

# THE EAST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA: A GLOBAL OR REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SPACE?

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## Abstract

This article discusses the feasibility of the East African Community Higher Education area (EACHEA) as a common higher education space for the East African Partner states. Attempts to establish the EACHEA have been in process since the passing of the Arusha Convention treaty on 5 December 1981. The treaty was subsequently revised in Cape Town, South Africa, in June, 2002 and amended in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2003. The Arusha convention was not an isolated development. UNESCO facilitated the signing of similar regional conventions for other regions of the world with the objective of facilitating greater mobility of students and professionals. From the perspective of UNESCO, facilitating mobility was important to provide educational and cultural continuity from the colonial to the post-colonial era, given that colonialism had provided the ideological anchorage on the character of first-generation higher education institutions. The emergence of the European higher education area (EHEA) through the Bologna process and the desire of the EHEA countries to recreate Bologna like-processes in other parts of the world through instruments such as tuning provided further political and intellectual justification to accelerate the process of realising the EACHEA. The European Union, through the African Union Commission (AUC) has supported the Arusha convention process and greater regionalization and harmonization of higher education systems in the continent. Publicly-funded bodies, such as the German Academic Exchange program (DAAD) have supported the development of quality assurance systems and qualification frameworks that have facilitated the establishment of the EACHEA. With such external support to the EACHEA comparative to local initiatives, and given historical and contemporary contexts, this article addresses itself to a crucial question: Whose higher education area is the EACHEA? And, what needs is it going to serve? Will the activities of the EAHEA area be more focused on global higher education needs while ignoring local needs and contexts?

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Harmonization, East African Common Education Area

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## Introduction

On 20 May 2017, the summit of the East African Heads of State declared the East African Community (EAC), a common higher education area, thereby bringing into force the East African Community Common Higher Education Area, EACHEA (Inter-University Council for East Africa, IUCEA, 2017). The establishment of the EACHEA can be traced to three historical contexts. The first is the colonial context that saw higher education in East Africa being established as a joint enterprise with the Federal university of East Africa. The federal university collapsed in 1970 as the political leadership opted for autonomous national universities (Southall, 1974). The Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), one of the institutions that survived the collapse of the federal university and the EAC was later revived and has been instrumental in creating the common education area (IUCEA/DAAD, 2010).

The second historical context is when African countries signed the Arusha Convention to facilitate professional and student mobility throughout the continent at a meeting convened by UNESCO in Arusha, Tanzania in 1981 (UNESCO, 1981). The convention has since undergone revisions, notably in Cape Town in June 2002 and ratification of the revisions by 16 African countries in Dakar, Senegal, June 2003 (UNESCO, 2016). The African regional convention was not an isolated development though. UNESCO facilitated the signing of similar regional conventions for the other continents with the overall objective of facilitating greater mobility of students and professionals at a regional, continental and international levels, especially with the coming to an end of colonial domination in most parts of the world, which had provided the ideological anchorage on the character of first-generation higher education institutions in the colonized countries (UNESCO 1981).

The third context has been the emergence of the European higher education area (EHEA) through the Bologna process and the desire of the EHEA countries to recreate Bologna like-processes in other parts of the world through instruments such as tuning, aimed to increase compatibility of other higher education systems to those of Europe. With respect to the EACHEA, the European Union, through its support to the African Union Commission (AUC) has supported the Arusha convention process and greater regionalization and harmonization of higher education systems in the continent. Public funded bodies, such as the Germany academic Exchange program (DAAD) has been instrumental in supporting the development of quality assurance systems and qualification frameworks that have facilitated the establishment of the EACHEA. Given this historical and contemporary context, this article addresses itself to a crucial question, whose higher education area is the EACHEA (IUCEA/DAAD, 2010).

The desire for the creation of the EACHEA by the political leadership of the region may be interpreted as an expression of the region to establish strong higher education institutions. The aim of such a political ambition is to have higher education institutions better suited to address the developmental challenges of the region while at the same time, signaling a wish to open the higher education institutions of the region to external players- students, researchers and private sector players, but doing so from a position of strength. Marhl, Rebolj, and Kraljić (2011) in reference to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) argue that “countries in search of establishing strong national universities through regionalization need to devote more resources to research, improve teaching record, build up centers of excellence, strengthen links between education and business and give its universities more autonomy” (p.124).

In this article, we deal with three important global trends in higher education that are shaping the nature of higher education common areas and how they manifest in the process and reality of the EACHEA. These are regional trends in student mobility, regional trends in research and innovation and the governance of the EACHEA space.

### Historical Context to the Establishment of EACHEA

Like the case was in most of Africa, Higher education in East Africa owes its origins to the “Asquith Colleges” during the colonial period. Though a response to nationalist aspirations, the establishment of the colleges was conceived and operationalized to respond to specific needs of the colonial economy (Asquith Commission Report, 1945). The colleges were established through federal institutional arrangements, where the mother institution was based in one country with university colleges in the other countries. The federal university of East Africa was designed as such thus providing a large higher education area that served the colonial economy in terms of the different skill requirements and specializations. The design of the colleges also contributed to inserting Higher education in the colonies to global higher education spaces, thereby from the time of their establishment, occasioning tensions between the global focus of the regional higher education institutions and their commitment to national and regional projects (UNESCO, 1963; Mazrui, 1977).

In 1970 strong nationalist feelings led to the dissolution of the federal university arrangement and the establishment of National universities (Southall, 1974). The subsequent collapse of the political federation, the East African Community in 1977 deemed any hopes of rebuilding a strong common higher education spaces in East Africa, as national level institutions continued to expand. The establishment of national universities from the 1970s however only responded to nationalist impulses. Schemes linking national universities to global universities continued especially in the areas of workforce development, curriculum design and content and research and knowledge production trends; extroverting tendencies, which by 1977 led Ali Mazrui to restate the deepening ‘multinationalism’ of the university in Africa (Mazrui, 1977).

