

# Surging enrolment in EAC universities

A JOINT REPORT

The EastAfrican

**A**t Moi Avenue Primary School on the fringes of Nairobi's central business district, an unusual group of learners — third year Bachelor of Education students from the University of Nairobi (UoN) — is sitting an examination on a Friday evening.

This group is an overflow of the growing enrolment at the country's oldest university. The university students start strolling into the school compound shortly after the pupils have left for the day.

Apart from Moi Avenue Primary School, which is 300 metres from the UoN's Main campus, the university has been forced to look for space in adjacent buildings to convert into lecture rooms. It is the same story at Kenya's other six public universities where admissions have grown faster than expansion of facilities over the past five years, sending the institutions into a frantic hunt for lecture rooms.

As student numbers continue to swell, Kenya's universities, like their East Africa Community (EAC) counterparts are facing a growing headache: How to guarantee quality of learning. Concerns are growing across the region that the quality of learning is degenerating faster than ever before even as regulators try to tighten the noose on the institutions.

## Quality assurance

Although universities too have upped their internal quality assurance systems, the EAC higher education system is facing a crisis of sorts, a higher education forum held mid last month in Bonn (Germany) and Brussels (Belgium) heard.

The forum, dubbed *Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies: Networking with European and German Stakeholders in Quality Enhancement in Higher Education*, which was attended by a host of senior officials from EAC universities, was organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) in conjunction with the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA).

"The higher education system has grown too rapidly in the EAC region, compromising the quality of learning. It is clear the region was not prepared for such a rapid growth. It is very worrying," said Mayunga Nkunya, executive secretary at IUCEA, the body charged with harmonising and regulating university education in the region.

For example, the number of students at the University of Dar es Salaam surged from 8,100 to

## THE NUMBERS

**18,300**

The number of students at the Dar es Salaam University in 2007 compared with 8,100 in 2001.

**39,400**

The number of students at the University of Nairobi in 2007 compared with 22,800 in 2001.

**84,000**

The current number of students at the University of Nairobi.

**15pc**

Income of public universities from self-sponsored students in Kenya.

**250**

The number of articles published by Kenyan researchers in journals.

18,300 between 2001 and 2007. At the University of Nairobi, the number of students increased from 22,800 to 39,400 over the same period, and is currently estimated at a staggering 84,000, according to data from the institution's website.

However, a raft of reforms are looming, which could lift the quality of higher education learning in the EAC.

