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### Project Report

## East and South African-German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management (CERM-ESA) A Case for Internationalisation and Higher Education Engagement

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### Why This Project?

Various studies and analyses show that secondary and higher education play a vital role in fostering social development, economic growth, and human well-being in particular in developing countries (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2006; Botman, van Zyl, Fakie, & Pauw, 2009; Gyimah-Brempong, Paddison, & Mitiku, 2006; Majgaard & Mingat, 2012; Meek, Teichler, & Kearney, 2009; Singh & Manuh, 2007; Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000). The Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000, p. 27) stated, “higher education is no longer a small enterprise for the elite. Rather, it has become vital to nearly every nation's plans for development.” Education systems in Africa are particularly challenged in the field of higher education and research with large differences between African countries in terms of research capacity and output. As such, the participants of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education demanded: “Higher education institutions should seek out areas of research and teaching that can address issues related to the well-being of the population and establish a strong foundation for locally-relevant science and technology” (Gurría, 2009, p. 6). Thus, effective impulses are called for through furthering excellence with regard to better data, innovative research and instruction techniques, as well as a better understanding of the unique opportunities of African education institutions such as schools or universities within their respective communities.

Against this background, a consortium of four African and one German university initiated the collaborative research, academic, and staff development project called, East and South African-German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management— CERM-ESA (2014–2022). It is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with support of the Federal Foreign Office (AA) under the umbrella of their Africa Strategy. CERM-ESA project partners are the following institutions: Moi University, Kenya; University of Oldenburg, Germany; Nelson Mandela

Metropolitan University (NMMU), South Africa; University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Uganda Management Institute.

This report provides a brief introduction to the theoretical approaches CERM-ESA employs and to the project's activities and structures relevant to educational research for social change and Africanisation.

## Theoretical Approach

Looking from a German perspective, CERM-ESA could be viewed as a development cooperation project and hence, development theory would be the one to refer to. However, the concept of development has been target of much critique in the past two decades as an ideology of the West/North and as a hierarchical concept that promotes cultural imperialism (Ziai, 2007). For CERM-ESA as a collaborative project, development theory would by no means represent a shared perspective on the joint endeavour and common objectives. Rather, CERM-ESA has been conceptualised and is operating within the two broad frameworks of a) internationalisation of higher education institutions, understood as the effort of universities to include an international and intercultural dimension into their teaching, research, and service functions and be responsive to their global environments (Qiang, 2003), and b) higher education engagement, understood as the social responsibility of higher education institutions to form partnerships with other societal actors and communities, to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and impact positively on the society (Fear & Sandmann, 2016; Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012; Pinheiro, Langa, & Pausits, 2015).

### Internationalisation

Most literature distinguishes between four different approaches to internationalisation of higher education institutions: 1) the *activity approach*, which focuses on academic exchange and the curriculum, 2) the *competency approach*, which focuses on the development of skills and competencies in students and staff, 3) the *ethos approach*, which promotes the values and culture of multi-perspectivity and intercultural initiatives, and 4) the *process approach*, which focuses on integrating an international/intercultural perspective sustainably into various activities, policies, and procedures (Qiang, 2003, pp. 250–251).

According to the literature, internationalisation of higher education institutions is mainly based on political, economic, educational, or cultural/social rationales, while there seems to be a general tendency towards a dominance of economic rationales and of global competitiveness that have driven internationalisation at universities for the past 20 years in most parts of the world (Jiang, 2008; Knight, 2007; Qiang, 2003).

Jowi (2009) reminded us that internationalisation efforts of higher education institutions in Africa—just like in the rest of the world—reflect the historical and cultural contexts as well as the needs and priorities of their particular society. In general, he identified the need for institutional and academic strengthening as the dominant rationale for African universities to internationalise themselves (Jowi, 2009).

### Higher education engagement

The second conceptual framework employed to explain CERM-ESA's rationale and activities, namely higher education engagement or social responsibility, explains CERM-ESA's underlying model of social transformation. In 1996, Boyer called on higher education institutions to become a "vigorous partner" contributing to solutions for the "most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems" (p. 18). Ostrander (2004) described the main concerns of this movement as "grounding academic knowledge in real-world conditions, connecting knowledge to practice, bringing academics and practitioners into closer relationships, improving conditions in local communities, and building democracy and civil society" (p. 74). As the third core function of universities besides research and teaching, engagement

can therefore be described as the universities' commitment to producing knowledge that benefits society and that produces students for productive citizenship in a democratic society (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Various models and concepts exist for (the scholarship of) engagement that refer to theories like institutional change theory and knowledge transfer or democratisation theory. Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) engagement model comprises four main characteristics which point out that engagement should be 1) scholarly (activities and products), 2) cross-cutting (in research, teaching, and service), 3) reciprocal and mutually beneficial, and 4) embrace values of a civic democracy (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). CERM-ESA has adopted this model as a conceptual framework for its programmes because it concurs with the objectives of the partner institutions. In their mission statements, the five higher education institutions refer to their social responsibility to form partnerships with stakeholders, for example, "for the betterment of society" (Moi University, n. d. ) or that "will make a critical and constructive contribution to regional, national and global sustainability" (NMMU, n. d.).

