

The AQUAHUB Programme

“Education and Research Hub for the Sustainable Management of Aquatic Ecosystems in Eastern Africa”

LESSONS from the IMPACT EVALUATION

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1. The AQUAHUB programme – an overview

- Inception in 1975 as Austrian based scholarship programme „International Post-Graduate Training Programme in Limnology (IPGL)
- Financed by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)
- Two joint master programmes:
 - LWM - International Joint-Degree Master's Programme in Limnology & Wetland Management: Egerton University (Kenya), BOKU (Austria), Institute for Water Education (IHE Delft, NL)
 - AEEM – Joint Master's Programme in Aquatic Ecosystems & Environmental Management: Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia), EIAR (Ethiopia), Egerton University (Kenya)

1. The AQUAHUB programme – an overview (cont.)

Purposes of the programme:

- a. support natural resource preservation and foster Higher Education Science and Technology (HEST) systems in the Eastern African region.
- b. strengthen individual and institutional research capacities to allow for long-term independent and context relevant knowledge production in the region.

Students mainly from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, (Ruanda, Burundi, Tanzania..)

3. Analysis of Wider Context

- **Conflicting political objectives:** industrial development vs sustainability policies
- **Resource constraints** & inflation
- Insecurity & armed **conflict**
- **Fragmented** & under-resourced **HEST systems**
- Asymmetric **global HEST landscape**
- **Gender:** barriers for female participation

4. Findings – 4.1. General Findings

Substantial contributions to:

- **awareness and regional cooperation**
- **establish limnology** as a scientific field in the region
- **creation and enhancement of institutions** in HEST
- **quality improvement** in HEST
- structural, methodical and didactical **change processes** in higher education
- **research activities and cooperation** in N-S and S-S perspective

4.1. General Findings (cont.)

- **Impact is most tangible in HEST, less at the policy and community levels**
- **Impact less visible at the level of local programmes**
- **Networking: need for formalization in Kenya/Uganda/regional;**
- **Gender: important contribution, but still barriers**
- **Challenge: academic publishing**
- **Challenge: financial diversification**

4.2. Findings on Austria

- Contribution to establish **BOKU as a lead driver in the Austrian development research community**
 - Change processes in teaching, internationalisation, administration
- Contribution to the further advancement of the **education sector strategy of ADC**
 - „Living lab“ for strategies in higher education: institutional cooperation (rather than scholarships; dislocation to Southern partners)

