

The Quality of Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa – Examining Intra-regional Inequalities in Higher Education

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Introduction

This paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of the 'Quality of Governance' (QoG) in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa by discussing in how far current (positive) development trends in many Sub-Saharan African countries universities can be related to a strengthening of public sector governance in these institutions. We will not use aggregated measures for discussing comprehensively, that is, at all governance levels, the QoG of the selected countries as a whole. Instead, the paper will be focused mainly on the institutional governance level. For this purpose, the paper will introduce an analytical scheme for studying: 1) the dynamics of Sub-Saharan African higher education systems and institutions; 2) cross-national variations in the structural characteristics of bureaucracies involved in the public governance of higher education; and 3) the relationship between 1) and 2).

The paper's analytical model is rooted in recent conceptualizations of the 'Quality of Governance' (QoG) (e.g. Fukuyama, 2013a, 2013b; Rothstein & Teorell, 2012; Smith, 2007). This conceptualisation is relevant in the Sub-Saharan African context both from an 'internal' as well as an 'external' perspective¹ as it can be assumed that a well-functioning bureaucracy is an important cornerstone for the delivery of state services and thus an effective state and more attractive living conditions.

The paper builds on both data and findings from an ongoing research project on the dynamics of research universities in eight Sub-Saharan African countries called HERANA (Cloete, Bailey, & Maassen, 2011; Cloete, Maassen, & Bailey, 2015) as well as a detailed survey of senior university administrators in flagship universities in four countries. Through

¹ For example, for getting a better understanding of the pull factors of Europe and the push factors of individual home countries for Sub-Saharan African refugees.

generating original data the research performed for this paper avoids the problems regarding the available data sources in Africa, as both cross-country statistical data and large-n expert surveys are significantly more unreliable in this region than in other parts of the world (Jerven, 2015).

This paper assumes that the inter-country variations in Sub-Saharan Africa concerning the dynamics of the national higher education systems and institutions can be explained, at least partly, by variations in specific features of the bureaucracies that administer these institutions. This leads to the following three steps that constitute this paper. First, we will explore recent developments in Sub-Saharan African higher education to understand the dynamics of higher education systems and institutions. Second, we will analyse the build-up and recent developments of governance capacity in central administrative units of flagship universities. Third, we will explore the relationships between the quality of bureaucracies and the higher education dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The following section will briefly introduce the background of the underlying study, which is followed by the conceptual positioning and the analytical scheme. Afterwards some methodological considerations and a first set of empirical observations on recent dynamics in Sub-Saharan African higher education are presented. Finally, we will present the first results from detailed qualitative surveys of administrators at flagship universities in two East African countries. Due to the time intensive process of generating data the remaining analytical steps are not yet finished.

Background

The discussion on state development and QoG in the post-independence period in Sub-Saharan Africa has traditionally been characterized by the dominance of 'failed state' and 'African exceptionalism' perspectives. The first was the result of Sub-Saharan African countries consistently being at the bottom-end of any measurement of state effectiveness (e.g. Evans & Rauch, 1999); the latter meant that it was assumed that analytical models for examining QoG in the OECD area could also be applied to emerging economies and developing countries in (East) Asia and Latin America, but were less relevant in Africa. A lack of available data, a lack of experts, or the assumed different nature of Sub-Saharan African governance problems and institutions (Altbach & Balan, 2007) are among the main underlying arguments for using this 'African exceptionalism' perspective.

This negative view continues also nowadays. The dominant perspective in the coverage of Sub-Saharan Africa in the media and in the publications of development cooperation agencies, as well as in the academic literature (e.g. Gustafson 2014), is deeply rooted in the governance problems facing the continent, including corruption, nepotism, lack of expertise, and weakly functioning, ineffective institutions. This is the case despite the fact that since the early 2000s Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing a kind of *Wirtschaftswunder* with many countries showing clear signs of progress in three core institutional spheres or 'pillars', that is, civil society, science, and (market) economy (Olsen, 2007b, p.28). For example, during 2012/2013, over one-third of the 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa exhibited growth rates of over 6 per cent (Africa Progress Panel, 2014), which implies that the traditional situation of a growing economic gap between Sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world (Huntington, 1968) no longer applies. However, at the same time there is admittedly persistent and significant inter-country diversity in actual growth rates, economic performance, and functioning of (public) institutions.