From 1980s however, the political leadership in the region began to explore possibilities of re-establishing a common higher education space. This was in a sense echoing the example of developments in Europe where countries were crafting mechanism for greater cooperation in higher education as a strategy for increasing investments in research and knowledge production. At the continental level, the Arusha convention provided momentum for these reflections. The Arusha convention spearheaded by UNESCO refers to agreement signed by member states committing them to a long-term process of harmonizing and recognizing higher educational qualifications and create enabling environments for professional and student mobility across African States. The African convention was adopted in Arusha, Tanzania on 5 December 198. The convention has since evolved and undergone revisions. The first revisions to the convention took place Cape Town, South Africa in June 2002 and subsequently amended in Dakar, Senegal, June 2003 (UNESCO, 2016). The latest revisions to the convention were undertaken in Addis Ababa in December 2014 (UNESCO, 2016). The idea for the commitment of countries to the convention is to facilitate greater mobility of students and professionals throughout the African continent. The convention was conceived as a strategy for reinforcing African solidarity and cultural identity through education and better utilization of education resources through enhancing academic mobility of students and academics (Oyewole, 2013).

In the spirit of pursuing the objectives of the Arusha Convention, the political leadership in East Africa agreed to revive the inter-university council for the region (IUCEA), which would then be tasked to exploring mechanisms for greater higher education convergence systems in the region. But as the case was before, regional and nationalist sentiments were never backed by funding commitments from the governments of the region to promote the realization of the higher education area. By 1992, the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Services (CHEMS), had to step in to fund the operational work of the IUCEA (Shabani, Okebukola & Oyewole, 2014). It was not

until 1999 when the treaty for the Establishment of the current East African Community was signed that the IUCEA was recognized as an organ of the political community and therefore deserving of funding from the member states (EAC, 1999).

A second impetus for the establishment of the higher education area came in 2009, when the Partner States signed the EAC Common Market Protocol which signaled their desire to establish a common market (EAC, 2009). Regarding higher education, the Common Market Protocol which became operational on 1 July 2010, designates education services (including higher education) among the 7 Priority sectors in which all 5 Partner States were required to make commitments (EAC, 2009). To facilitate the realization of the objectives of the protocol, states were required to have provisions for eased mobility of students and labour across the EAC Partner State. This is only realized through the establishment a Common Higher Education Area. The signing of the protocol for the common market in 2010 therefore included a target of establishing a common higher education space by 2015, thus providing a platform for free movement of labour and students across the region (East African Business Council, EABC, 2013).

Since 2000, the IUCEA, with funding from regional governments, but also with further funding from partners has been engaged in progressive processes and institution building to realize a common higher education area for the region. In 2009 the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) enacted the IUCEA Act 2009, thus effectively integrating IUCEA into the EAC operational framework (IUCEA, 2011). The Act spells out the objectives, functions, institutional set up and systems of governance and management of IUCEA. According to the Act any university, university college and degree awarding institution may apply for and get admitted to the IUCEA membership if it is properly incorporated in the EAC Partner State where it is operating and is pursuing objectives that are consistent with the functions of IUCEA as spelt out in the Act. The IUCEA is expected to work to promote the realization of a strong regional higher education space for the political entity, the EAC. The EAC on the other hand, works in harmony with other regional economic communities in Africa to promote the agenda of the African Union commission (AUC) higher education strategy. The ambition of the whole architecture is to promote strong higher education institutions at a regional level as regional sovereign projects through which the development ambitions of the region and Africa may be realized (IUCEA, 2011).

The focus of the IUCEA in the period preceding the establishment of the EACHEA has been on creating greater harmony and mobility within the higher education institutions of the region. For example,

- Regional Quality Assurance Framework, with four operational pillars, namely, a policy framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa; regional quality assurance instruments at program and institutional levels and benchmarks for academic programs;
- Staff Mobility Framework (2014) to enhance sharing of the existing human resources in higher education within the Community and encouraging staff mobility;
- Students Mobility Policy (2015) to facilitate free movement of students within the Community; and
- In 2013 and 2014 IUCEA guided a regional consultative and participatory process that led to the development of the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), which was approved by the EAC Council of Ministers on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015. (EAC, 2015)

Political support and stewardship have been evident in the process that culminated to the establishment of the EACHEA. The political leadership in pursuit of

an integrated East African political and Economic community sought to achieve this through an integrated system of higher education and training. This imperative culminated to the amendment of the IUCEA Act of 2009 to change the institution from a university membership institution to one of the key organs of the EAC, with funding and oversight for its operations overseen by the regional assembly, the East African Legislative assembly, EALA, (IUCEA, 2014). The amendment thrust more responsibilities to the IUCEA, including strengthening regional cooperation through networks that link universities in the region to universities and other institutions in Africa and globally, initiating, assisting and encouraging the development of higher education institutions in East Africa; and encouraging collaboration in regional research thereby contributing to development of centers of excellence in higher education and research (EAC, 2014).

The political enthusiasm to establish the EACHEA has however not been followed up with adequate funding. Reports indicate most of the partner states do not pay up their commitments to the IUCEA on time (AUC/EC, 2014). In addition to inadequate financial resources, there is inadequate prioritization and allocation of the resources to core activities of the institution, due to the existing cash flow problems (IUCEA, 2014). The IUCEA's work on quality assurance, accreditation standards and development of qualification frameworks has been achieved through partnership with the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), the German Rectors Conference (HRK), German accreditation agencies as well as several German, such as the University of Oldenburg (AUC/EC, 2014).

This raises questions of sovereignty, ownership and relevance of the standards developed, and their widespread local acceptability and applicability. However, benevolent, external partners are likely to design systems informed by perspectives from their context. Nor does this seem to be a short-term problem. By 2013, the EAC relied on donors for 69% of its budget and 31% from partner states (EAC, 2011). Public universities, who provide alternative sources of funding to the IUCEA are themselves facing funding crises given that national governments are unable to fund their operations. This reality suggests that much of the work the EACHEA is required to undertake, such as collaborative research, academic and staff mobility and restructuring the governance of the higher education space, depends on donors.

