

Editorial: Academic Collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the Post-COVID World

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Introduction

The Higher Education Forum on Africa, Asia and Latin America (HEFAALA) was launched in 2016 to promote dialogue in higher education between these three major world regions in mutually constructive engagements. The forum, which is an initiative of the International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA), is intended to foster dialogue, research and communication in higher education in recognition of the enormous common challenges as well as growing opportunities in the three regions and beyond.

HEFAALA has successfully organised two international symposia since its establishment: the first in Durban, South Africa in 2016 under the theme “Continental Realities, International Imperatives” and the second in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2019, under the theme “Internationalization of Higher Education in the New Era of World (Dis)Order”.

These themes were well featured, with a strong focus on the three continents, especially Africa, in multiple publications in scholarly periodicals such as the *International Journal of African Higher Education (IJAHE)* and other professional media, such as *University World News* which published a special issue through an arrangement with the INHEA. For instance, the debate that started at the symposium on the definition of internationalisation has triggered numerous articles in *University World News*, in the process raising the profile of the initiative (and the theme), but more so questioning the relevance of the discourse in the Global South.

As an output of the Second HEFAALA Symposium a special issue of the *IJAHE* was published, with a number of prominent higher education experts contributing articles. As a spinoff of the symposium a book chapter by this author entitled “From ‘Dumb’ Decolonization to ‘Smart’ Internationalization: A Requisite Transition” was published in *Intelligent Internationalization: The Shape of Things to Come*, edited by Kara Godwin and Hans de Wit and published by Brill Publishers. The symposium also

contributed to the realisation of an edited book *The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Global South* by Thondhlana Juliet, Garwe Evelyn C., Hans de Wit, Jocelyne Gacel-Avila, Futao Huang and Wondwosen Tamrat (2021), published by Bloomsbury.

The Third Symposium

In the last two symposia, many lessons were learned; extensive knowledge and information were generated; and formal and informal networking opportunities were made possible. The symposia created a high-profile platform for scholars, researchers, academics, post-graduate students, and officials from the Global South to deliberate on key issues of relevance and significance from their national and continental context as well as discourse vantage points. By incorporating Northern players in the symposia, we created a conducive and constructive environment of enriched dialogue and passionate debates that inform policy and shape discourse.

Building on the experience in the last two symposia, the Third HEFAALA Symposium was jointly organised by the INHEA, the publisher of the *IJAHE* based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), and Saint Mary's University, one of the leading private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It was organised in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the Association of African Universities, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College in partnership with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Mastercard Foundation.

The symposium took place on 27 and 28 April 2022 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the theme "Academic Collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the Post-COVID World". It was integrated with the 20th International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa under the theme "Embracing New Realities and Paradigms: Africa's Higher Education Response" and Masterclass workshops under the theme "Building Leadership of Young Academics: The Power of Academic Collaboration". While the Symposium and Conference run in hybrid mode, the Masterclasses run in person.

The events benefited from three key note addresses titled Academic Collaboration: Emerging Issues and Looming Challenges by Professor N.V. Varghese, Vice-Chancellor, National Institute of Educational Planning

and Administration, India; Higher Education Partnerships in Response to Addressing Development Challenges in Africa by Dr Teshome Yizengaw, Associate Vice-President, Indiana University and former State Minister of Education, Ethiopia; and Academic Collaboration in the Post-COVID Era: Challenges and Opportunities by Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius and former President of the International Association of Universities.

HEFAALA III had four panels under the following sub-themes: Academic Collaboration: Imperatives and Modalities; Impact and Relevance of Academic/Research Collaboration; Mobility and Intellectual Diaspora; and Challenges and Opportunities of Academic Collaboration. These featured some of the leading authorities in these fields drawn largely from Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States.

The robust Masterclass Workshops from 25 to 29 April 2022 under the theme "Building Leadership of Young Academics: The Power of Academic Collaboration" were effectively embedded in the conference and the symposium. This Masterclass, which was made possible by a partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, deliberated on three subthemes: Knocking at the Gates of Knowledge Gate Keepers: The Significance of Collaboration; Co-Constructing Knowledge: The Power of Collaboration; and Overcoming Marginality through Academic Collaboration.

The symposium was once again designed as a series of round-table panel discussions where a number of key questions guided the respective themes with anticipated outcomes. This was systematically designed to ensure in-depth conversation and critical analysis to contribute to the dialogue, and shape emerging discourses and phenomena in the service of the respective stakeholders in higher education and beyond.