In parallel, a change can be observed in national development strategies in the region from mainly emphasizing the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, incl. halving poverty rates and providing universal primary education, towards the active inclusion of a long-term vision aimed at creating African knowledge economies. This change is clearly expressed in the Agenda 2063, the long-term vision and action plan agreed upon in January 2015 by the African heads of state. The target concerning the building of an 'African knowledge economy', which goes beyond usual Education for All (EFA) goals, is clearly described in Aspiration 1: *"Well educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society is the norm."*² This political focus on building an African knowledge economy resembles the EU's Lisbon 2000 Agenda's intention to strengthen Europe's economic competitiveness and bolstering its social cohesion by making Europe the most competitive knowledge economy (Maassen & Olsen, 2007).

Similarly to the period after the Lisbon 2000 summit in Europe (Gornitzka, 2007) also in Africa meetings are organized where politicians, bureaucrats and experts gather for interpreting and operationalizing the Agenda 2063's strategic aims in the area of (higher) education and research. The first of such meetings, a political summit of Africa's ministers of

² See: <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf> (07.06.2017) page 2

education and science, took place in Dakar in March 2015, under the title 'Revitalizing Higher Education for Africa's Future'.³ The Summit's Final Declaration and Action Plan include deliberations on governance-related issues in Africa's higher education sector, as well as issues of innovation and harmonization of policies across the continent. The overall aim of the action plan is to ensure that the higher education sector will be able to be a driving force in the realization of the development vision for inclusive growth and sustainable development outlined in Agenda 2063, amongst other things, by strengthening the research productivity of the continent's universities.

Conceptual positioning: higher education dynamics

This paper builds on HERANA, a project that analyses the productivity of African flagship universities, which is financed, amongst others, by the US Foundation Partnership for Higher Education in Africa. In the first decades of the post-independence period in Sub-Saharan Africa (1960s-1990s) the region's universities were haunted by many grand challenges, such as low-quality and insufficient facilities, low research output, overcrowded lecture halls, weak leadership, and dysfunctional administration. The HERANA project did not take the negative effects of these factors as given, but instead conducted detailed empirical analyses of the change dynamics in eight African universities, and their socio-economic and political contexts.

A point of departure in this is that higher education belongs to the core institutions of modern societies, in terms of continuity as well as change. Historically, the development of the university as a specialized institution dedicated to specific purposes and principles was part of the large-scale transformation from pre-modern to modern societies in Europe as elsewhere (Castells, 2001). In any society higher education is functionally dependent on, but partially autonomous from other institutions. Political-administrative orders, nevertheless, routinely face institutional imbalances. Collisions between key institutions are an important source of change, and radical transformation of one institution is usually linked to changes in other institutions. As a consequence, there is a need to clarify the conditions under which institutional change is a fairly autonomous (internal) process, and the conditions under

³ See: <http://www.trustafrica.org/images/Executive%20SummaryFINAL.pdf> (07.07.2017)

which internal processes are to a large extent shaped by wider political-administrative processes (Olsen, 2007b). It can be assumed that higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa now faces this kind of situation, as a result of the strategic vision (as expressed in Agenda 2063) that universities and colleges are the main institutions in the region through which accumulated knowledge on advanced levels is produced, and where the skills and competencies needed for the (future) labour force are developed in teaching and learning processes. This moves higher education from a more peripheral role into the centre of political attention, exposing it to new environmental pressures and demands (Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet, & Vukasovic, 2017).

Analytical scheme: capacity and autonomy, plus coordination

The paper's basic assumption with respect to the QoG is that for poor countries, political-administrative order and competent institutions, that is, a well-functioning state bureaucracy, are a precondition for social progress, increased knowledge production, and economic growth (Cloete et al., 2015; D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2017; Fukuyama, 2011, 2013b; Huntington, 1968; Olsen, 2007a; Rothstein & Teorell, 2012). This assumption represents a specific perspective in the academic interest in trajectories of state development, especially when it comes to developing countries and emerging economies. It is in many respects a result of what Rothstein and Teorell (2012, p.3-5) refer to as the two failed hopes of democratization and marketization.

The empirical evidence that democratization in itself will lead to social progress and economic growth is, in general, inconclusive (Diamond, 2007). On the one hand, it is argued that representative democracy, with free elections, is not a guarantee that developing countries will manage to improve economic and social conditions for their populations. The argument rests, amongst other things, on historical parallels and the argument that for almost all stable democracies, increased state capacity came well before representative democracy was established (Carothers, 2007). On the other hand, there is research that claims that democracy has a positive effect on economic growth (Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, & Robinson, 2004). However, in latter work there is no conclusive empirical evidence, for example, with respect to the question 'what came first, economic growth or the strengthening of state bureaucracies'?