### **Conceptual and Analytical Framing**

How can the re-emergence of higher education areas, especially in Africa be explained, especially in the context of globalization internationalization, and what forces shape their character? The establishment of Higher education institutions in Africa during the colonial period was structured along regional and federal trends. Universities were established and served several countries, and the orientation of the academic cultures of the institutions was such that it retained strong relationships with higher education institutions from the colonizing countries. Such was the case with the University of East Africa, with university colleges at Makerere, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, and all established with a special relationship to the university of London (Southall, 1974). The federal university arrangement collapsed in 1970, with the establishment of national universities. The re-emergence of plans for the establishment of higher education areas, like the East African Higher Education area (EACHEA) which has just been established therefore need to be academically and ideologically contextualized. With a few structural and policy modifications, the EACHEA has re-enacted the historical university of East Africa structure and ambitions (Shabani, Okebukola & Oyewole, 2014). What needs to be accounted for are the impulses that these developments are responding to: do they represent genuine attempts at establishing stronger higher education systems to serve

national and regional needs or ‘special purpose vehicles’ whose best will only be captured to serve external interests?

Establishing regional higher education areas to facilitate student and academic mobility is not new. The project was launched by UNESCO in 1970 throughout all regions of the world. In the east African region, the “Arusha Convention” became the official manifestation of this ambition for 35 years, up to the signing of the treaty establishing the EACHEA in 2015. The urgency to establish the higher education area has been a response to the intensity of globalization’s influence on trends in higher education developments, especially regarding competition for reputation, talent, as demonstrated through global rankings, dynamic research funding, and international mobility of staff and students (Van der Wende, 2017). As higher education systems vary in their strengths, often buttressed by economic and political power, those of developing countries get disadvantaged in this competition.

On the other hand, stronger higher education systems, acquire expansionist tendencies akin to political entities seeking territories for commercial ends. Overtly, these trends are appreciated and promoted as positive developments through which national barriers breakdown, thus connecting universities on a worldwide scale, facilitating sharing of knowledge, values and culture in ways that benefits lesser developed higher education systems. Covertly however, the trends mirror ways through which developed systems seek to influence and reshape lesser developed higher education systems, as a strategy for widening zones for recruitment of students to boost revenues from tuition fees from an expanding worldwide market of globally mobile students and researchers; safeguard commercial interests accruing from research and innovations and/or acting to further the commercial interests of business entities (Van der Wende, 2017; OECD, 2014).

In the case of higher education systems, commercial interests are seen in the manner institutions package themselves as attractive to boost their enrollments, obviously targeting tuition fees from increased enrollments to boost their revenues. On the other hand, the partnership between higher education institutions and private business, especially in developed countries increasingly tap into investment opportunities offered by expanding higher education institutions in developing countries. For underfunded higher education institutions in developing countries, the promises of internationalization or any kind of partnerships that promote the process sound seductive. Some literature suggests that various forms of internationalization boosts the attractiveness of higher education institutions. This attractiveness is achieved through expanding the global space from which higher education institutions recruit students, while at the same time safeguarding the national space against encroachment and domination from other national global players (Kwiek, 2004). It is the fear of competition from other national players, that has for example, the United States concerned that if countries such as China choose to adopt a new model of tertiary education based on three years of undergraduate education and two years of graduate education, a global system of higher-education mobility based on the European model might emerge, and directly privilege the European Union in Asia (Carlin, 2007).

Some African scholars have raised similar concerns regarding the extension of the European Higher Education area to Africa through the Bologna process (Mohamedbhai, 2013; Khelifaoui, 2009). Some literature suggests that the progressive support of the European Union to building other regional higher education areas and interlinking of those spaces around the globe is tied to Europe and its globalizing higher education project and might have negative implications for other national and regional economies (Robertson, 2008; Tomusk, 2004). It is in cognizance of this reality that doubts have been cast on the intentions of the European Union supporting a ‘Bologna’ kind of process to reshape higher education in Africa (Khelifaoui, 2009). Hence, the perceptions that beyond Europe, ‘Bologna’ is a “Europeanization” process of other higher education systems

through greater compatibility and comparability of degree structures, credit systems and quality assurance procedures continue to influence the degree of its acceptance in receiving countries and regions.

The degree of acceptability or modifications are, however, determined by national and regional level conditions, including the strength of national and regional higher education systems and resourcing patterns. Financially weak regions, as has been discussed with respect to the EAC and the IUCEA may not have much room for choices or even a critical awareness of the long-term implications of their higher education systems being 'tuned' or transplanting whole practices. What is not clear and needs further examination is how developing countries benefit by having their education structures and systems made compatible to those of Europe. In other words, what room do higher education systems, especially those of developing countries must address the developmental needs of their societies if they are continually reconfigured to fit certain external circumstances?

Some studies examining the influence of the Bologna process beyond Europe have suggested possibility of the re-emergence of the a new 'Euro model' of higher education as an influence on education systems around the world through strategies such as collaborative cross-border cooperation and tuning arrangements (Robertson, 2008). In the case of Africa, the search for greater compatibility between Europe and African higher education systems has been articulated through the 'Tuning program'. Making higher education institutions compatible to those of Europe serves to expand business opportunities for private business. Developing higher education institutions are investing a lot of resources not only for physical expansion but also other knowledge production infrastructures that universities need to be competitive, including library subscriptions to online databases and accessories for STEM studies. The upsurge of public-private partnerships as alternatives to funding all aspects of university expansion in developing countries illustrates this contention.

For analytical purposes, the article deploys Knight's (2013) analytical framework for understanding higher education harmonization processes. The establishment of the EAHEA is seen as the final act of actualizing the harmonization process of higher education institutions within the East African region. Knight's framework proceeds from the point that higher education harmonization should be understood in terms of the Political, functional, and organizational enablers to the process. In Knight's articulation, the political enablers entail the legal instruments, treaties or policies that regulate the way higher education harmonization is achieved. This is usually political as compared to a process undertaken by academics as policy making is a political process.