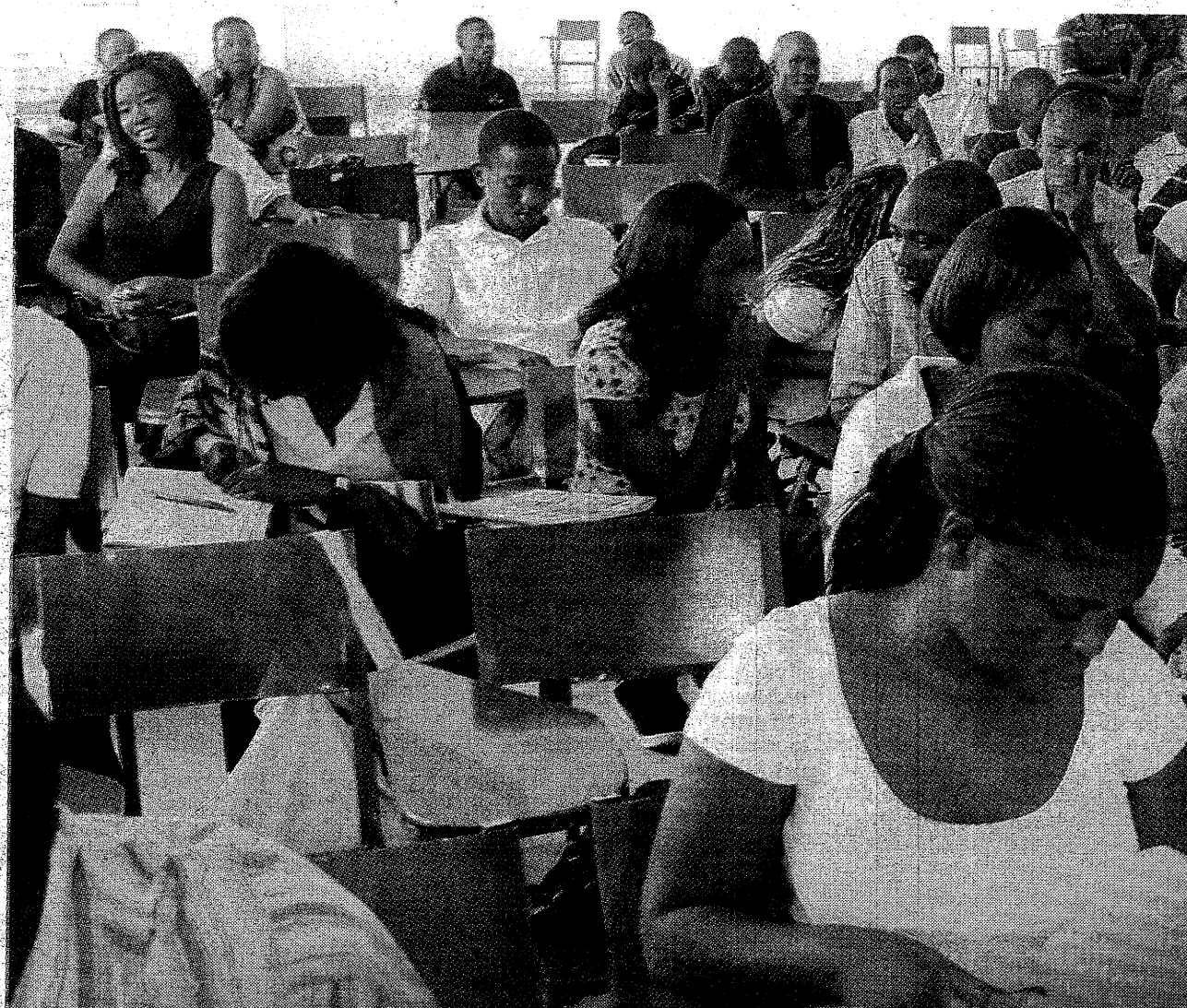
Kenya has for example crafted new rules dubbed the *The Universities Regulations, 2013* (to support the implementation of the University Act 2012) which are expected to be implemented this year (2014) with the aim of safeguarding the quality of university education in the country. The regulations provide for the establishment of universities and colleges of universities, development of academic programs, collaborations between foreign universities and local institutions and licensing of student recruitment agencies and activities, said Prof David Some, the secretary and chief executive at the Commission for University Education (CUE), Kenya's universities regulator.

## Foreign universities

The rules also provide for recognition and evaluation of qualifications awarded by foreign universities and institutions.

Although enrolment in higher education has been growing in all the East African countries, concerns have been growing over the universities' effectiveness in preparing graduates to be competitive in the 21st century technology-driven era.

Latest data from the think



Country comparisons on innovation enablers and outputs

		Uganda	Tanzania	Kenya
Knowledge creation	Local availability of specialised research and training services	3.67	3.48	4.40
	Capacity for innovation	2.56	2.53	3.35
Knowledge application	Growth rate of labour productivity	6.00	4.90	-0.60
	Production process sophistication	2.27	2.78	3.22
Benefits to social welfare	GDP per capita (USD)	348	362	464
	Gini co-efficient	0.43	0.35	0.48
Investment in education	Education expenditure (% of GNI)	4.00	2.39	6.63
	Extent of staff training	3.46	3.64	4.22
Quality of educational institutions	Quality of the educational system	3.17	3.17	4.43
	Quality of scientific research institutions	3.68	3.63	4.27
	Quality of management schools	3.54	2.83	4.44
Innovation potential	Availability of scientists and engineers	3.71	3.48	4.31
	Enrolment in tertiary education	3.47	1.45	2.75

Source: INSEAD (2010)

Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET), reveals that Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania all score relatively low in knowledge creation and application, quality of education institutions and innovation potential.

However, Kenya is the best performing among the three in all these indicators, particularly on the local availability of specialised research and training services, quality of the education system and management of schools.

In addition, Kenya benefits from having a relatively high availability of scientists and engineers.

**Students in a lecture room at Kenya's Kenyatta University.**

Pic: File

Data from the World Bank shows that Kenyan researchers published 291 articles in peer-reviewed scientific and technical journals in 2009, compared with 152 from Tanzanian researchers in the same year, 143 from Uganda, and just 12 from Rwanda and three from Burundi.