Further, the belief in the positive effects of marketization on state development in developing countries is strongly connected to what is known as the 'Washington Consensus' (Williamson, 1989). The latter consists of ten broad sets of relatively specific policy recommendations, including fiscal policy discipline, tax reform, and trade liberalization. The policy recommendations represent the view that social progress and economic growth can be created by deregulations of markets, tightening of public spending, guarantees for property rights, and large scale privatizations of state enterprises (Serra & Stiglitz, 2008). The failure of the Washington Consensus agenda to produce the assumed outcomes in state development can be explained by the lack of the required institutions that neoclassical economists have taken for granted (Rothstein & Teorell, 2012, p.14f). The rational choice approach in which the Washington Consensus is rooted continues to be a part of the academic debate on the fitting paradigms for state development in the context of foreign aid (Krasner, 2011). However, in line with Fukuyama (2013b, p.348) one can argue that it is difficult to imagine how a model based on economic incentives would be appropriate for measuring the quality of state agencies, given that capacity in any state organization is strongly affected by norms, organizational culture, leadership, and other factors that do not 'fit' a rational choice perspective.

Over the last 10 to 15 years an agenda has emerged that has challenged and in many respects replaced the Washington Consensus approach. Under this agenda there is a focus on the extent to which countries have managed to strengthen political order (Fukuyama, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) and develop competent institutions, that is, well-functioning executive branches and their bureaucracies. In this agenda the concept of 'Quality of Governance (QoG)', and related concepts, such 'State Capacity', 'Good Governance', 'Good enough governance' and the 'Quality of Government' have been used (e.g. Grindle, 2007, 2017; Smith, 2007). The theoretical approach for this paper aligns with these conceptual underpinnings.

The efforts to measure the QoG in various national settings have been affected by a conceptual challenge, resulting from the lack of agreement on what exactly constitutes (high-) quality governance (Bouckaert, 2017; Bouckaert & Walle, 2003; Rose-Ackerman, 2017; Rotberg, 2014). As a consequence, a number of approaches to measure empirical patterns of the QoG can be identified in the academic literature. When judging the validity of

these approaches the starting point is formed by the (pragmatic) question “What are possible measures of good governance”?

The measures that have been proposed include: ‘sound policies’, small government, absence of corruption, delivery of services, rule of law, democracy, and government efficiency (Grindle, 2007, 2017; Rotberg, 2014). However, it can be concluded that none of these measures provides a sufficiently valid foundation for deciding upon what is ‘good governance’ in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa. The reasons for this are manifold. First and in line with Fukuyama’s (2013a, 2013b) argument, it is necessary to conceptually keep the QoG and the ends of governance separated. This means that governance is about the performance of agents carrying out the wishes of the principals and not about the goals that are set by these principals. In this, governance is defined as the government’s ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, independent of the question whether the government is democratic or not (Fukuyama, 2013b). Thus, instead of following the conviction that is presented in parts of the development literature, that good governance and democracy are mutually supportive (which is often more of a theoretic assumption than an empirical result), the approach used for this study focuses only on the QoG without regarding the normative aspects.⁴

Moreover, many of the (quantitative) measures used for QoG rely on expert surveys, which can be regarded as inherently weak due to problems of measurement validity. Unless the experts have a common understanding of the surveyed issues, they might answer the questions honestly but with very different perspectives (Fukuyama, 2013a). Furthermore, these surveys are largely subjective and often non-replicable (Rotberg, 2014). In addition, as governance conventions differ across countries, comparative indices struggle with defining a common standard to which countries are related to (Grindle, 2017). Moreover, if the quality of governance is assessed through output criteria the link between governance and development becomes blurred, as this encourages a belief that development (in the form of service provision) leads to good governance and good governance leads to improved development, effectively obscuring cause-effect relationships (Grindle, 2017). Finally, expert surveys also have a major specific disadvantage when it comes to Sub-Saharan Africa: there

⁴ Fukuyama (2013a, 351) therefore claims that governance is about execution and what has traditionally fallen within the domain of public administration as opposed to politics.

are no, or not enough experts, and those that are included, for example in Rothstein and Teorell's work (2012) do not always agree among each other. The consequence is that there are hardly any Sub-Saharan countries included in their work and with respect to those that are included, the conclusions reached can be argued to have limited validity.