The second level of analysis is functional and focuses on the structures established to facilitate the processes. It includes for example, the governance structures that regulate the process and how they function to achieve the declared aims of harmonization; including qualification frameworks, credit transfer systems and degree and other academic program structures. Lastly are organizational enablers. These are the bodies that have been established to govern the process and subsequently the higher education space that is created. Organizational actors of harmonization are critical in mediating the relationship between political and academic institutions. Within the EACHEA, for example, there are national level organizations, including individual universities, science granting councils, higher education commissions and the inter-university council of East Africa (IUCEA) as the body providing overall governance of the space.

On the other hand, the three levels of analysis can be explored in terms of a futuristic perspective; trying to figure out the kind of political objectives, functional education and socio-economic structures and organizations that a harmonized higher education area has been designed to craft. Here higher education institutions are entrusted with a more broad and regional responsibility; that if they worked in a harmonized

manner, they create greater capacity and energy to recreate alternative societies as determined by the political system. Therefore, analysis at this level proceeds from the assumption of greater political and intellectual sovereignty in the manner the establishment of the higher education area has been actualized. Those who have sovereignty over the space will devote more political and economic capital to ensure the final product is fit for the purposes envisaged.

We use this analytical frame to examine three indicators; trends in student mobility, research and innovation initiatives and the governance of the system in the EACHEA. The objective is to show if trends in the three indicators connect with the political ambitions envisaged in the EACHEA or they are responding to external interests.

### **Trends in Student Mobility**

Both the political ambition to establish the EACHEA and the act establishing the IUCEA as the coordinating institution for the establishment of EACHEA identify improving ensuring mobility and employability of graduates in the region as the main motivation. The 2010 Common Market protocol for the EAC region stipulates the commitment of the Partner States to harmonize their education and training systems in order to provide for, among others, concerted efforts in the development of human resources, and mobility of people, labour, and services. In that regard, the treaty required the IUCEA to develop systems that, among others, enhance students' mobility and labour across the Partner States, and hence transform the EAC region into a Common Higher Education Area. The student mobility policy developed by the IUCEA provides a framework for the promotion of students' mobility amongst the Partner States, as a way of facilitating regional integration as envisioned in the Common Market Protocol (EAC ,2009; IUCEA, 2013).

Three issues emerge from these commitments. One is if the reemergence of the IUCEA and the subsequent efforts to harmonize higher education in the region, up to the declaration of the EACHEA has had any implications on patterns of student and labour mobility in the regional. In other words, is there a real political commitment to make the region's higher education competitive and make them first choice for students from the region. The second is if the political commitments have not had any implications, and mobility continues in some way given the historical connections between the countries of the region. Third is to examine any external influences that explain trends in student mobility in the region.

Policies promoting the mobility of students within the East African region have been developed and implemented to advanced stages in each of the member countries. In 2012, education ministers from the five partner states—Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda – approved an amendment to the 2009 IUCEA Act to allow the organization work out an accreditation system to facilitate university students to move freely across the region's universities through a credit accumulation and transfer arrangement (Nganga, 2012). The idea to the amendment is to ensure that students enrolling in one university within the region can transfer and graduate in another regional university without having to lose study years or course credits. Data does not exist though indicating how many students have opted to benefit from this enhanced opportunity for mobility or which institutions are attracting more students, from which countries and the motivations. The process of harmonizing course content and duration has not been finalized.

The latest indicative data on the direction of mobility and the number of students from East African partner states studying in another country within the region is for 2012. According to the data, 13,513 (1.8%) were mobile within the region (Burundi 603, Kenya 9,072, Rwanda 1,852, Tanzania 1,059 and Uganda 727) (IUCEA, 2013). Kenya had



the largest number of students in the other 4 Partner States, while Uganda was enrolling the highest number of foreign students (10,707) from other members states. These trends in student mobility within the EAC region are summarized in the table below;

**Table 1. Student Enrolment by Nationality in HEIs of the EAC Partner States 2012.**

Country	Enrolment by Nationality, 2012					Total EAC
	Burundi	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	
Burundi	19,920	67	220	206	310	20,723
Kenya	10	250,029	56	690	8,316	259,101
Rwanda	129	35	76,022	219	1,469	77,874
Tanzania	30	357	60	165,513	612	166,572
Uganda	3	253	101	370	143,005	143,732
Total	20,092	250,741	76,459	166,998	153,712	668,002
Enrolment Ratio	3.2%	4.0%	5.5%	2.1%	4.2%	4.1%

Source: IUCEA (2013); Harmonizing Public Higher Education Fee Structure in the East African Community Partner States Study Report: Creating New Higher Education Space.

Data from the UNESCO institute of statistics tracking trends in student mobility between 2015-2016 (UIS, 2017) is revealing in establishing where students from the five partner EAC countries have as first choice for higher education. Kenya had the highest number of mobile students in 2016, with 14,017 higher education students characterized as mobile, with an outbound mobility ratio of 0.3% (UIS, 2017). However, none of the east African countries appears among the top ten country destinations for students from Kenya, and only South Africa comes at number 4 as a destination of choice. The number of Kenyan students bound for the USA, which is indicated by the UIS data as first choice for Kenyan students however has been declining over the last decade. According to data from the Institute of International Education (IIE) Kenyan students enrolling in USA universities declined from 7000 students in the 2004/05 academic year to 3,072 students in 2014/15 (WENR, 2017). The explanation for the decline is that an increasing number of Kenyan students are opting to study at home, and within the region. The number of students from Kenya going to neighboring countries however remains speculative with Uganda and Tanzania cited as key destinations.

