A 'local turn' for Africa's flagship universities? A Comparative Case Study of the University of Rwanda and universities in nine African city regions

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Declaration

I, James Colin Ransom, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

There is limited analysis of how universities in sub-Saharan Africa engage with and contribute to the development of their local surroundings. This study seeks to answer a seemingly straightforward question: are African flagship universities – often the most prestigious and largest institution in their country – developing a local focus alongside their historic national mission? It does this by adopting a multi-scalar approach: looking at local, national and global activity, and the relationship between these scales. Ten flagship universities in African city regions are analysed, including a detailed examination of the University of Rwanda. Two data components inform the findings: thematic analysis of strategic plans, and interviews with senior staff from universities, government, and other organisations working in Rwanda.

This study shows how the traits that unite flagship universities directly and indirectly shape engagement activity. Some of the traits emerging from the research are a reflection of the broader marketisation of higher education (an emphasis on consultancy, for example), and others assert the unique public role of the flagship as embodied in its founding role (such as the circulation of staff between public offices). The overriding focus of the flagship university is to manage the tension between these two groups, to reconcile them in the name of national relevance and to ensure institutional survival. As such, there is a local dimension to their activity, but this is an adjunct to an unequivocal national focus. However, city regions are places where the international coexists with the national and local, and the centre is entangled with the periphery. Local engagement is a means of contributing to national development.

The histories and strategic plans of the ten flagships are analysed, before an exploration of practice at the University of Rwanda. This study introduces three frameworks: first, the components that determine the extent of local engagement (institutional setup, demands of external stakeholders, and actions of staff); second, a process to show stages of engagement; and third, a decision tree to consider institutional hurdles. Finally, wider implications of the local role of African flagships are considered.

Impact statement

This research increases our understanding of the important role played by large public universities in African cities. It connects two highly topical debates that resonate beyond the continent: the impact of higher education on development, and the design of localised place-based policy, including the contribution of city regions to the Sustainable Development Goals. Through a case study approach, it provides rigorous evidence on the relevance of higher education at the local and national level, and the interrelation between these and the burgeoning international roles of universities.

As a result, the research has the potential to influence both institutional and national policies. It will be valuable for policymakers outside of academia, including city hall staff and national ministry officials, and international donors such as the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the World Bank, who support higher education initiatives. This study will help them to understand the barriers to effective collaboration with universities.

University staff will benefit from the analysis of local and national engagement, enabling them to enhance the contribution of their institutions. For flagship universities, the analysis provides a roadmap to navigate the balance between market-driven imperatives and their public mission, ultimately improving their effectiveness in addressing local needs. University administrators and policymakers can utilise the findings to devise strategies for strengthening local partnerships, fostering innovation, and promoting inclusive development.

The research can also inform public discourse on the role of universities in local development and in society, raising awareness about the potential benefits of stronger collaborations between academic institutions, government agencies, and communities. This awareness can lead to more informed decisions and policies, ultimately contributing to the improvement of public services, urban planning, and national policymaking processes.

Within academia, this research bridges the disciplines of higher education and regional development. It does so within the context of sub-Saharan Africa rather than Europe or North America – a departure from most studies in these fields. Methodologically, it combines thematic analysis of strategic plans and interviews with elites and senior officials in a Comparative Case Study (CCS). The research extends the CSS model by incorporating a deeper understanding of 'place' as more than a spatially bounded location, exemplified by the

notion of the city region. It also advances our understanding of how strategic planning documents can offer a window into institutional priorities and values.

Finally, the study presents new frameworks that can be adapted and extended by other researchers to examine university engagement at different spatial scales, providing a platform for comparative studies and cross-disciplinary analysis.

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Contents

Figures

Tables

1. Introduction

Despite growing interest in the role of higher education in development, there is limited analysis of how universities engage with and contribute to the development of their local surroundings, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This study examines the roles and activities of 'flagship' universities in addressing development challenges in African city regions. In turn, it generates new knowledge on the traits of public universities in Africa, the challenges and opportunities facing these institutions, and practices of local engagement.

Flagship universities are often the most prestigious and largest higher education institutions in their country, and wield considerable influence (Teferra, 2017, p. 2). They are spaces for shaping public discourse, and are historically linked to advancing national development (Lebeau, 2008). This study seeks to answer a seemingly straightforward question: are flagship universities in African city regions developing a local focus alongside their historic national mission? There are several reasons why such a shift may take place, all of which suggest a greater role for public institutions based in urban areas. First, the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation are especially acute in African cities (Parnell and Pieterse, 2014). Second, there has been a wider push for cities to take on a range of new roles: to help meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Moreira da Silva and Kamal-Chaoui, 2019), to tackle grand challenges (Acuto, 2016), and to contribute to global governance and improve international relations (Curtis, 2014; Herrschel and Newman, 2017). This is partly driven by the popular notion of 'resilience', which shifts the onus of (and responsibility for) tackling development challenges from nations to cities (Vale, 2014). Third, there is a recognition that universities in the Global North are being called upon to contribute more to their place and their locality (Birch, Perry and Taylor, 2013; Pugh et al., 2016), to engage beyond teaching and research (Nelles and Vorley, 2010), to tailor their teaching and research to the area (Goddard et al., 2016), and to leverage their international connections for local benefit (Addie, 2016). There has been little work to test whether a similar 'local turn' is taking place in universities in the Global South.