Objectives and questions

The overall theme of the symposium, "Academic Collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the Post-COVID World" had the following specific objectives:

1. explore, identify and investigate the current state, nature, modalities and practices of academic collaboration between and among institutions in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the rest of the world;

2. analyse and critique existing models and emerging trends in academic collaboration and academic mobility between and among institutions in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the rest of the world in the post-COVID era;
3. identify and advance progressive models and paradigms, best practices, systems, and frameworks, such as the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2015), in all facets of academic collaboration at both the system and operational levels to promote quality and excellence in higher education in Africa and beyond; and
4. explore resources and networks to enhance academic collaboration between and among Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the rest of the world.

The following critical questions were framed to achieve these objectives:

1. How and to what extent is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the typology and productivity of international academic collaboration in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South?
2. How could academic collaborations, often cited as exhibiting unequal relationships, be transformed to foster more equitable partnerships through virtual and other modalities?
3. What recommendations can be made to enhance South-South collaboration in response to COVID-19 through the emergence of new forms of educational delivery and research?

The team

An advisory committee of nine eminent scholars drawn from institutions in the three regions and INHEA's key partner, the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, USA was established and tasked with:

1. framing the theme of the symposium and identifying the research topics, including drafting the open call for proposals;
2. recommending, commissioning and peer reviewing the papers;
3. developing a final programme;
4. widely announcing the symposium;
5. presenting, moderating and chairing sessions;
6. reviewing the final papers for publication; and

7. reviewing, providing feedback and recommending a way forward, including directions on subsequent HEFAALA events.

These scholars and their institutional affiliations include:

1. Professor Philip G. Altbach, Honorary Member, Founding Director, Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), Boston College, USA;
2. Associate Professor Gerardo Blanco, Member, CIHE, Boston College, USA;
3. Mrs Claudia Frittelli, Member, Carnegie Corporation of New York, USA;
4. Professor Marcelo Knobel, Member, President of the State University of Campinas, Brazil;
5. Associate Professor Wondwosen Tamrat, Member, Vice-Chancellor, St Mary's University, Ethiopia;
6. Professor N. V. Varghese, Member, Vice-Chancellor, National Institute of Education Planning and Administration, India;
7. Professor H. Wei, Member, Dean, Peking University, China;
8. Professor Hans de Wit, Co-Chair, Director, CIHE, Boston College, USA; and
9. Professor Damtew Teferra, Chair, Founder and Convener, Higher Education Forum on Africa, Asia and Latin America, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Following the identification of the topics and their potential contributors, papers were commissioned, thanks to the resources made possible by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The articles

The Global North remains the epicentre of academic collaborations in the world. Countries in the Global South, typically the so-called developing countries, have mainly collaborated vertically rather than (and including) horizontally. The Global South remains at the margins of this phenomenon of research and knowledge brokerage.

This volume of the *IJAHE* contains eight articles by experts drawn from the three continents and beyond. Most are jointly authored by contributors from the regions for a comparative and enriched perspective.

In “Imperatives of Academic Collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America”, Damtew Teferra, Morshidi Sirat and Pablo Beneitone posit that academic collaboration is as old as academia itself and that it has become fashionable—and even imperative—for institutions and individuals in their systematic drive to pursue excellence and distinction. They add that over the years, institutional status and ranking have grown in importance and that these are increasingly gauged by the extent and magnitude of academic and research collaboration that institutions develop and sustain. Teferra, Sirat and Beneitone observe that academic collaboration has witnessed massive growth as interest in tackling major global issues and challenges has taken centre stage. Accordingly, they argue, there is robust understanding and hence practice of undertaking massive multi-national, multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaborative projects. The authors go on to state that the rationales for and imperatives of academic collaboration and partnerships of countries and institutions, and for that matter continents, vary in their profile and intensity. They conclude that the imperative, and hence trend, of collaboration between and among the three regions vary as they are dictated and constrained by resources, objectives, history and languages. Finally, they posit that a new era of partnership and sense of collaboration has dawned in the post-COVID-19 world and that this promising trend and spirit will continue in a more equitable and sustained manner.

In “Academic Collaboration in Africa and Asia: Current Status, Challenges, and Emerging Trends and Strategies”, Yamina El Kirat El Allame, Hajar Anas, Oumaima Elghazali, Tibelius Amutuhaire, Bie Dunrong, Huang Yifan, and Yu Jingran and Ma Jie note that, South-South cooperation has garnered much attention in recent times among multiple stakeholders including policymakers, institutions and academics. They hold that academic collaboration in teaching, learning and research across borders gathered impetus during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also assert that the pandemic emphasised the need for institutions to consolidate their efforts in collaboration and internationalisation at home. This, they say, could be a key strategy to boost the capacity of institutions in the South to implement internationalisation and confront global threats such as the pandemic. Based on the experience of the pandemic, the authors hold that both the Global North and the Global South have recognised the unique and considerable opportunities that

academic collaboration represents for tertiary education. They conclude by highlighting the incompatible agendas and priorities and the unequal power dynamics between the ‘powerful’ Northern partners and those in the South.