5. Key factors facilitating success

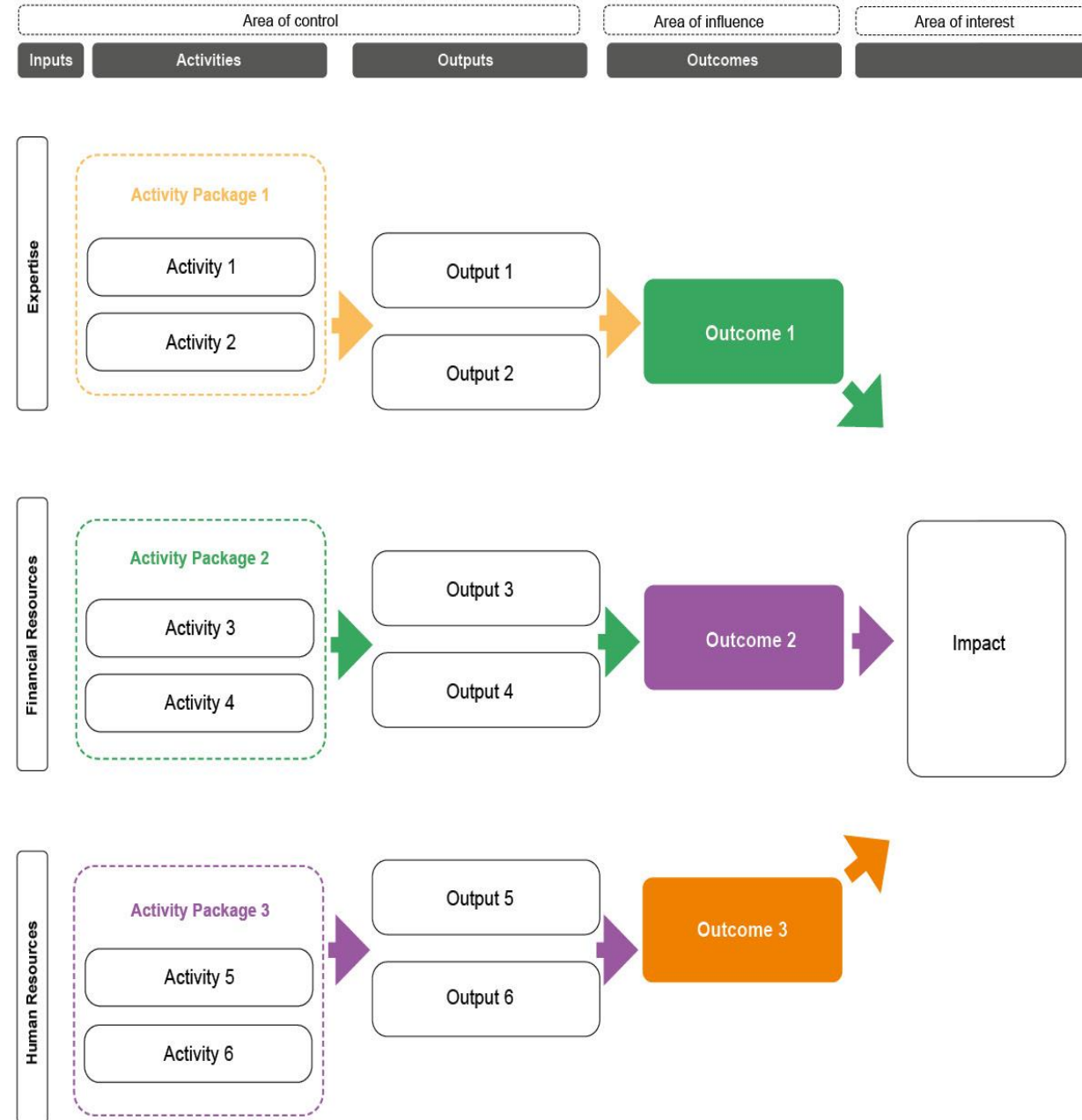
- Long programme duration
- „Anchor individuals“ and enabling institutional environments
- Mediating role of contextual factors Accounting for context
- Collective negotiation as a mechanism for change