The contribution that universities and, separately, cities can make to global development has become a focus of academic and policy attention, with both universities and cities at risk of being seen as a panacea and saddled with unrealistic expectations. This research sits between two active, but mostly separate, research areas: universities and development, and universities and their local role. The literature on universities and local development is largely written from a Northern perspective and uses European or US case studies, although an African exception

is South Africa, with a recent flurry of work (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk (2018) and van Schalkwyk and de Lange (2018), for example). In closely related fields such as community engagement a similar pattern emerges, with most of the theories and concepts imported from the Global North (Fongwa et al., 2022, p. 3). As such, this study also contributes to broader scholarship on African higher education, a field experiencing a recent rise with new research communities beginning to emerge outside of South Africa, the home of most existing work (Lebeau, 2020, p. 447; Zavale and Schneijderberg, 2022, p. 199).

The two major studies of African flagship universities (Teferra, 2017; Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018) provide a valuable academic foundation, but do not focus on the local (that is, sub-national) development role of these institutions. This study addresses this gap, looking specifically at engagement with communities, government, city hall and others in local areas. It also revisits the concept of the flagship university, expanding the analysis to include several institutions not previously included in multi-country studies, deepens the analysis with a detailed study of a comparatively new flagship university (the University of Rwanda), and introduces a new lens for exploring priorities, plans and values – the university strategic plan. In doing so, this study identifies the distinctive traits of modern flagship universities, and their role in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions. At the same time, it helps to address the paucity of work on local university engagement in Africa, contributing a multi-country analysis to a field dominated by single-country studies, and does so using a multi-scalar Comparative Case Study approach that emphasises the local, national and international dimensions of university activity. Our understanding of the challenges and incentives of engagement is deepened, and these are set within broader frameworks of the role of universities in society, their historical origins, and their relationships with government.

Finally, this study also has relevance for higher education beyond Africa. Given trends of institutional isomorphism towards 'the research university' and the internationalisation of higher education (Zapp and Ramirez, 2019), the trajectories of large public universities in Africa help us understand the pressures and opportunities for higher education institutions globally, in particular the influence of development agendas and how local engagement can sit alongside national and international roles.

1.1 Ten flagship universities

This research analyses local engagement at ten African flagship universities (shown in figure 1), including a detailed examination of the University of Rwanda. Table 1 provides a summary

of all ten universities included in this study. The table also includes some data on the size of the universities (in terms of student numbers), their ranking in the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023* (where they are included), and two rankings that examine research performance, innovation outputs and societal impact – the *SCImago Institutions Rankings* and the *Ranking Web of Universities*. There are significant issues with such league tables (Hazelkorn, 2007; Kiraka et al., 2020), and relying on rankings as a measure of 'flagship' status is deeply problematic. However, they may serve as a proxy for the prominence and international profile that these universities all seek in their strategic plans.