## **CERM-ESA Objectives**

CERM-ESA's overall objective has been identified as to establish a centre of excellence in educational research methodologies and management that is visible to society and to the international scientific community by delivering excellent academic results, which will serve as a basis for evidence-based decision making for improving educational practice. The specific project objectives within the three programme pillars illustrate the academic rationale of this international cooperation:

- **Research Programme:** Advancing and expanding excellent and innovative educational research on methodologies, instruction techniques, and management strategies for African contexts.
- **Academic Programme:** Teaching and training of future educational leaders in terms of research methodologies, innovative management solutions, and instruction techniques at master's and doctoral levels.
- **Staff Development Programme:** Advancing capacity building and staff development in academia and management of the participating universities in effective university instruction and management for (future) leaders, and sustainable institution building.

In order to frame the research activities in such a way that they contribute to social change and Africanisation, the following four umbrella topics have been identified by the partners:

- Educational research methodologies and higher education in specific African contexts.
- Science education and education for sustainable development.
- Community schools, leadership, and management for social development.
- Languages, intercultural communication, indigenous knowledge, and arts.

## **What Have We Found out So Far?**

After 2 ½ years into the existence of CERM-ESA, we can draw first conclusions on the project's achievements and potentials concerning all three objectives (research, academic, staff development) and the North–South and South–South cooperation between the four African and one German partner. For the purpose of this project report, the main activities and collaboration structures are valued against the project's contributions to internationalisation and engagement in the table below.

**Table 1: Significance for Social Change and Africanisation**

	<b>Measures and Activities</b>	<b>Contribution to Internationalisation</b>	<b>Contribution to Engagement</b>
<b>Cooperation structure</b>	Bi-annual steering committee meetings: decisions made by all partners	- regular cross-country meetings - visibility at host university	Ensures: - that the programmes are relevant and beneficial to all partners
	International advisory board: experts for Africanisation	- transfer of knowledge and expertise	- guidance and critical reflection is provided on African contexts & methodologies
	Building a CERM-ESA faculty: all alumni and participants	- forum for educationists of all five partner institutions	- a broad collaboration and interdisciplinary basis for the project
	Online learning platform	- online collaboration for staff and students	- sharing of resources and best practices
<b>Research</b>	4 umbrella topics and research teams	- relevant topics for all partner regions	- focus on social change and improvements
	Contextualised & evidence-based methodologies	- internationally comparative topics	- advancing participatory, arts-based, action research and other forms of engaged methodologies
	Co-supervision of theses	- cross-country collaboration in supervision	- mutual support and ensuring best practice
	Participation in international conferences	- support for schools/faculties of education to be internationally visible	- disseminating research methodologies and results from African contexts
<b>Academic / Teaching</b>	Annual CERM-ESA schools on research methodologies for scholarship holders	- regular student and lecturer exchange - international perspectives	- focus on ethical questions, engagement, leadership and change
	Students' visits to co-supervisors	- international experience	- exposure to other community outreach activities and methods
	New master's programme, Education Research, at Moi University	- joint curriculum development, teaching and co-supervision	- innovative, contextualised research methodologies for social change
<b>Staff development</b>	Short learning programme research supervision	- learning and knowledge transfer in international scientific communities	- engaged supervision practices and skills development
	Principals' and teachers' days	- in-service training according to international standards and with contributions by CERM-ESA partners	- direct knowledge transfer in various directions, transdisciplinary collaboration, mutually beneficial
	Methodology skills development cross-universities	- multidirectional knowledge transfer (South–South and North–South/South–North)	- focus on particular methodologies for social change

The table shows how CERM-ESA has conceptualised *internationalisation* and *engagement* as cross-cutting issues that are central to a) its academic rationale and three objectives, b) the organisational

structure and mode of collaboration, c) the research topics and methodologies, and d) to all its activities within the three programme lines.

With regard to social change and Africanisation, the academic rationale and three objectives (a) support the African partner universities in their efforts to produce more highly qualified graduates to meet the identified societal needs to more teaching and research capacities in the universities. Following the introduction of free primary education (2003) and free secondary education (2008) in Kenya, as an example, student numbers in universities have gone up rapidly and hence, the need for qualified university lecturers is blatant (Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2011; Ndirangu & Udoto, 2011). The organisational structure and mode of collaboration within CERM-ESA (b) follows the understanding that a positive impact and change can only be reached if we build a partnership between equals where global conditions of asymmetrical power relations, inequalities, and long histories of injustices are reflected upon and dealt with. North–South/South–South and university-communities partnerships that don't employ a deficit-based and Eurocentric approach to service, cooperation, and education are still at the margins and need to be brought to the centre (Martin & Griffiths, 2012; Odora Hoppers, 2001). A core element of addressing issues of social change and Africanisation are the topics CERM-ESA focuses on in its research and the integration of indigenous knowledge and methodologies (c). The individual research projects of CERM-ESA scholarship holders address issues like gender and sexuality education, mother-tongue based education in multilingual settings, humanising pedagogy, the integration of indigenous knowledge in science education, and early learning advancement through guided play. The employed methodologies are not a mere duplicate of what has been applied and tested in European or US contexts, but they are rooted in and developed or adapted for the specific African contexts. Built into the methodologies are ways of giving back to the research participants and the institutions to support the forces driving change towards more social justice in the particular area of interest (Chilisa, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The capacity building, teaching, research, and community activities CERM-ESA carries out (d) are conceptualised as a comprehensive approach to drive social development and Africanisation from various angles. While the activity and ethos approach to internationalisation has dominated so far, the process and competency approach will become more important in the years to come. A critical reflection and review of how the research projects of CERM-ESA's scholarship holders have contributed to the knowledge about African grounded methodologies and solutions for educational challenges in African contexts that are needed for social change to happen, is still in progress. However, first results suggest that educational research, teaching, and staff development framed by engagement in African contexts can benefit tremendously from international collaboration, especially within Africa.

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