Tanzania comes second in most of the indicators, while Uganda scores highly in the growth rate of labour productivity and enrolment in tertiary institutions.

Uganda has seen a rapid expansion in university enrolment over the past few years, with many Kampala-based institu-

## DOCTORAL DEGREE WORLDWIDE

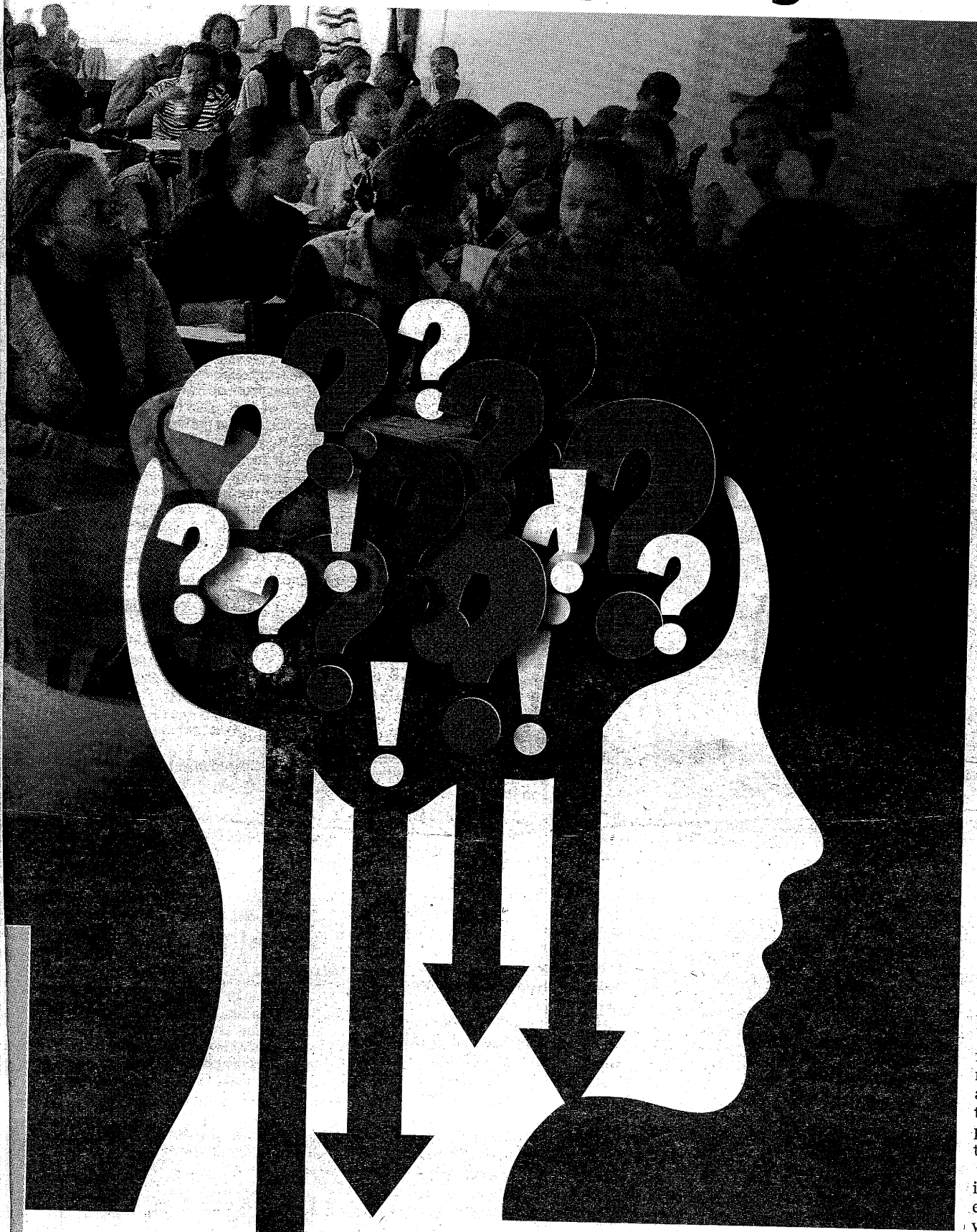
In a recent study analysing doctorate degrees around the world, Nature reported that there had been nearly 40 per cent growth globally in doctoral graduates between 1998 and 2008.

