

LEADING FROM THE SOUTH

Panel Africa Knows! Conference on 25 February 2021

Initiated by Nuffic

International (higher) education and research is changing at an unprecedented pace and intrinsically linked to international relations. New modalities of staff- and student mobility connect with public-private partnerships and research, between countries and across continents. It is necessary that contemporary diplomacy moves in tandem with these developments. Intersecting with the academic dynamic is the multitude of non-governmental actors, societal issues and geo-political trends. With this panel, we seek to develop an understanding of the international dimension of education institutions in Africa, and how the challenges they face in this regard can be addressed. The main focus of the panel was how education institutions (ranging from TVET to Higher Education) can maximize their potential for international engagement.

Underlying themes are the current state of affairs in education systems, science and innovation systems and the position of universities within Africa as well as continental and regional agencies and their knowledge policies. Adding to this discussion is the role youth can play in furthering the discussion on decolonizing, holding a firm focus on the fact that they are and have the future.

Central to this session were the following questions:

- 1) On staff-student mobility: What trade-offs do knowledge institutions need to make to ensure their institutions' future academic strength while adequately addressing the challenge of not having enough staff already? For example, these might include making difficult strategic decisions around which departments, students or faculties to support.
- 2) The infrastructure paradox: In order to increase capacity of academic and research institutions, it is often said that effective international engagement is necessary. How should this engagement look like? What are the critical parameters for successful international engagement, the actors involved and the actors that hinder such engagement? How can this be applied to TVET and North-South cooperation in education?
- 3) Recognizing the differences of African and European approaches to knowledge diplomacy, what are best practices and ways to move it forward? What are the pros and cons of further intensifying international academic exchanges?

In this session, we focused on how leading from the south can impact existing knowledge infrastructures, how they affect especially youth and how to amplify their voices by means of international education experiences.

After a brief introduction on Nuffic and its role as the linking pin between the panelists, Samira Zafar and moderator Huba Boshoff gave the stage to the participants.

Cornelius Hacking (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) kicked off the session with a keynote on decolonizing the mind from a policy perspective (note for Marieke: see doc attached). A lively discussion on Dutch initiatives on capacity building followed, with special attention on donor-implementer relations and synergy in policies.

Read Mr Hacking's keynote (p. 3 and 4).

Pauline Essah (ESSA / RUFORUM) shifted our attention to the effect and necessity of scholarships in Sub Saharan Africa. Scholarships can open up opportunities for young people from developing countries and building academic capacity, transforming lives and building institutions. Their role in development is recognised as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in Target 4.b: to expand the availability of scholarships by 2020.

Essah and colleagues examined the challenges facing scholarship funders and providers to maximise the impact of scholarships to young people from sub-Saharan Africa. She draws on the knowledge and experience of RUFORUM, an experienced provider of scholarships to young Africans, and Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA), whose research has fed directly into the evaluation of SDG 4.b. for UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report on Education & Inclusion.

ESSA's mapping of 350 scholarship providers and in-depth at the practices of 20 of the top 50 providers shows that as demand for quality Higher Education across Africa surges, scholarships for sub-Saharan African students look to be increasing too. However inclusive development is often not prioritised and many programmes lack focus on impact for young people.

This lack of prioritisation is troubling. RUFORUM's experience points to the fact that inclusive scholarship provision in sub-Saharan Africa requires deliberate effort. It needs a streamlined institutional and policy environment with agile development partners willing to unlearn and re-learn to support co-creating working models. Inclusion will only be achieved with purpose and financing that comes with supportive criteria and looks beyond the narrow outcome of attaining a higher education qualification. In Pauline's presentation, she focused on:

1. Inclusive access: are scholarships reaching marginalized groups?
2. Completion rates: are scholarships being delivered in such a way as to enable completion?
3. University engagement: what are effective ways of working between universities, scholarship providers and recipients?
4. Transition to employment: what is the best way to support graduates as they make the transition from education into work?

Hellen Ongayo gave us an insight in civil society and NGO initiatives, by means of presenting the case of VSO Kenya. In her presentation she answered the question on the real need for harmonization: fragmentation of the sector and lack of coordination is hampering effective TVET aid – what should donors do to address this? The lack of coherence in policy on regional and regional levels is met with equally misaligned policies on continental and intercontinental levels. This gravely affects the work of NGOs and civil society organisations. Hellen Ongayo shared examples from her own experience that demonstrated where such blockades existed and how they could have been mitigated.

Last but not least, **Doussouba Konaté** from Accountability Lab Mali helped us see the concept of 'leading from the south' through a youth lens. In her presentations, she gave several examples of how youth empowerment and youth engagement can lead to strengthened communities and improved effectiveness of civil society interventions. The youth provide a way to real systemic change, but it requires a shift in attitude from all stakeholders.