Writing on “Global South Research Collaboration: A Comparative Perspective”, Abdoulaye Gueye, Edward Choi, Carolina Guzmán and Gustavo Gregorutti were guided by three key issues: identifying the trends in academic collaboration in the Global South; whether scholars from a colonised past were inclined to collaborate with counterparts based in the Global North; and if efforts to promote South-South academic collaboration resulted in increased co-authorship between researchers based in different regions of the Global South. They posit that, in their quest for academic partnership, scholars in the Global South look to their own country or the US or Europe, with occasional reach in another country in the Global South. The authors contend that an analysis of the weaknesses of these transcontinental and intracontinental collaborations arguably needs to take into consideration the cultural distance effect mediated by numerous actors and factors such as history, politics and economics. They note that many scholars in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia may not possess the mainstream social capital required or desired to facilitate research collaborations with foreign counterparts, with an orientation to ‘collaboration localism’ to research. The authors conclude that the current publication dynamics of Global South scholars, as a proxy measure of collaboration, do not reflect the political discourse of South-South collaboration.

Oanda, Jon and Blanco’s article on “Mobility for Academic Collaboration Post-COVID-19: Rebuilding Towards More Equitable Networks” frames mobility for academic collaboration post-COVID-19 as a series of paradoxes. The first is that while the pandemic provides the perfect example of a problem for which international academic collaboration is absolutely necessary, it imposes disruptive and extremely complex conditions. The second paradox, they argue, is that research activity in all fields of study resumed, increasing input and international collaboration without physical mobility. A third paradox is that the pandemic exacerbated geopolitical tensions and as a result academics seeking to collaborate across borders needed to deal with a complicated set of regulations. The authors hold that higher education internationalisation—in the context

of academic collaboration—at the present historical juncture requires the ability to creatively interrupt vicious cycles. They anticipate increased inequality between research communities, decreasing availability of research funding, and more pressure to demonstrate results, with a risk of focusing on short-term and more transactional partnerships, rather than deeper, more sustained collaboration. The authors further posit that the future of research collaboration may involve not only new modalities for mobility, but in many cases the ability to work together under deteriorating conditions, as well as more academic mobility from economically struggling areas where massive growth is taking place and the middle class is growing. They observe that the normalisation of virtual collaboration for research could open the door for researchers from ‘marginal’ countries, who may not have been major players in international collaboration prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. They conclude that academic mobility for research cooperation - assisted by technology - will likely be semi-permanent or permanent with deeper imbalances remaining and call for thoughtful engagement with these new modalities to avoid replicating the old barriers in the emerging space.

In “Academic cooperation between Africa, Asia and Latin America: The place of diasporas”, Ayenachew A. Woldegiyorgis, Lucas Luchilo and Thanh Pham provide an extensive comparative perspective on the formation and genesis of diaspora communities on the three continents. They trace the growth and decline of these communities along with their triggers and make the case that the intellectual diaspora play a marginal role in inter-continental partnerships. The authors note that the combination of the global distribution of knowledge production and incentives for the development of academic careers—dominated by those in the Global North—conspire against the possibility of building strong bonds between academic diasporas in the countries on the three continents. For instance, they contend that the characteristics of Asian migration to Latin America and of Latin American migration to Asia do not facilitate the creation of academic diasporas. History, language, physical distance, funding (for joint cooperative activities) and (national) academic maturity are posited as paramount to the manifestation of the phenomenon of the academic diaspora.

Drawing on the OECD’s definition of relevance as the “extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’

and donors’ policies”, Wondwosen Tamrat’s article, “The Notion of Relevance in Academic Collaboration: From setting objectives to targeting development goals” stresses the need to understand one’s own context as a critical component of any cooperative scheme. In highlighting the essence of relevance, he draws on a ‘10/90 gap’ in health research where less than 10% of global spending is devoted to 90% of the world’s health problems that are rampant in the Global South. Drawing on the argument that the needs and priorities of the South should be the basis for North-South partnerships, he intimates the fundamental danger that underlies a supply-oriented identification of the needs of the South under the influence of the driving agenda and central interests of the North. To counteract current trends and address the interests of both blocs, different modalities that privilege mutual interest, and hence relevance, have been articulated, including tendering and consensus. That said, basic considerations of relevance, as an important aspect of partnership and collaboration schemes, have been incorporated into the practice of some of the major development partners, although the power dynamics that inherently exist tend to unsettle the ecosystem. Tamrat notes that the challenges facing sustainable academic partnerships include legal, financial, academic, institutional and cultural issues. He concludes that equitable and collaborative agenda setting, design, decision-making, and consideration of developmental goals, as the end product of a collaboration scheme, can be used to address issues of relevance.