Uganda, the other country with a fast-expanding higher education system had South Africa as second choice for its outbound students and none of the East African countries among the top ten destinations for their students, the USA being the first country of choice (UIS, 2017). The country had about 4,751 studying abroad in 2016, with a gross outbound mobility ratio of 0.1% (UIS, 2017). But other studies also indicate that about 16,000 foreign students were enrolled in Ugandan universities and a large percentage of these students were enrolled in Kampala International University, followed by Makerere University and Bugema Universities (WENR, 2017). The bulk are from Kenya, though Uganda has become a hub for students from all East Africa. The low fees charged on foreign students by universities in Uganda is cited as the key attraction to Uganda. Similar trends are noticeable in the other partner countries. Tanzania has none of the partner countries as a destination for its students among the first 10 preferred destinations; Rwanda has Burundi as the third preferred destination of its students, while Burundi had the highest ratio of inbound students at 3.2%, with students' countries of origin being DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya (UIS, 2017).

No clear picture emerges regarding consensus among key players on policy initiatives supporting harmonization and regional strengthening of higher education institutions as the foundation of the EACHEA. A combination of three factors; national

strengthening of higher education institutions, the entry of private providers and charging of lower tuition fees seem to be influencing the level of intra-regional student mobility. The issues of quality that have pre-occupied policy makers in the region through the IUCEA over the last decade and which should constitute a strong higher education area seem to be missing from consideration. The competition for students rather than strengthening the quality of programs seem to be influencing the expansion strategy of universities to the extent that intra-regional mobility is seen as undermining the integrity and qualifications obtained from the common higher education area. Higher Education institutions in Uganda such as Kampala International University and the universities of Busoga, Makerere and Kampala have emerged as regional expansion giants, establishing campuses across the entire region and partnering with local colleges, attracting masters and PhD students through lower tuition fees (Waruru, 2013). But mobility influenced by competition and lower tuition fees has also caused accreditation disputes, resulting to the Kenyan higher education regulator cancelling several doctoral degrees obtained from Kampala International University in Uganda because some courses had not been cleared accredited.

Another emerging trend has been that of institutional mobility through the establishment of branch campuses in other countries. Kenyan public universities have, for example expanded and established branch campuses in all the other partner countries. Private universities have also followed suit, especially with Mount Kenya university in Kenya and Kampala international university from Uganda leading the market. Most private universities have a broader ownership structure that extends beyond the region. What drives public and private university expansion in the region is however the very idea of privatization which largely has worked against the adoption of uniform fees for east African students. Students in offshore universities of public universities are classified as private. Even within their borders, most students in public universities of East Africa are classified as private and seen as a strategy for the institutions to compensate for falling public resources.

This explains the lower tuition fees strategy institutions are using to attract students at the expense of quality. However, countries where the branch campuses are located perceive that their citizens are not receiving value for money and in the long-term such developments can only undermine the quality of their workforce and socio-economic development. It is for this reason that the regulator for higher education in Tanzania, the Tanzanian Commission for Universities closed several universities in 2017, including campuses operated by public universities from other East African countries (Ligami, 2017). Poor quality of programs and failure to conform to accreditation standards by the institutions was given as reasons for the closure.

Tuition fee regimes have therefore influenced student and institutional mobility within east Africa in ways that do not promote institutional differentiation. This has been especially the case in the 2005-2015 decade when public funding for higher education institutions declined, the number of students seeking access to higher education increased and privatization was promoted as a policy option to address the two challenges. Institutions dependent on student tuition fees ended duplicating programs from one institution to the other, avoided offering courses requiring large capital outlays and reduced the level of specialization in the courses on offer. The mushrooming of homogenous public and private institutions within the EACHEA is therefore one issue that regulators need to address to enhance meaningful student mobility in the manner contemplated by the 2010 common market protocol.

A common education space presupposes greater mechanisms for institutional differentiation and diversification and mechanisms of enforcing compliance to certain conditions that promote the greater good of countries within the space. While there is now a clear distinction between public and private institutions, diversity exists even

within each of these categories more with respect to numbers than concrete curriculum offerings. Part of the reason for this is that the immediate force for the establishment of the institutions was lack of public funding and a greater acceptance to offer higher education as a market commodity. The competition for students and the need to generate income for operations have meant little investment in innovative practices that raise the intellectual and academic contributions to the realization of regional public goods. This growth undermines the promotion of regional sovereignty through a common higher education space.

### **Trends in Research and Innovation**

Do the partner states in the EACHEA have a plan for a common research and innovation strategy for the region? Joint research and study programs, often facilitated through mobility schemes contribute to the quality of scientific, educational and other work of universities. African Union Commission's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (2014) reaffirmed the commitments of African countries to spend at least 1% of GDP in Research and Development. This translates to an expectation that if governments provide this 1% of GDP resources, individual institutions should also set aside an equivalent amount for research and knowledge production. Besides, commitments should presuppose a well-articulated research strategy both at a regional, national and institutional levels. The ambition for greater sovereignty is realized in instances where governments take greater steering role in policy design and funding of projects, including sporting projects that bolster more the achievement of objects. In instances where research strategy is lacking, and funding is provided by external partners, the possibility of losing out on the agenda, including possibilities of underfunding are greater.

Are there policies for joint funding of research and innovation in areas of common interest? With the rise of the knowledge-based economy, higher education has taken on greater significance for the creation and utilization of knowledge, leading to a global trend pushing universities to be competent not only in education and research but also in the extent the knowledge is practically deployed to the needs of communities. Part of the justification for the establishment of large higher education spaces is that this makes them better placed to articulate and serve such needs. Next, we analyze how the third mission is integrated in the architecture of the east African higher education area and institutional responses. This analysis is based on a review of institutional documents in order to determine their orientation towards the third mission. There are two objectives: first, to determine if different organizational orientations exist in the conceptualization of the EAHEA in supporting the paradigm of the third mission; and second, to provide a basis from which to capture and describe these orientations, and the mediating role that regional governments play in this process.