Taking these considerations as a starting-point, this paper employs a conceptualisation of the QoG in terms of an interaction between capacity and autonomy (Fukuyama, 2013b). These dimensions relate on the one hand to basic elements of the Weberian state in which criteria for well-functioning bureaucracies include that staff is selected and motivated by merit, remunerated fairly and subject to discipline (Fukuyama, 2013a). On the other hand the conceptualisation is linked to ideas stemming from principal-agent models and the conviction that too strict forms of control hamper innovation and experimentation (Huntington, 1968).

Capacity consists in the first place of resources (incl. financial resources) and specific bureaucratic-administrative staff aspects (such as level of education and professionalisation), while autonomy has to do with the number and nature of mandates issued by politicians to the bureaucracy / administration (Fukuyama, 2013a, 2013b). Both of these dimensions refer to the input side of the political process and are obviously not ends in themselves (Fukuyama, 2013a). It can rather be expected that the QoG can be related to shifts in service production on the output side of the political process, while at the same time keeping both the input and output side conceptually separated. Thus, while it might be too bold to assume a causal relation between the dimensions of QoG and output regarding public services, investigating whether there are correlating trends is the central endeavour of this paper.

QoG can therefore be seen as an interaction between the two dimensions of capacity and autonomy. This means that "more or less autonomy can be a good or bad thing depending on how much underlying capacity a bureaucracy has" (Fukuyama, 2013b, 360). If an administration is staffed with competent and highly trained bureaucrats it is sensible to provide them with a high level of autonomy, reversely if the same administration is staffed with incompetent self-serving political appointees it would make sense to limit the range of their autonomy.

From this perspective, and depicted in table 1, bureaucracies / administrations that combine high levels of discretion (low levels of rule-boundedness) with high levels of capacity are expected to maximize effectiveness⁵, while bureaucracies / administrations that are characterized by a combination of low capacity and high autonomy or vice versa, are expected to have low levels of effectiveness. A bureaucracy-administration combining low capacity with low autonomy is preferable to both a low capacity/high autonomy, and a high capacity/low autonomy bureaucracy-administration, even though a low autonomy/low capacity bureaucracy-administration can be expected to have a limited output. However, the output that is produced can be expected to be more in line with the issued mandates⁶ as a result of the strict rule boundedness of such a bureaucracy's-administration's operations and decisions.

Table 1: Analytical scheme

	Low Autonomy	High Autonomy
Low Capacity	Limited Bureaucratic-Administrative Effectiveness	Low Bureaucratic-Administrative Effectiveness
High Capacity	Low Bureaucratic-Administrative Effectiveness	High Bureaucratic-Administrative Effectiveness

What the scheme in table 1 displays is a basic approach to categorizing the QoG. However, also the interaction of capacity and autonomy of state bureaucratic organisations and institutional administrations is of relevance. What is noteworthy here is first that the interaction between capacity and autonomy is expected to matter for the QoG. Second, interactions of high capacity with low autonomy and vice versa are expected to imply (relatively) low quality of governance due to the mismatch between capacity of the administration and its autonomy. Third, the preferred pattern is a combination of high capacity with high autonomy, which can be argued to permit high and effective levels of innovation, experimentation, and risk taking in a bureaucracy-administration (Fukuyama, 2013b). In this, the analytical scheme also goes beyond Weberian and principal-agent

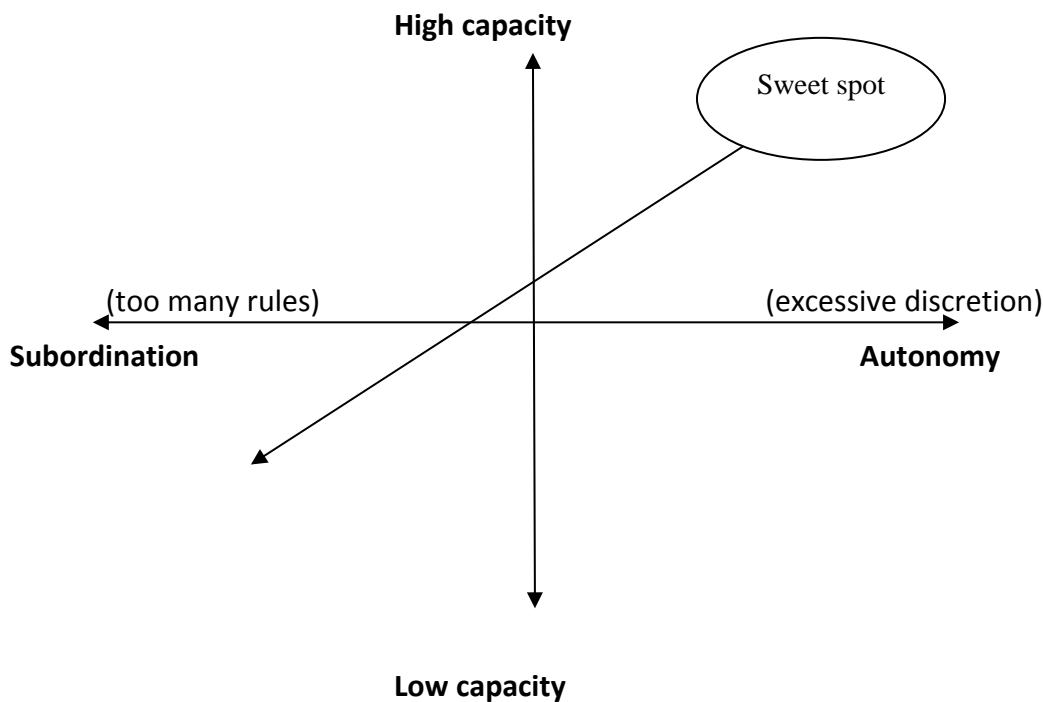
⁵ Meaning the effective execution of mandates provided by the principal.