But growth in PhD production is not uniform across the world, countries with already high levels of doctorate production — for example Germany, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom — were growing at around 5 per cent or less, while fast developing countries are growing doctoral output at more than 7 per cent, with Mexico (17 per cent) and China (40 per cent) growing at much higher rates than the global average. But a "very bleak" picture of PhD education has emerged in a study of nine sub-Saharan African universities conducted by CHET. In five of the universities studied, there had only been 20 or fewer doctorates in 2008 while Makerere, Nairobi and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan universities produced between 20 and 40.

Source: Nature; University World News



# pushes down quality of learning



tions. setting up campuses in rural areas such as West Nile, an area, which has seen a tripling in the number of university graduates.

Data from CHET shows that between 2001 and 2007, the University of Dar es Salaam's graduation growth rate was higher than its enrolment growth rate, which implies fewer students drop out.

Similar trends are found in Makerere University, which saw a graduation growth rate of 8.9

per cent, three times higher than the increase in enrolments. Still, dropout rates are high in some fields of study at Makerere with more than 50 per cent of students entering undergraduate programmes in business/management likely to drop out before graduation.

The dropout rate in science and technology programmes is about 35 per cent, while that in the humanities programmes is lower at 25 per cent.

The EAC is pursuing the idea of establishing a common regional quality assurance framework that would

foster mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications and promote cross-border education.

Under a programme jointly rolled out by the IUCEA and DAAD, at least 100 quality assurance officers have been trained in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

"Some of the skills achieved by the quality assurance officers include how to implement quality guidelines and set up and run Quality Assurance (QA) offices," said Prof Mike Kuria, director of Centre for Quality Assurance at Daystar University and the DAAD co-ordinating expert on the QA initiative for

East Africa.

The programme is also supported by the HRK. The EAC is hoping to get into a common higher education space by 2015, as stipulated in the East African Common Market of 2010, thus providing a platform for free movement of labour and students across the region.

"We are working on a generic regional qualifications framework for higher education characterised by a harmonised credit system, qualifications descriptors, qualification categories, qualifications levels, articulation modes from one level or category to the other, which is linked to the national qualifications frameworks in the Partner States," said Prof Nkunya.

"The idea is to allow free movement of students from one country to other for studies," said Prof Nkunya.

The bloc has also come up with a quality assurance handbook in four volumes based on harmonisation of existing instruments in the partner states, into an agreed upon regional instrument. Volumes one and two have already been piloted and now in full use while the other two editions are being piloted in the partner states.

#### Piloting stage

Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda have already finished the piloting stage and integrated the instrument into their national systems of institutional evaluation.

The African Union has been working on a project to institutionalise quality assurance in higher education under the auspices of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, which runs until 2016.

In addition, the AU is working on a programme to harmonise higher education in Africa and to establish an African system to measure and compare performance of higher education institutions.

But funding is also emerging as a big headache for EAC education managers. In recent years, government funding for higher education has increased only marginally. State funding constitutes the bulk of university income in most of the EAC, representing between 50 and 90 per cent of total institutional revenue.

Income from self-sponsored programmes constitutes an average 15 per cent of revenue in Kenyan universities; the University of Nairobi has the highest proportion of income derived from fees — some 40 per cent.

Public spending in Kenya on higher education, as a proportion of GDP, averaged 6.7 per cent between 2002 and 2010.

The regional picture is not much different — East African governments spent an average



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of 4.5 per cent of GDP on higher education in 2010, the lowest being Uganda, where private fees are the leading source of funding and the government spent only 2.5 per cent of GDP on universities.

Student fees are now the leading source of funding for Ugandan universities; the percentage share of private resources in public institutions has overtaken government support.

At Makerere University, for example, funds from private sources contributed 60 per cent to total recurrent expenditure in 2005/06 up from 28 per cent in 1996/97.

#### Change in education sector

"The nature of higher education around the world is changing. This is true for teaching, for research, and for the management of higher education institutions. Universities in many countries are faced with less public funding, more demands by external stakeholders as well as increasing national and international competition," said Marc Wilde, the head of unit, DAAD, Bonn.

"Higher education institutions have to identify ways to harness their strengths, to deal with uncertainties; they have to introduce new management tools in order to use the scarce resources prudently and efficiently," he said.

By Christine Mungai and Peter Mwaaura