge society- contributing about 2% of global knowledge

- This has to change- what can be done?

- Do universities have the answers to our problems?- water, food security, climate change, messed politics, education etc

Internationalization- Opportunities, risks &challenges

- Internationalization presents several opportunities to Africa's HE.
- Main rationale- enhance institutional capacities for research/curriculum strengthening
- Has contributed meaningfully to strengthening research
- African universities engage with internationalization with several challenges
- Main challenges- weak capacities, funding, policies and strategies,
- It presents several risks –brain drain; imbalances; curriculum influences; cultural and language issues etc
- Unintended consequences
- Internationalization means different things to different people
- Africa is the only world region that identifies risks associated with internationalization
- It presents several opportunities
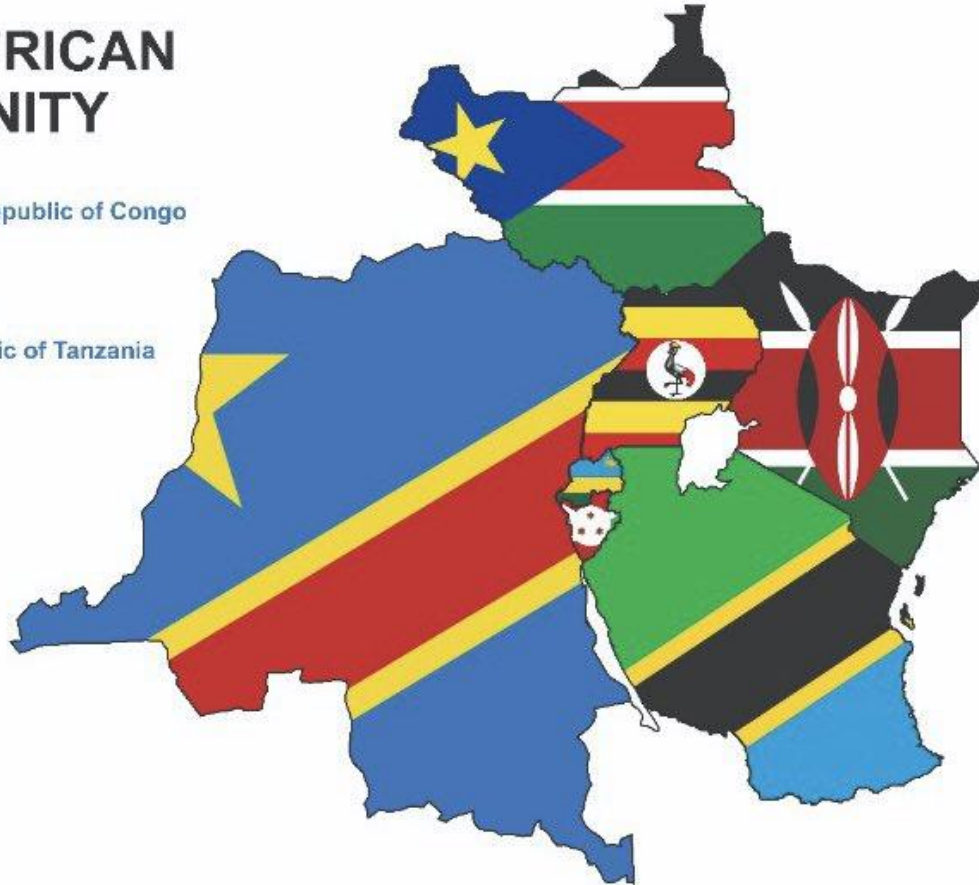
Some experiences from the East African Community (EAC)

The East African Community is one of Africas Regional Economic Communities (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania)

Harmonization of education systems of partner states since 2008. This has led to:

- Development of regional quality assurance frameworks
- Regional mobility programs/frameworks for students and staff.
- New scholarship programs
- Mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications.
- Establishment of centres of excellence for capacity building in targeted areas.
- Development of regional policies and frameworks
- Development of Regional TVET Qualifications Frameworks
- EAC region declared a Common Higher Education Area- several implications e.g common fees, elimination of visas, fees for work permits etc
- University networks and consortia
- Regional Coordination- Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)

EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

- Burundi
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Kenya
- Rwanda
- South Sudan
- United Republic of Tanzania
- Uganda

Making internationalization work for Africa

Internationalization should contribute to enhancement of higher education in Africa

- Strengthen research infrastructure/environment
- Support African centres of excellenges/academic networks
- Development of next generation of African researchers- postgraduate training
- Brain- drain- needs to be responded to
- Local relevance
- Responding to the risks/challenges/imbalances associated with internationalization
- More meaningful engagements with partners in the North and also in S-S engagements
- African governments need to come to the forefront
- Opportunities for reverse mobility
- From development cooperation to meaningful knowledge exchanges
- No- one size fits all
- Continuous dialogues

Emerging realities and challenges

- The COVID 19 Pandemic-an important turning point-demonstrated the vulnerability of the HE sector/growing societal expectations

- Digitalization/ICTs – have taken a centre stage

- New ways of doing things-e.g strengthening collaborations/partnerships

- New societal challenges-climate change, unemployment, industrialization, innovations, growing poverty and inequalities, structural barriers etc

- Emerging global dynamics- new political environments, impacts of globalization/internationalization.

- Inadequate capacities for strategic responses

- Funding-has remained a perennial trap

- Emergence of new players- China/India etc

Looking back- The Covid 19 Pandemic

- The COVID 19 Pandemic has been unprecedented
- Serious impacts globally on all sectors including HE
- Africa's HE was grounded by the pandemic
- Impacted on Internationalization globally
- Due to several challenges- Africa's HE couldn't effectively respond to the pandemic
- Teaching, Learning, Research, Community engagement- grounded
- Rise of nationalism and protectionism
- Policy/priority shifts
- Impacts on regional laws/regulations/protocols
- Serious capacity deficits-lack of preparedness
- An important turning point
- What are the opportunities? The future of internationalization?

Building back together

There is no crisis without opportunities

- Time for renewal/ relevance of universities to their missions.

- Enhanced and meaningful collaborations- hold together

- Development of supportive policies and strategies

- Investment in ICT for e-learning, new forms of engagement- support internationalization

- Change of attitude -New approaches to work, teaching and learning

- Support African Centres of excellence- specialized training/interventions

- Strengthening intra-Africa collaborations

- Participation and strengthening global knowledge networks

- Mitigate unfair collaborations

The Balancing Act

- Balancing contradictory requirements
- Plans/Policies/Strategies
- Funding/Support for internationalization
- Professionalization of international offices
- Develop best practices
- Create teams/champions
- Understand your context

Looking into the future

- Africa becoming a new frontier for internationalization
- Growth/expansion of the sector
- Youth advantage
- Governance/quality reforms
- Digitalization and ICTs
- Mobility with rise again
- Lessons from COVID 19
- Renewed interest and support to Africa's HE
- Resilience of the sector
- GLOBAL COOPERATION