⁶ And ideally therefore the demands of society.

models which assume that bureaucrats-administrators are most effective when they are strictly rule bound by their principals. Finally, when a low level of bureaucratic-administrative capacity in a specific agency or institution cannot be increased on a short notice, one would want to make sure that the actions and behaviour of the agency's-institution's staff are restricted by a high level of rule boundedness to prevent deviations in the realisation of mandates.

The framework in Figure 1 suggests that there are two quite separate approaches to the interpretation of the effectiveness of state bureaucracies and institutional administrations. In line with the above argumentation, it is possible to strengthen the quality of a state bureaucracy or an institutional administration by moving up the y-axis to higher capacity, particularly with regard to the professionalism of the organisations, organisational units, and actors involved (Fukuyama, 2013b). However, this is not easy and often not even possible, at least not in a short period of time. If a country cannot significantly upgrade bureaucratic-administrative capacity in the short run, another possibility to increase effectiveness is by shifting the degree of autonomy toward the sloping line.

Figure 1: Capacity and autonomy



(Source: Fukuyama 2013a, p. 362)

Based on this understanding of QoG this study assesses the level of capacity and autonomy of the public governance of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa and its development in recent years. To this end, a questionnaire is used in the underlying project to survey as well as interview state level bureaucrats as well as administrators in central higher education institutions, which will be presented in the following section.

Methodological approach

The lack of accessible data is a fundamental challenge in the study of public governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. From that perspective the main goal of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the quality of governance in Sub-Saharan Africa by producing and analyzing valid and relevant data. The feasibility of this is supported by the availability of the HERANA project's data, which provides a foundation for assessing the changes when it comes to the quality of higher education's services to society (policy outputs) in Sub-Saharan Africa. HERANA provides valuable insights into the complexities and possibilities of public sector data production in Sub-Saharan Africa. With the exception of South Africa and Mauritius, at the beginning of the HERANA project (2006/07) no aggregated, electronic databases were available with respect to national higher education systems and institutions. Today the

dataset provided by the HERANA project offers information on flagship institutions in eight Sub-Saharan African countries (South Africa, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Botswana, and Tanzania) on a number of indicators such as student numbers, academic staff, or knowledge outputs for a period of more than ten years (Bunting, Cloete, & van Schalkwyk, 2014; Cloete et al., 2015). This data will be the basis for the first analytic step of this paper, which is the study of recent developments in Sub-Saharan African higher education and its services to society.

The second analytic step, understanding the build-up and recent developments of governance capacity and autonomy of public governance structures in the higher education sector, is based on data derived from a questionnaire (attached in the appendix) that is used to survey senior administrators in flagship universities in four countries. At a later stage the questionnaire will also be used to survey bureaucrats employed by national Ministries of (Higher) Education in the countries in question. The questionnaire has two sections, each addressing one of the central conceptual dimensions (capacity & autonomy).

With regard to the capacity dimension the focus is on measuring the resources and staff characteristics of the administrative units that are being analysed. These indicators relate to Weber's conditions for effective bureaucracies, namely that administrations are staffed with bureaucrats who are selected based on their technical qualifications (Fukuyama, 2013a). To this end, the main indicators include, for example, the number of administrative staff (Question 3), the hiring procedures (Questions 4 & 5), required (academic) qualifications (Question 6), or international experience of staff members (Question 8).

