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## Internationalisation within the African Higher Education Context

**Session 1:** 4th March 2025, 12:00 – 14:00 GMT

### Session summary:

#### Overview

The inaugural session of the [series on the internationalisation of African higher education](#) highlighted critical perspectives on integrating international and intercultural dimensions within African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The discussions ranged from policy frameworks to practical implementations, underscoring the imperative of internationalisation in fostering mutual learning and enhancing Africa's global academic standing.

#### Key Insights

**Defining Internationalisation:** The internationalisation of African higher education involves integrating global and intercultural elements into academic institutions. This encompasses student and staff mobility, cross-border collaborations, language policies, and initiatives aimed at value-building. Internationalisation is both a moral and educational imperative, offering the potential for mutual enrichment and reinforcing Africa's role in the global academic community.

**Interconnectivity and Knowledge Exchange:** A significant theme of the session was internationalisation as a multi-directional exchange fostering interconnectivity and the transfer of local knowledge. This allows African HEIs to engage with global academic standards while preserving indigenous perspectives and values. However, there were concerns about the potential erosion of local identities in the pursuit of high international standards. Thus, it is crucial to critically assess these standards, their origins, motivations, and relevance to diverse global contexts.

**Collaborations and Research:** Collaboration, both within Africa and globally, is vital for strengthening research and academic programs. There is a growing need for research linked to political contexts, particularly in addressing issues such as decolonisation, economic disparities, and political oppression. These challenges present opportunities for meaningful change, with the internationalisation process playing a pivotal role in reshaping educational landscapes for positive outcomes.

**Economic Considerations:** The economic implications of internationalisation were also discussed. International student mobility, exchange programs, and online education significantly contribute to the financial sustainability of institutions. Nonetheless, there are concerns about government policies and the withdrawal of institutions in the Global North from offshore campuses. This underscores the necessity for Africa to proactively shape its higher education agenda.



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### Priorities for Effective Internationalisation:

To drive internationalisation effectively, several priorities were identified:

1. **Securing Funding:** Ensuring financial resources for internationalisation initiatives.
2. **Strengthening Doctoral Training:** Enhancing doctoral training programs to foster advanced research.
3. **Global Research Collaborations:** Building robust global research partnerships.
4. **Enhancing Academic Linkages:** Strengthening connections with academic institutions worldwide.
5. **Establishing Leadership:** Creating an internationalisation chair to lead and sustain these efforts.

**Structural Approaches:** The session raised the question of adopting a model similar to the European Union, treating Africa as a unified academic space. This also brought up the debate on horizontal versus vertical integration—whether to prioritise equal partnerships or hierarchical relationships between institutions. These discussions are essential for future episodes.

**Transformative Journey:** Ultimately, internationalisation is a transformative journey that demands a shift in mindsets, policies, and potentially, institutional structures. It aims to create the right conditions for positive change, ensuring African higher education remains competitive, relevant, and globally influential while maintaining its unique local identity and priorities.

### Conclusion

The first session emphasized that internationalisation in African higher education is about creating an inclusive academic environment that respects local identities while engaging with global standards. The discussions highlighted the need for strategic collaboration, robust research, and a shift in policies to foster positive change. Future sessions will delve deeper into these themes, exploring structural approaches and further priorities to drive the internationalisation agenda forward.

### References

1. Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 290-305.
2. Knight, J. (2015). Internationalization: A Decade of Changes and Challenges. *International Higher Education*, (50), 3-4.
3. Teferra, D., & Knight, J. (2008). *Higher Education in Africa: The International Dimension*. Center for International Higher Education, Lynch School of Education, Boston College.