Writing on “Financing and Resourcing International Collaboration in African Higher Education: Beyond Negotiated Power between the Global North and Global South”, Gift Masaiti and Edward Mboyonga present an extensive account of funding higher education in the context of academic collaboration in Africa. They cite a UNESCO report that notes that Africa accounts for just 1.01% of global research and development expenditure, 2.5% of global researchers and 3.5% of scholarly publications, compared to 45.7%, 44.5% and 48% for the Asian region, respectively. Even the most advanced country in Africa, South Africa, allocates only 0.83% of its GDP, which is below the recommended one per cent. They observe that collaboration in higher education between countries in Africa and the Global North is manifested through joint research, student and staff mobility, teaching, and funding; and organise this phenomenon into three categories: principal programme countries, colonial legacy and self-

selection. Masaiti and Mboyonga note that the politics of power and control that characterises international collaborations usually privilege partners in the Global North who are typically the sources of funding. Furthermore, despite the existence of several collaborative funding initiatives on the continent, studies show that minimal research output is recorded through regional collaborative research among sub-Saharan African countries. The authors argue that the dialogue on funding and collaboration should go beyond the hitherto negotiated power dynamics between the Global North and Global South as this has often exhibited unequal financial muscle. They recommend that countries and institutions formulate and adopt policies to prevent the unfair practices which typically characterise the landscape of partnership finance.

N. V. Varghese's article on "Academic Collaborations in Asia: With Special Emphasis on India" analyses academic collaboration efforts by universities and higher education institutions in Asian countries, particularly India. He notes that while the Asian countries have by and large been westward looking, with 'vertical orientation' in their academic orientation and collaborations, many are now establishing collaboration with countries within the same region ('horizontal orientation'). However, a major share of the scientific papers published in the 'North' are co-authored while the share is relatively less in the Asian region where China and India stand at 23% and 18.9%, respectively (UNESCO, 2021). Varghese also observes that the orientation of R&D activities has shifted from the traditional focus on discipline-based basic research to trans-disciplinary approaches which, he states, has promoted collaboration between eclectic disciplines, universities and scholars from across the world. He goes on to assert that research universities and world class universities have become 'aspirational ideas', with global ranking a yardstick for measuring research and knowledge production, and concludes that these developments augmented by ICT fostered the rapid expansion of cross-border research collaboration. Varghese envisages international academic collaborations of Asian countries as being in three distinct but related stages: a) collaborations for national capacity development; b) collaborations as part of the globalisation process; and c) collaborations to enhance academic credibility and the global ranking of national institutions. He maintains that these collaborations are promoted through four different channels: through public institutions established by national governments and

programmes initiated by the public authorities; various networks and associations; R&D institutions; and diaspora.

Conclusion

This special issue is an outcome of the Third HEFAALA Symposium, with contributions and rich analysis from a number of experts from Africa, Asia, Latin America and beyond. In their totality, the articles are a collective effort of researchers and higher education leaders who explore issues from a host of vantage points including, but not limited to, funding, development partners, and academic diaspora.

The symposium provided substantial opportunities for structured dialogue between participants. Discussion sessions responded to papers but also focused on advancing the possibilities of academic collaboration and networking within and across the three regions, particularly considering the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Countries in the North American region have the highest researcher density per million population standing at 4 432 followed by those in the South Asian region at 263 and the lowest in the African region at 124 (UNESCO, 2021). It is important to note that ultimately these densities typically determine the extent of collaboration, with implications for research productivity, outcome, impact, citation, and networking, among others.

There is near unanimity—and a renewed call—for South-South collaboration which is often sustained through the intervention of sources—and forces—in the North. Much has been said about the need to change the paradigm, often without commensurate follow up action. Thus, the need for more progressive discourses on academic collaboration in the three regions cannot be overemphasised.

The 'polygamous' nature of collaborations, particularly in the context of Africa (Teferra, 2022), may, however, require deeper and more extensive analysis of this mode of research and academic collaboration in the interests of the global community, particularly those in the Global South. HEFAALA will continue to serve as a forum to advance this dialogue among academics, scholars, professionals and practitioners interested in and concerned with higher education development in these regions and beyond.

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