In 2007, the summit of heads of state established the East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO) as an Institution of the EAC. The organ, which is headed in Kigali, Rwanda has been operational since July 2015. The focus of EASTECO is to promote & coordinate the development, management & application of Science & Technology to support regional integration & socio-economic development. The overall strategy of EASTECO is to build a knowledge and technology driven East Africa. But the contribution of EASTECO can only be in the future as its inaugural strategic plan for (2015/16-2016/17) is being implemented. The institution is in the process of developing policy and regional consensus on STI priorities to facilitate commercialization of R&D findings and translation of technology innovations to marketable products (Kibeya, 2016; Tumushabe & Ouma-Mugabe, 2012).

Before the regional organ takes shape, the reference point to what is happening in ST&I within the EACHEA is the 2007 AUC's 'Science and Technology Consolidated Plan

of Action'. The policy commits African countries to devote at least 1% GDP to ST&I (AUC, 2007). None of the regional countries are however meeting the commitments. Some studies suggest however that scientific production within the EACHEA has increased over the last decade. An analysis by Clarivate Analytics (2014) on key trends in Scientific Research in East Africa argue that the pace of East African research growth has been impressive since 2007, with more research being focused around Medicine, Life Sciences, and Environmental Sciences. Lack of resources and an effective research ecosystem in the region have however limited growth in the region's scientific prestige. Lacking funding and a research ecosystem, all indicators for scientific production from the EACHEA point to a situation. Where researchers are responding to forces.

UIS data on various benchmarks that signify scientific sovereignty of the region all point to outward trends. Expenditure on GERD as a percentage of GDP and by Source of funds by the EAC countries, for example, shows that all countries of the region have fallen below the AUC 2007 target of 1%. In terms of source of funding for research, all countries show external dependence, with Uganda leading with 57.3% of research funds obtained from abroad followed by Kenya with 47.1% (UNESCO, 2015). As discussed earlier under student mobility, Kenya and Uganda have the largest and stronger higher education systems in the region. When it comes to government funding as a source of research funding, the other countries with less dependence on funding from abroad for research have a higher percentage of funding coming from government. This is the case with Tanzania, 57.5% and Burundi, 59.9% (UNESCO, 2015).

A clear picture therefore emerges, regarding the degree of convergence in scientific research and innovation within the EACHEA. Ideally in any a region seeking greater coherence and partnership, it is expected that the stronger countries are a nucleus within which collaborative arrangements to fortify the higher education area revolve. Kenya and Uganda should be expected to perform this role within the EAC region, including making a higher percentage of contributions to fund regional research collaborations. This however does not appear to be the case. More developed higher education systems are attracting more external funding for research and less of their government's support. The implications here are that private external interests are more attracted to more established higher education systems in ways that undermine the commitment of some countries to regional projects.

**Table 2. GERD by Source of Funds (2011).**

	GERD as % of GDP	Source of funds spent on R&D				
		Business	Government	Higher Education	Private	Abroad
Kenya	0.79	4.3	26.0	19.0	3.5	47.1
Uganda	0.48	13.7	21.9	1.0	6.0	57.3
Tanzania	0.38	0.1	57.5	0.3	0.1	4.2
Burundi	0.12	-	59.9	0.2	-	39.9

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, April 2015;

Trends in scientific collaboration are replicated in publication trends. If co-authorship of scientific publications is taken as an indicator of scientific collaboration in the region, the implication of the data is that there is very little collaboration between scientists within the EACHEA. Trends on authorship between 2008-2014 show that the first choice of scientists from the EACHEA on research collaboration and authorship were scientists from North America and Western Europe (UNESCO, 2015). As the summary on the table below shows, Researchers from Kenya, which has a stronger higher education

system and a more established research eco-system seem to be the more outward looking with no collaboration on authorship even as a 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> choice. Ugandan researchers picked their Kenyan counterparts as third choice for authorship, while those from Rwanda and Burundi picked Kenyans as 4<sup>th</sup> choice for co-authorship in the period 2008-2014. Choices on research collaboration and co-authorship have implications on the capacity to develop the EACHEA area as a reality. Stronger entities within the common area need to engage more with their partners within the area to consolidate their strengths, which on this score, Kenya is not doing. Besides, co-authored research is more expensive to access and utilize within the region given copyright restrictions.

**Table 3. Trends in Scientific Collaboration and Authorship.**

	1 <sup>st</sup> collaborator	2 <sup>nd</sup> collaborator	3 <sup>rd</sup> collaborator	4 <sup>th</sup> collaborator	5 <sup>th</sup> Collaborator
Burundi	Belgium (38)	China (32)	USA (18)	Kenya (16)	UK (13)
Kenya	USA (2 856)	UK (1 821)	South Africa (750)	Germany (665)	Netherlands (540)
Rwanda	USA (244)	Belgium (107)	Netherlands (86)	Kenya (83)	UK (82)
Uganda	USA (1 709)	UK (1 031)	Kenya (477)	South Africa (409)	Sweden (311)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, April 2015;

External funding and research collaboration prove disarticulating to the reality of the EACHEA in several respects. Research partnerships potentially refocus research engagements from local realities. An illustration of this reality is the debate that has been on for the last decade within the region and generally in Africa regarding agricultural biotechnologies. Because the regional economies are often food insecure, external researchers and funding streams have offered research into genetically modified food as the alternative for the region to the exclusion of all other alternatives. In this process, African voice, knowledge systems, and knowledge communities, and to a large extent, the African development agenda are excluded from research considerations and funding. According to the Nairobi based African Technology Policy Studies (ATPS), research partnerships, even within the universities are driven by greedy focus on financial - rather than developmental concerns (ATPS, 2010).

External dependency on funding coupled with the focus of such funding to areas expected to generate profits excludes the interests of poor people from scientific investments. This dependency of external funding does not also provide a sound base for research, development and innovation that is rooted in African development concerns. Consequently, the result is an under-funded EACHEA as a political project, higher education institutions that are increasingly privatizing and popularizing low capital academic programs focusing more on teaching than research and a research agenda that is outsourced in terms of funding and epistemological grounding often tapping into the best of what local higher education offers.