A tough act to follow, but **David Ehrhardt** from the Africa Studies Assembly rose to the challenge and gave us a glimpse of what lies ahead for Africa Knows and its legacy.

Africa's knowledge infrastructure and institutions creation

Keynote speech by Cornelius Hacking

“Decolonizing the Mind” as a theme of this session brought back great memories of the wonderful novels and other writings by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who published this challenging booklet in 1986. It was however preceded by Chinweizu’s “Toward the decolonization of African literature” in 1980. It is not a coincidence that this long underestimated process of decolonization started in the arts (after the political independence, of course).

However, the political decolonization has not automatically delivered the epistemological decolonization: most domains of knowledge and knowledge production continued and continue to be based on foundations that can be called colonial and ethnocentric.

Luckily, going through the many documents, papers, blogs, films, podcasts and discussions that this conference has produced over the last three months, there is no need for me to repeat the role of Western powers, thinkers and policy makers, which has been the benchmark for many years (for too long indeed), presented as being a “universal” form of knowledge production.

I was asked to talk to you today from the perspective of a policy maker, working as an education adviser at the ministry of foreign affairs. **Please note that what I am going to say today is my personal opinion, meant to come to a critical reflection on some of the work that we do, that you do, and we are doing together.** I have also been asked to be bold and not diplomatic, so I have chosen to present a number of dilemmas:

Dilemma 1:

There is a tension between support to Basic Education and Higher Education: we are spending Official Development Assistance and the international community agreed that ODA should primarily work for the poor. In most LICs and LMICs, the poor do not get into higher education; they hardly manage to graduate from primary education. Children of the richest 5% to 10% get into higher education, so is ODA subsidizing the rich?

Our dilemma is that teachers for primary and secondary education are trained in higher education, but that does not justify the high percentage of ODA that goes into post-secondary. So should we stop this type of aid and put all our efforts into primary where, even before the COVID-19 crisis, more than 250 million children did not go to school at all, worldwide, especially effecting girls?

Dilemma 2:

This makes it even more complicated: taking the perspective of an educator, child psychologists will tell you that “decolonizing the mind” takes a long time and best is to start at an early age. Towards the end of the 1990ties and the beginning of this millennium, the NL supported a small but interesting project at the University of Cape Town, on mother-tongue based multilingual education, led by the late Prof. Neville Alexander. Among the results of this initiative is a programme translating/writing children’s books in the 11 official languages of South Africa.

My dilemma is: should we, as a donor, put all our funds in pre-primary and early primary reading and learning programmes? That would be a major shift in our policies but I look forward to your comments.

Dilemma 3:

Financial data from UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report on post-secondary education show that, in 2019 more donor funding went to post-secondary education than to basic education (USD 6.6 billion versus USD 6.1 billion respectively).

At the same time, we see a high percentage of ODA funds for education being spent in the donor countries themselves; examples of more than 50% are South Korea and France.

This is what we call "tied aid" and we promised the world (at the Paris conference on aid effectiveness back in 2005 already) that we would stop doing that and that all ownership should be with the receiving country.

So what about "decolonizing" this and spend the funds where they might make a bigger difference, meaning in the partner countries? Alternatively, one could set a target of for instance 75% or 90% of the funds that should end up in partner countries. Universities in the Global South should implement themselves the programmes from which they benefit.

This brings me to the dilemma: the Orange Knowledge Programme, financed by our ministry and the largest education programme we have, is tied aid: Dutch institutions receive the majority of the funds and implement the programme. I would look forward to discuss with my friends from Dutch institutions participating today how we could change that, and design a future programme in a way that does answer to the Paris principles of ownership. In this case meaning, "really leading from the South".

Dilemma 4:

This concerns fellowship programmes; the GEM Report that I just mentioned says that, over the years 2017-2019, 10% of all ODA to education worldwide went to fellowships and scholarships for training in donor countries, with another 17% added to the 10% for imputed student costs. We could look here as well at the intermediary role of an organisation like Nuffic, kindly hosting us today. Yes, SDG 4, Target 4.b tells us to expand the number of fellowships, but also that these should be "transparently targeted" at young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. And 27% of all education ODA is a lot..!

The dilemma is in how to check their transparency and their effectiveness. First, are fellowships the most efficient and effective way of training and learning? Second, who decides on awarding fellowships? Third, can we learn from the responses in relation to the COVID-19 crisis and work more in a virtual way, as we are doing today? Contacts between educators, students and other stakeholders are relatively easy online, and cheaper. Fourth: could we design a system through which the majority of fellowships would be awarded to universities in the Global South? Would south-south cooperation be more effective? Lastly, measuring results of fellowships is currently very difficult.

Perhaps this conference has already given answers to some of these issues concerning the dilemmas that I just presented. In any case, and repeating that these were **my personal observations to get our discussion going**, I look forward to your questions and comments.

Thank you.