6. Lessons learnt

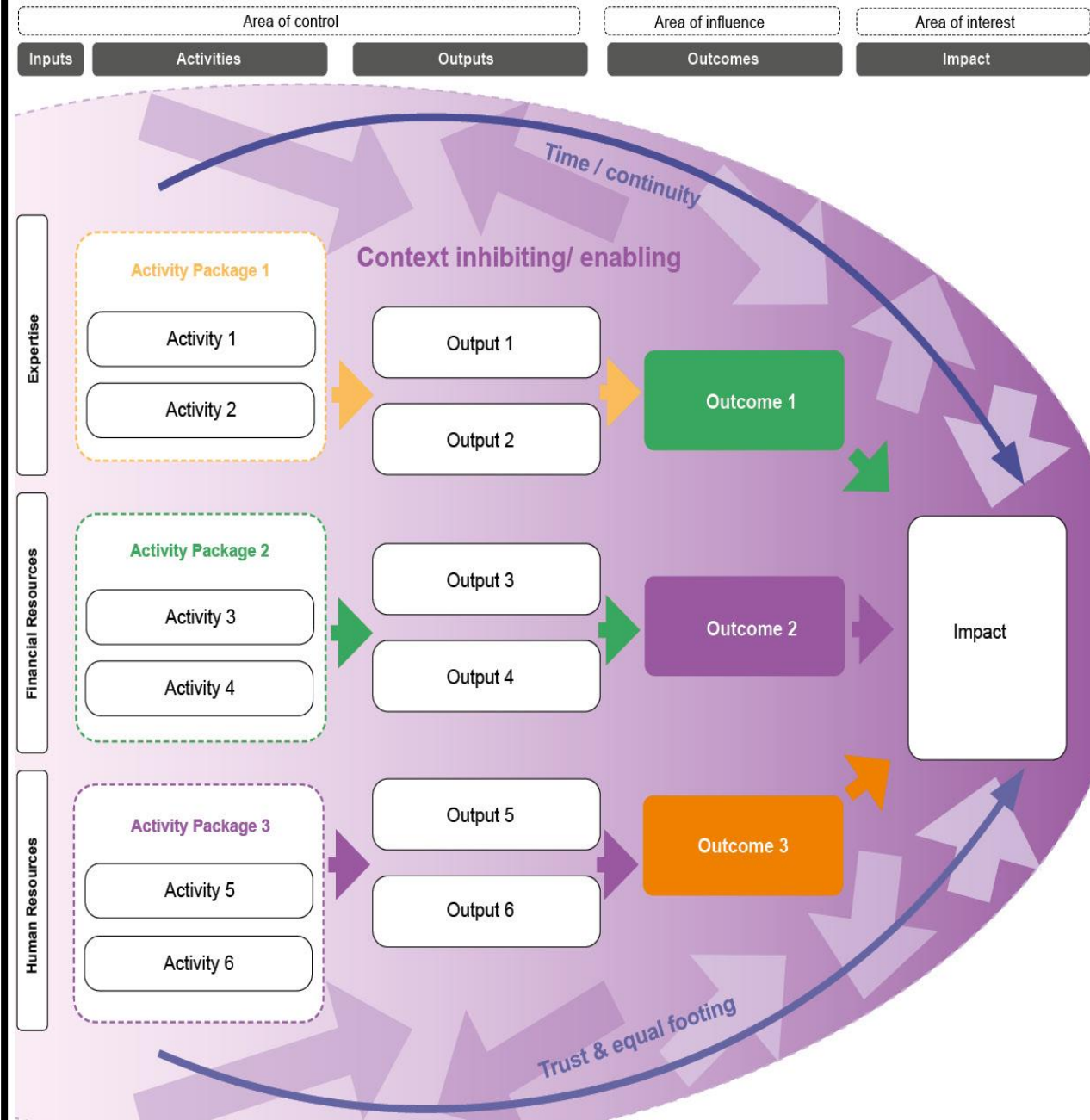
Education & Research are not a panacea for structural problems

- Avoid unrealistic expectations of wider social impact
- Need to account for context – also in project ToCs

Linear ToC



Complex ToC




6. Lessons learnt (cont.)

- **Acknowledging power asymmetries**
 - Trustful partnerships are necessary to constructively deal with the given context
- **Sustained commitment over a long period of time**
- **Prolonged processes of collectively negotiating change in each partner institution**
- **Advocacy for more inclusive regulations of the global HEST landscape**

7. Further Resources

ÖFSE Policy Note Nr 42: North-South Cooperation in Higher Education. Potentials and Limitations. The case of the Eastern African-Austrian AQUAHUB Programme



42/2024 POLICY NOTE

North-South Cooperation In Higher Education. Potentials and Limitations
The case of the Eastern African-Austrian AQUAHUB Programme

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Abstract

Cooperation between institutions of higher education in North-South directions have long been a common instrument of development cooperation in the education sector. At the level of research, North-South partnerships have increasingly become a preferred strategy of financing mechanisms for research on and in countries of the global South. Transnational cooperation and partnership projects are considered to be particularly useful for capacity building at institutions in the global South. For this to materialise, however, several preconditions, such as long-term commitment, trustful relationships and accounting for power asymmetries as well as contextual factors, need to be in place, as recent research on the Eastern African-Austrian AQUAHUB programme confirms¹.

Individual scholarship and mobility programmes have for decades been the predominant instrument of international cooperation in higher education. In the development realm, this has mostly involved programmes addressed to students and staff from the global South to study at institutions in the global North. In the 1990s, resonating a general turn towards institutions in development thinking, this form of individual support began to be complemented by instruments aiming at institutional capacity building in higher education. Institutional cooperation and partnership programmes at various levels and in different forms have gained popularity ever since.

Globalisation dynamics and internationalisation policies in higher education have acted as additional drivers for international cooperation. However, globalisation and its accompanying trends of commoditisation and privatisation have also reinforced a framework of asymmetries solidifying the disadvantaged positions, inherited from colonialism, of institutions in the global South. Such asymmetries do not only refer to resources and power but are manifest also at a conceptual level in terms of marginalising epistemologies, languages, knowledge traditions, methodologies as well as understandings of scientific excellence and relevance other than those predominant in the academia of the global North. They are reflected in, and at the same time reproduced by, international rankings of universities and academic publications, access to which is strongly resource dependent and therefore often limited for institutions in the global South.