### **The Governance of the Common Education Area**

What governance and management structures have been established for the EACHEA? Who between institutional level, national level and regional level has overall oversight on how various aspects of the education area are governed and managed? The focus of the governance structure is to ensure that qualifications are appropriately recognized in all partner states both for continuation of studies as well as in the labour market. It also requires the education system in the five partner states be harmonized, comparable, and compatible, thus boosting knowledge and skills development. The spaces

for the EACHEA are however the individual public and private universities in the region. By virtue of the amended 2012 IUCEA Act, the regional higher education body has been empowered to develop various policies to operationalize the EACHEA area. But IUCEA does not have enforcement mechanisms to force institutions to comply with certain policies.

From the various policy documents, it would seem that governance in the EACHEA seems to be exercised at four contradictory level (IUCEA, 2017; Tumushabe & Ouma-Mugabe, 2012; EAC, 2009). The first is the political level anchored in the regional assembly and overseen by ministers of Education from member states and the East African legislative assembly. The second level is the IUCEA which works on the direction of the EALA but performs a more academic role. The chief executive of the IUCEA is appointed through political processes, and ideally should be above all Vice-Chancellors of member universities, the IUCEA being a membership organization of regional universities and playing a regulatory role. But Vice-Chancellors of regional universities exercise a greater degree of autonomy are accountable to national level ministries of higher education and national level higher education councils. Directions emanating from the IUCEA to regional universities are therefore never binding and remain advisory. The third level are national level regulatory bodies or higher education commissions. These bodies are more autonomous of regional bodies and are answerable to national political organs. The last level are the individual universities which have been established and chartered as autonomous institutions. Beyond these levels, four different institutions that compete for supremacy and governance latitude regarding matters affecting the common area exist. These are the regional assembly, EALA, which has legislative powers, the council of ministers from members states which can veto legislation passed by EALA, the IUCEA, and the national level higher education councils.

The document adopted by the summit of heads of state to establish the common higher education area point to three areas of common concern. Student and academic mobility, common approaches to research and innovation and labor mobility. While labor mobility may not be a concern of higher education, the other two are and need a well-articulated governance structure especially regarding funding arrangements, management and administration of the area and final authority in terms of decisions affecting academic matters in the common area.

The issue of governance for the common area becomes important for three reasons. First, each one of the countries signatories to the common area has over the years strengthened their national level higher education frameworks in competition with the other. Each of the countries has autonomous national councils for higher education and national councils for science and technology. These institutions have independent governance arrangements with competing channels for raising operational resources. It may require a well-structured supra-regional body with political and financial leverage to have the national level institutions surrender part of their autonomy. The second reason is that the national level institutions have in the past not gone along with some decisions that have been made in the past by the IUCEA, the regional body coordinating the EACHEA mechanism. Issues like uniform student fees and curricular reforms that have in the past been suggested by the IUCEA have never been implemented. The third issue regards funding mechanisms and how to enforce them. None of the countries is currently honoring the AUC commitments to investments in research and development as a percentage of GDP or even to higher education as a sector as at a national level. Instead, and has indicated in the IUCEA strategic plan for 2011-2016, member countries are in arrears of their commitments to the regional body, and this has in turn affected the initiation and timely completion of projects (IUCEA, 2011).

The first challenge the realization of the EACHEA is likely to face in terms of its governance relate to funding and funding responsibilities. The IUCEA, which by the 2009

amendment became an organ of the East African community (EAC) remains a membership organization of universities. By virtue of this, vice-chancellors of member universities constitute a kind of highest level of governance to which decisions that the secretariat implements are passed. Funds contributed by member universities, those provided by development partners and commitments from partner states constitute the resource base of the IUCEA and from where it is supposed to fund the extra responsibilities associated with overseeing the operations of the EACHEA. But on the other hand, as an organ of the EAC, its operations, including approval of budgets is subject to the regional parliament, the EALA.

How complicated these relationships are, and the implications to funding stability can be deduced from the budget approval for the EALA for the 2016/2017 financial year (EALA, 2016). Only 47% of the budget approved is to be financed by partner states leaving slightly more than half of it to be financed by development partners. In terms of distribution of the budget among its organs, the bulky of its (57%) is voted to the secretariat, while the IUCEA, is among the organs with the lowest allocation 4.4% (EALA, 2016). Part of the allocation to the IUCEA, US\$ 431, 923(9%) of the budget are contributed by member universities. The picture that emerges is one where a higher education area has been established as a political ambition but with inadequate resources to establish it as a functional unit. The IUCEA is already supported by contributions from member universities.

At a national level, public resources going to universities have been falling over the last decade and most public universities in the region receive less than 35% of their operational budgets from government allocations (IUCEA, 2011). The implications here are that the underfunding from the public that has affected operations of public institutions, and which seem to cripple the operations of the IUCEA as the anchor of the EACHEA affect the realization of a truly regional higher education space. Governments in the region generally have had less appetite investing in higher education institutions to match their political ambitions.

In terms of distribution of responsibilities, there does not seem to emerge an overall structure to operationalize the EACHEA beyond the basic foundations that have been undertaken by the IUCEA. At the regional policy level, the IUCEA remains the most visible entity spearheading this process. The relationship of the IUCEA to national level higher education institutions and other political entities at the EAC is not very clear regarding the ambition to create the EACHEA. The IUCEA Act passed in 2009 by the EALA integrated the IUCEA into the EAC operational framework and specified its functions, institutional set up and systems of governance and management of IUCEA. According to the Act any university, university college, and degree awarding institution may apply for and get admitted to the IUCEA membership if it is properly incorporated in the EAC Partner State where it is operating and is pursuing objectives that are consistent with the functions of IUCEA (EAC, 2009). The operational legal framework for the IUCEA thus, seem to exist and runs parallel with national level institutional and legal frameworks especially in matters of quality assurance.