The autonomy dimension refers to the number and level of detail of the mandates that the administrative unit receives from its principal(s) as well as the general room to manoeuvre when it comes to the usage of the capacity that the unit possesses (Fukuyama, 2013b). To measure this dimension the questionnaire uses indicators, such as the autonomy of the university from the state (Question 1), the actors involved in public governance of higher education (Question 2), the level of detail of the formal mandate of both the university and specific administrative units in the university (Questions 4 & 5), reporting regulations (Questions 6 & 7), the level of autonomy in hiring procedures (Question 8), or the level of budgetary autonomy (Question 9).

While the presentation of change dynamics regarding the output of higher education based on the HERANA data will include all eight flagship universities, the second part of the study focusing on the QoG will only focus on four of the institutions. This is mainly due to the time-intensive data gathering process and the desire to keep a certain level of anonymity of the respondents. Flagship universities are in the focus of this study due to several reasons. First, in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa countries often do not have elaborated higher education systems but rather put a strong focus on their flagship universities. In turn, these institutions regularly produce more than 50% of higher education's services to society. Thus, they can be seen as key institutions that due to their central position can be expected to be affected stronger by the new political focus on higher education.

Based on the results from the detailed qualitative survey composed of mostly open-ended questions, that to a certain extent could also be seen as a structured questionnaire for written interviews, we will construct an assessment of the level of capacity and autonomy of the central administrative units in the surveyed universities. To ensure the anonymity of our respondents we will refrain from mentioning the names of the surveyed countries or institutions.

Developments in Sub-Saharan African higher education

Higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa underwent dynamic developments in recent years. To show how the higher education institutions in the region have improved their delivery of services to society this section will present changes in the areas of student enrollment, academic staff and knowledge outputs for the flagship university in eight countries.

In the area of student enrollment the eight HERANA universities underwent significant changes during the time of the analysis, as the total enrollment over all eight countries doubled between 2001 and 2011. However, individual growth rates vary widely with some universities showing high annual growth rates (e.g. the University of Ghana 13%) and others more moderate growth rates (e.g. Makerere University in Uganda 2%). Additionally, all eight flagship universities remained primarily undergraduate teaching institutions throughout the period 2001-2011, as only the University of Cape Town has a proportion of non BA-level (post-)graduate students above 30% in 2011. When unpacking the development of

enrollment in post-graduate programs in the eight countries, it becomes visible that enrolment in masters programs increased from a total of 9,600 in 2001 to 25,600 in 2011 with especially high growth rates at the Universities of Ghana (from 1,198 to 4,280) and Nairobi (from 3,937 to 11,807) as well as at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (from 0 to 1,295). Furthermore, also the enrollment of doctoral students increased with an average of 8% between 2001 and 2011. Especially high growth rates can be observed at the University of Ghana (472%) and at Makerere University (2,156%).

In parallel to the developments regarding student enrollment, there have also been changes with regard to the academic staff at the eight universities. From 2001 to 2011 the academic staff grew at an average annual growth rate of 4% from a total of 5,543 to 7,972. This growth rate was significantly lower than the one of student enrollment, which had an average annual growth rate of 7%. The difference between annual growth rates of students and staff was especially pronounced at the University of Ghana with staff growth rates being 8% lower than student growth rates, while Makerere University managed to keep the gap between the average growth rates at 1%.

In the area of knowledge outputs, meaning both the number of graduates as well as research articles produced, all universities show some improvement. The overall number of graduates of the eight universities doubled from 2001 to 2011. The Universities of Ghana and Nairobi produced the largest increase in graduates, while the University of Botswana is the only institution that shows a decreased number of graduates in 2011 compared to 2001. Additionally, the total number of masters graduates increased from 2.268 in 2001 to 7.156 in 2011 with the Universities of Ghana (from 541 to 1,591) and Nairobi (from 370 to 2,533) showing especially high increases. The combined number of doctoral graduates from the eight universities increased from 154 in 2001 to 367 in 2011, with the Universities of Cape Town, Nairobi and Makerere University producing around 80% of this output in 2001 and 76% in 2011. Finally, the production of research articles of the eight universities doubled from 1,148 in 2001 to 2,574 in 2011. Again the Universities of Cape Town, Nairobi and Makerere University produced around 80% of this output both in 2001 and 2011.

Overall, the data show that on average the flagship universities in all eight countries managed to increase their delivery of services to society by enrolling more students,

producing more graduates on all levels of qualification and also improving their output with regard to research articles. However, the growth patterns differ significantly between the eight institutions, with Makerere University and the Universities of Cape Town and Nairobi being especially active in increasing their knowledge outputs, the University of Ghana and Eduardo Mondlane University increased mainly their student intake on the different levels, and other institutions remaining somewhat in between.

