

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Mapping International University Partnerships Identified by East African Universities as Strengthening Their Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health Programs



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Abstract

BACKGROUND International university partnerships are recommended for increasing the capacity of sub-Saharan African universities. Many publications describe individual partnerships and projects, and tools are available for guiding collaborations, but systematic mappings of the basic, common characteristics of partnerships are scarce.

OBJECTIVE To document and categorize the international interuniversity partnerships deemed significant to building the capacity of medicine, nursing, and public health programs of 4 East African universities.

METHODS Two universities in Kenya and 2 in Tanzania were purposefully selected. Key informant interviews, conducted with 42 senior representatives of the 4 universities, identified partnerships they considered significant for increasing the capacity of their institutions' medicine, nursing, and public health programs in education, research, or service. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Partners were classified by country of origin and corresponding international groupings, duration, programs, and academic health science components.

FINDINGS One hundred twenty-nine university-to-university partnerships from 23 countries were identified. Each university reported between 25 and 36 international university partners. Seventy-four percent of partnerships were with universities in high-income countries, 15% in low- and middle-income countries, and 11% with consortia. Seventy percent included medicine, 37% nursing, and 45% public health; 15% included all 3 programs. Ninety-two percent included an education component, 47% research, and 24% service; 12% included all 3 components.

CONCLUSIONS This study confirms the rapid growth of interuniversity cross-border health partnerships this century. It also finds, however, that there is a pool of established international partnerships from numerous countries at each university. Most partnerships that seek to strengthen universities in East Africa should likely ensure they have a significant education component. Universities should make more systematic information about past and existing partnerships available publicly.

Conflicts of Interest: ANY was employed by the University of Toronto as its Program Manager - AMPATH-UofT when the majority of the data for this study was collected.

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INTRODUCTION

International partnerships between universities are identified as a means of building the capacity of health professional programs (HPPs) of universities in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).^{1–3} The New Partnership for Africa's Development⁴ identified such partnerships as an “essential” step for addressing the critical shortage of skilled human resources for health in SSA—the region of the world with the greatest burden of disease relative to its health workforce.⁵

The Sub-Saharan African Medical School Study⁶ characterizes international partnerships as “important assets” for their support of education, research, and service mandates through a variety of activities, including student and faculty exchanges, research, and curriculum development. The existing literature identifies numerous examples of university-to-university partnerships with SSA universities. Categorizing them by general discipline is sometimes straightforward—for example, by medicine,^{7,8} nursing,^{9–11} or public health¹²—but sometimes they bridge disciplines.¹³ Clear examples of partnership activities focusing on education,^{14–16} research,^{17,18} or service¹⁹ also exist. Sometimes partnerships are clearly multidisciplinary, by including at least 2 health professions, and include more than 1 component of education, research, or service.¹³ North-South partnerships are identified by the Academy of Medical Sciences and Royal College of Physicians²⁰ as the “traditional model” of academic partnerships before stating that South-South partnerships, networks, and consortia have increased in number this century.

However, after identifying the type of activities partner universities engage in and noting that medical schools have “an array” of international university partners, the Sub-Saharan African Medical School Study (p. 95) concludes that “an area for future research is how to improve and measure these collaborations to maximize efficacy and provide evidence for success.” An initial step toward achieving this need is identifying systematically the number and types of international university partnerships at specific universities in SSA.

Objective. The objective of the present study was to document and categorize the range of international university-to-university partnerships deemed significant for building the capacity of medicine, nursing, and public health professional programs at 4 East African universities.

METHODS

This study used a concurrent mixed methods design. We conducted key informant interviews and reviewed gray literature and published reports. Quantitative analysis has dominant status²¹ in this paper. Qualitative viewpoints are included to emphasize key issues and provide prospective.

University Selection. We sought a total of 4 universities in 2 countries (Kenya and Tanzania), within 1 distinct region of SSA, to explore diversity within broadly similar political, economic, and social contexts. All universities had to have medicine, nursing, and public health programs. Using purposeful selection, we included the oldest medical schools in each country and a private university, because the number of private universities in SSA has increased significantly in the past 2 decades.²² The 4 universities chosen each had a teaching or affiliated hospital.

Moi University (MU), Eldoret, Kenya, was selected because its partnership with Indiana University has been referred to as successful^{2,3} and has been used as a case study more than once.^{23–25} University of Nairobi (UoN), the second Kenyan site, is the country's oldest and largest medical school.

Tanzania has close cultural and economic ties with Kenya, and its first medical school, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) in Dar es Salaam, was founded within 5 years of UoN's* in the 1960s. Kilimanjaro

*The first medical school in East Africa, Makerere University Medical School, was found in Kampala, Uganda, in 1924. It is today housed within Makerere University College of Health Sciences (see <http://90.mak.ac.ug/>). Makerere produced physicians for Kenya and Tanzania before what are today the schools of medicine of UoN and MUHAS were founded, in 1967 and 1963, respectively (see <http://med-school.uonbi.ac.ke/> and <http://som.muhas.ac.tz/>).

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