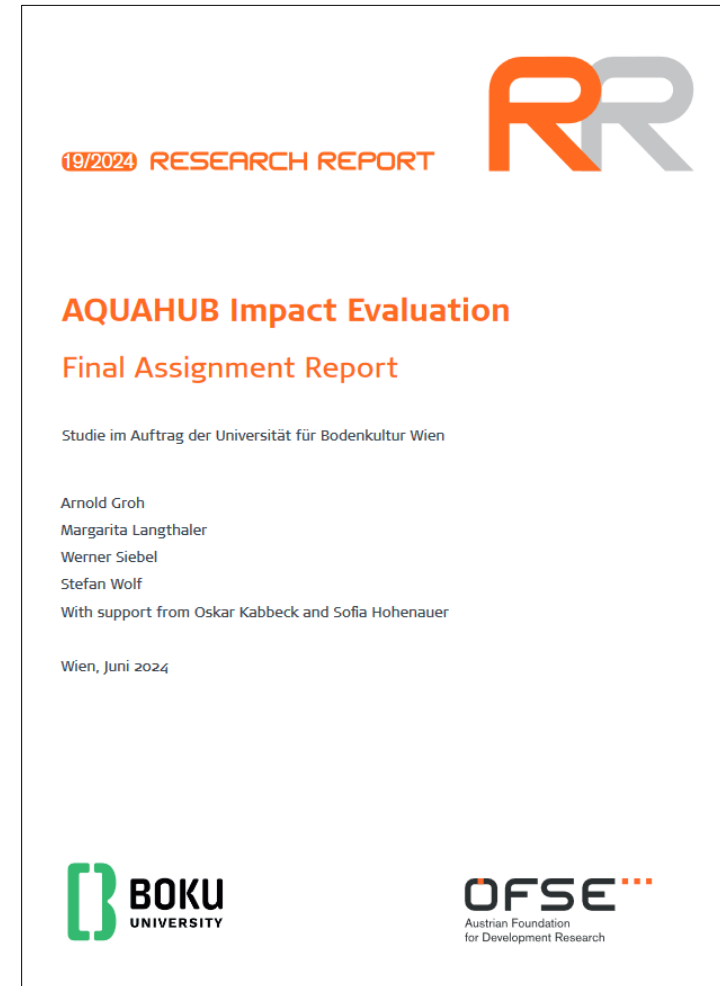
International activities in higher education of many OECD-countries often follow commercial interests (e.g. through the establishment of branch campuses in other countries), while strategies for public funding tend to be informed by political objectives. For instance, the latest substantial increase of funding for higher education cooperation with Africa by the European Commission² corresponds to the EU's recent focus on Africa (see the EU Africa Strategy: EC 2020). Moreover, colonial legacies continue to shape North-South relations in higher education (Walker/Martinez-Vargas 2022). Yet, some European nations, e.g. Germany or the Nordic countries, claim to have a more collaborative and less profit- or influence-driven approach to higher education cooperation than those with important colonial histories (DAAD 2012).

However, a growing body of research, often informed by post- and decolonial approaches (e.g. Walker/Martinez-Vargas 2022), elaborates on how the above described global asymmetries frame and affect North-South partnerships in higher education, including those financed through aid funds and pursuing corresponding objectives. While equity in North-South research cooperation has increasingly become a precondition for public funding, at the implementation level equitable relationships appear to be rather elusive. As pointed out by Carbonnier and Kontinen (2015: 160), Northern partners, especially when unexperienced, tend to repeat traditional deficiencies such as lack of basic contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity as well as failure to explicitly address the issue of power relations. Yet, even in long-standing partnerships the above global asymmetries are reflected in "critical challenges (including) competing conceptualizations of excellence, jointly negotiated and agreed research agendas, approaching capacity building as a two-way street especially when it comes to localized knowledge, or recognizing the variety of vehicles to disseminate research outcomes toward diverse target audiences" (ibid.).

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7. Further Resources

Research Report 19: AQUAHUB Impact Evaluation. Final Assignment Report



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Thank you!