The QoG of central administrative units in flagship universities

The survey of senior administrators in central administrative units of two flagship universities in Sub-Saharan Africa show some interesting results concerning the QoG in these institutions. Both administrative units that have so far been studied fulfill (different) key functions for their university but also support the leadership of the institutions in their day-to-day work. Thus, they can be seen as key units within their universities. One unit (unit A) mainly works on providing institutional research for the university's leadership, while the other (unit B) provides institutional research while also producing new regulations and policies for the institution. Both units are well established and existed for at least 15 years.

Moreover, both units have reached a certain level of capacity and cannot be described as having only low capacity. This is visible in their operational budgets, which range between 50.000 and 100.000 USD per year as well as the fact that they have a core staff of 5-8 people. Furthermore, both units use formal job descriptions and announcements in their recruiting procedure, which are based on expectations concerning qualification of applicants. They also value academic degrees and work experience for recruitment. These are indicators for a hiring procedure which is oriented towards skills and capacities and not (purely) based on political patronage or personal connections. Moreover, in both units recruitment procedures are run through and overseen by HR departments as well as appointment or staff committees of the highest decision making bodies. These are further indications of a professionalization of hiring procedures that point towards a focus on capacity of the incoming staff instead of patronage.

At the same time, the studied units also show differences regarding their capacity. One of the units works solely with its annual budget and core staff (unit B), while the other unit (unit A) coordinates a large amount of externally funded projects that amount up to 2 Mio USD and employ an additional 15 temporary members of staff. While the latter unit might seem to have a greater (temporary) capacity it also saw a reduction of its permanent staff in the last years partly because no announced position has been filled in the last 5 years, while unit B witnessed an increase in staff in recent years. None of the studied units has developed a formal staff training program, they only offer (sometimes) single courses for staff development. However, unit B is situated in a university that has the policy to circulate general administrators every three years through the different units or departments to ensure life-long learning.

On the autonomy dimension both units also show differing results. While both surveyed units describe the development of the overall autonomy of their unit as stable over the last years, there are differences regarding reporting and oversight. Unit A does not have clear reporting requirements, only cooperates with the different actors in the institution and the director of the unit personally reports to the deputy vice chancellor, but is free to decide about the day to day activities of the unit as long as overall expectations are met. Unit B on the other hand has to regularly deliver reports to multiple actors within the institution on a monthly, quarterly as well as annual basis, and is under much stronger supervision especially by the university's committee for teaching and research in which the head of the unit is a member. These observations point towards less autonomy of Unit B.

The mandate of Unit A is formulated by the central leadership of the university and has been revised as part of a new strategic plan of the university nine years ago. Unit B also has a mandate that is determined by the central leadership of the university. This mandate has not been revised since the inception of the unit. An attempt to do so and to increase the scope of the mandate of the unit failed in 2012. In addition, the director of unit B highlighted in the survey that it is important for them to seek the support from the leadership of the institution as well as the responsible committee for teaching and research to successfully execute their activities. This also hints towards a more limited autonomy of the unit.

Unit B also shows a lower level of autonomy concerning its budget as it receives an earmarked budget while Unit A receives a lump-sum budget and thus has more freedom to use its core funding. Both units have the autonomy to formulate job advertisements and descriptions according to their needs, but at the same time they also have to consult the HR division of their institution for their acceptance.

Overall, the analysis shows that both units have already reached a certain level of capacity. However, Unit A has a varying capacity as they coordinate many projects with staff being employed for the duration of the projects, while witnessing also a decrease in the permanent staff capacity. The mandate of Unit A is also more limited, as it is mainly in charge of institutional research and providing data for evidence based decision making of the leadership. At the same time, the unit also has a larger amount of autonomy as it receives a lump-sum budget and only has a limited obligation to report. Unit B on the other hand shows a somewhat greater capacity with a higher budget and more permanent staff, but also a larger mandate that includes also the development of regulations and policy. This goes along with limitations in Unit B's autonomy since the unit has multiple reporting demands, works based on an earmarked budget and is in need of the support of the academic community to properly execute its mandate.