In the case of IUCEA, its main objectives as provided in the IUCEA Act of 2009 are to (a) facilitate networking among universities in East Africa, and with universities outside the region; (b) provide a forum for discussion on a wide range of academic and other matters relating to higher education in East Africa; and (c) facilitate maintenance of internationally comparable education standards in East Africa so as to promote the region's competitiveness in higher education (EALA, 2009). The IUCEA pursues these objectives through coordinating inter-university cooperation in East Africa, facilitating development of member universities and assisting the institutions develop internationally acceptable standards. The IUCEA Act 2009 also mandates the institution to advise the EAC Partner States on higher education matters, and to contribute towards meeting



national and regional developmental needs; developing quality assurance processes in order to ensure that teaching, learning and research in the region achieve and maintain international standards; assisting member universities and other higher education institutions to identify and implement good practices in institutional management and use of resources; developing human resource capacity in all disciplines of higher education in the Community; and promoting equal opportunities for all higher education students in East Africa, including those with special needs (EALA, 2009).

Implementation of an amendment to the 2009 IUCEA Act passed by EALA in February 2012 (IUCEA Amendment Act, 2012) that sought to give the IUCEA powers for accrediting all higher education institutions in the region has not been approved by the council of ministers. The amended Act sought to give the IUCEA more powers to approve the content of courses taught in tertiary institutions of the region to create uniformity as a step towards harmonization. This is further evidence of how the continued battle by the various organs to protect national supremacy derail the EACHEA.

The same fate has befallen attempts to introduce uniform fees for all East African students to align to policy by the IUCEA (EALA, 2017). According to the policy, both public and private Universities from the EAC member states were supposed to adopt uniform fees by end of 2014. What this meant was that a Kenyan student enrolled in a Ugandan university pay the same fees as a Ugandan student. The idea by the IUCEA was to introduce a uniform regional tuition fees governance regime. The model for harmonizing the fees structure was approved by the IUCEA executive committee and tested by the partner states. But it has faced resistance from vice-chancellors from the region's universities and lukewarm support from the political leadership. The reason for resistance from vice-chancellors is that tuition fees remain the single source of revenue for the universities and varying fees often is used as a strategy to attract more students. Private universities also do not receive public funding and are hesitant to enter schemes that erode their resource base.

In terms of laying the foundations for the common area, this has been limited to academic related regulations, not political commitments and consensus building among the wide array of stakeholders (Nkunya, 2017). The process leading to the declaration of the higher education area does not give any sense that governance and management issues of the areas were part of the deliberations. Rather only academic regulation and quality control processes engaged the IUCEA and other stakeholders since 2010. These are:

- The development of a policy framework and principles for quality assurance in higher education in East Africa;
- Development of Regional quality assurance instruments contained in the 'Handbook for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The handbook is published in four volumes covering internal quality assurance at program level, external quality assurance at program level, institutional quality assurance, implementation of a quality assurance system and Principles, Practices and Management of External Quality Assurance in East Africa;
- The establishment of the East African Quality assurance framework as part of IUCEA's mandate of promoting the development of a quality culture in East Africa.
- The development of the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications attained in and outside the EAC Partner States, enhance efficient sharing of existing resources among universities and contribute to academic staff networking.
- A student mobility policy to enhance cross-border student mobility; and
- Benchmarks for academic programs, which have contributed to the emergence of the East African Quality Assurance system, by providing member universities



with a frame of reference when developing and reviewing academic programs and curricula (Nkunya, 2017; UNESCO, 2017).

Despite the existence of these quality assurance regulations, the IUCEA does not have authority over accreditation and quality assurance enforcements mechanisms for member universities. Issues of quality assurance and accreditation processes are handled at national level in each of the five EAC Partner States through frameworks established by national councils for higher education and ministries of education. Each of the partner states also have similar instruments, including qualifications frameworks and national quality assurance standards that have been developed with support from different partners, and therefore have a skewed orientation in terms of foundations for the frameworks in ways that undermine harmonization and the realization of a regional higher education space. How then is the EACHEA going to be governed by qualification frameworks which may conflict with existing national level governance structures? A study undertaken by the IUCEA in preparation for the establishment of the EACHEA points to this governance challenge (IUCEA, 2014). The conflicts arise when there is strong government support for national level frameworks as opposed to regional ones and when different government bodies are at odds with each other, often materializing in lack of financial support to the development of regional frameworks in favour of national ones (IUCEA, 2014).

## Conclusion

The reflections in this article commenced with posing a question on whose area the just declared EACHEA is and likely to be in the long-term, beyond the political ambitions and rhetoric of the partner states. This question was posed with the acknowledgement that like political systems, higher education systems are expanding, and in the process, reshaping other higher education systems to act as offshore spaces for intellectual, ideological and more importantly economic reasons. In a sense, the economic interests of higher education institutions and the states where they are located converge. Higher education institutions are intent to establishment revenue streams for their operations outside the funding they get from the public. But at the same time, states get interested on how higher education institutions, through their research and innovation systems are instruments for local business entities, thus the political lobbying and support that public-private partnerships are receiving as a strategy to develop higher education institutions in developing countries.

The EACHEA has been interrogated in this article as such; an instrument for economically stronger states within the five East African partner states or a larger education area being shaped to serve external interests linked to higher education systems and private economic interests from developed countries. While this external interest may not be immediately apparent, three points are worthy noting. First, that the achievements realized so far in setting up the EACHEA have come from external support. The various foundational instruments that the IUCEA has developed to support the EACHEA have received financial and technical support from external entities. Second, that beyond political ambition, the EAC partner states have not shown any crystallized plan for the EACHEA for the long-term. Much political support from each of the partner states goes towards building national level institutions that often contradict or subvert the work of the IUCEA.

Lastly, higher education institutions in the region are engaged in a vicious competition for students as a source of revenues in ways that they do not fund common projects such as student scholarships and mobility, research and innovation and common approach to staff development initiatives. These aspects of higher education in the region continue to be largely externally funded. Some of the noticeable developments in higher education in the region are responses to these external connections, which connections

have the potential to undermine the intellectual sovereignty of the region. For the EACHEA to be an East African higher education space in the intellectual and ideological sense, it requires better political stewardship and indigenous funding to actualize the idea.

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