Conclusion

Sub-Saharan African higher education is at a crossroads. While higher education in the first decades of the post-independence period was regarded as a 'luxury' (Cloete & Maassen, 2015), the last 15 years have seen a growing national and regional focus on the role of higher education in development. In this Sub-Saharan Africa (finally) seems to connect to the global emergence of the knowledge economy. However, very little is known about change dynamics of higher education in this part of the world, and the extent to which change dynamics in higher education is the consequence of a strengthening of the quality of the public governance of higher education at the national level in Sub-Saharan Africa. National and institutional data and statistics are unreliable (Jerven, 2015), if available at all, hardly any detailed (and valid) empirical research has been done on the nature and functioning of the public governance practices with respect to higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, and for many reasons the possibilities of using experts is extremely limited.

This paper has presented the first phase of a long-term research project aimed at contributing to a better understanding of public governance dynamics in Sub-Saharan African higher education. It intends to (in the long run) produce data at national and institutional governance levels by combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Such data are invaluable in the next stages of modernizing Sub-Saharan African higher education. Reliable and valid data, information and statistics on higher education dynamics are indispensable for national policy-makers and institutional leaders' possibilities to learn from what works and what does not work in the reform of Sub-Saharan African higher education (also from a comparative perspective), and to make better informed reform and policy decisions.

Appendix

Questionnaire on the quality of governance in HERANA universities: Interrelationship between capacity and autonomy

Please provide the following information on the person(s) answering the questionnaire:

Name:

Position:

In current position since:

CAPACITY

1. What is the name of your unit (office, etc.), and how does it fit in the organizational structure of your university? (If available, please provide an organigram of your university)
2. When was your unit established and how is it organized?
3. What was the annual budget of your unit in 2016? (If available, please provide an annual report for the latest year available).
4. What is the current staff capacity of your unit in real terms (i.e. the number of members of staff) and in FTE (Full Time Equivalents)? What are the functions of these staff members?
5. If your unit has been established more than 2 years ago, how did the unit's staff capacity develop over the last years? If you do not have exact data, can you indicate whether (as far as you know) the number of staff members grew, stayed stable or decreased over the last couple of years?
6. When it comes to the two most recent staff appointments in your unit, were formal job descriptions used in the recruitment process? Were formal job announcements used in both cases? If so, could you please provide us with these job descriptions and announcements?
7. Who is involved, both within and outside of your unit, in the procedures for recruiting new staff? How are these actors involved in the various stages of these procedures (incl. determining the creation of a staff position; deciding upon the formal job description of the position; deciding on the announcement text; determining the selection procedures; selecting the qualified candidates among the applications; determining who of the qualified applicants will be offered the position)?
8. Are formal academic degrees/diplomas/qualifications an important requirement in the recruitment of staff for your unit? If so, in what way are they important (e.g. are there formal education requirements for all staff positions, or only for certain positions, etc.). Is work experience of importance in the recruitment of staff for your unit? If so, what kind of experiences is your unit looking for in the recruitment of new staff?
9. Does your university have a programme for training ('upgrading') the current staff members in administrative units such as yours? Does your unit have such a programme?
10. To what extent is your unit similar (when it comes to its organization and staff structure) to other administrative units of your university? (Similar – dissimilar – Do not know/No opinion). If dissimilar, please explain in which respects.

11. What are the main outputs that your unit produces (e.g. annual research report, activity report etc.)? Who (that is which actor, other unit within university; external body) does your unit report to? How often and how detailed does it have to report?

AUTONOMY

1. In your opinion, did the overall institutional autonomy of your university increase, stay stable or decrease over the last 5 years?
2. In your opinion, did the overall autonomy of your unit increase, stay stable or decrease over the last 5 years?
3. How specific and formalized is the mandate of your unit? Can you provide us with the written mandate of your unit?
4. Who has determined the formal mandate of your unit? Is it the central leadership of your university, is it coming from the outside (e.g. the Ministry of Education), or is another actor responsible? When was the original mandate formulated? When was the mandate renewed for the last time?
5. Within the areas and tasks that fall within your mandate, in your opinion, in which areas (with respect to which tasks) is your unit most autonomous (that is, where is the room to manoeuvre of your unit largest), and in which areas (with respect to which tasks) does your unit have the least autonomy (that is, with respect to which tasks does your unit has the least room to manoeuvre)?
6. Can your unit formulate job advertisements for new staff and job descriptions for its own staff or does the responsibility for this lie outside your unit?
7. Does your unit receive a lump sum budget or are you operating based on an earmarked / line-item budget?
8. When it comes to your own day-to-day tasks and activities, do you have the freedom to decide yourself about the way to perform your tasks or is it prescribed externally / from someone else in the university?
9. Who do you personally report to with respect to your own work activities; how often and how detailed do you have to report?

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