Figure 1: Map of the University of Rwanda and nine secondary cases
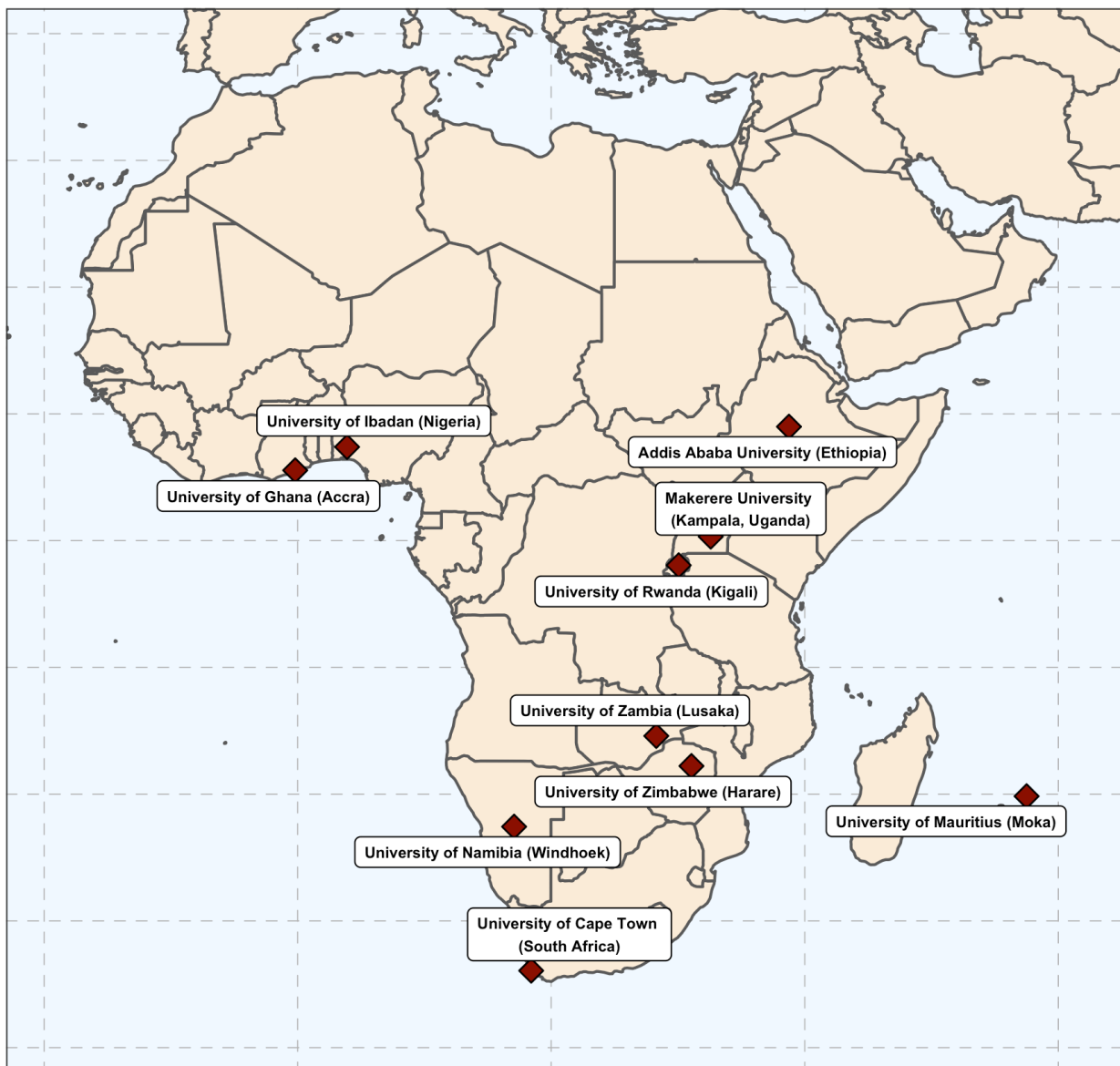
Table 1: Profiles of case study flagship universities

Flagship university	City and country	No. of FTE students (a)	Proportion of international students (a)	THE ranking 2023 (a)	SCImago ranking 2022 (Africa (World)) (b)	Web of universities ranking (sub-Saharan Africa) (c)
Addis Ababa University	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	46,881	0%	601-800	32 (637)	15
Makerere University	Kampala, Uganda	31,233	3%	801-1000	23 (620)	9
University of Cape Town	Cape Town, South Africa	21,069	15%	160	1 (425)	1
University of Ghana	Accra, Ghana	54,256	1%	1001-1200	34 (639)	12
University of Ibadan	Ibadan, Nigeria	26,156	0%	401-500	52 (664)	14
University of Mauritius	Port Louis, Mauritius	8,710	1%	1001-1200	116 (737)	35
University of Namibia	Windhoek, Namibia	29,369	3%	601-800	96 (716)	86
University of Rwanda	Kigali, Rwanda	28,609 (d)			89 (708)	51
University of Zambia	Lusaka, Zambia	16,903	1%	501-600	62 (677)	39
University of Zimbabwe	Harare, Zimbabwe	20,598	0%	1001-1200	74 (690)	30

(a) Times Higher Education (2023) (except where indicated)
(b) SCImago (2022)
(c) Ranking Web of Universities (2022)
(d) University of Rwanda (2018a, p. 16)

The ten flagship universities were selected based on the following five criteria, designed to provide a group of broadly comparable institutions across varied local contexts.

1. Universities can be considered a flagship university: usually a large public institution, often perceived as one of the most prestigious universities in their country, and wielding considerable influence (see section 2.2 for a full definition).

2. Universities are located in sub-Saharan Africa, as defined by the UN (2022c). This geographic classification includes island states such as Mauritius, and excludes North Africa.

3. Universities are located in a country with English as an official national language, and English is used by the university for strategic plans and other public materials. Anglophone institutions and universities influenced by English models of education are thus well-represented, whereas Francophone and Portuguese-speaking Africa is not represented.

4. Universities are headquartered, or have the majority of their facilities and activity, in a major city region.[1] The implications of the city region as a unit of analysis is discussed below.

5. Universities had an active strategic plan in 2020, and this was either in the public domain or I had permission to analyse and cite it.[2]

Given the diversity of higher education institutions in Africa, there are notable differences between some of the universities, despite meeting the criteria. First, they vary in size. Addis Ababa University and the University of Ghana have over 45,000 students, whereas the University of Mauritius and University of Zambia have 8,700 and 16,900 students respectively. The remainder sit within the 20,000 to 32,000 band. Second, some have a greater international profile than others. The University of Cape Town in particular is an outlier in most of the traditional metrics of research 'excellence' and global standing: league table rankings, numbers of international students, the volume of research funding, and the development of academic staff (the number of lecturers with PhDs, the proportion of postgraduate research students, and so on). Third, all ten universities have a significant presence in a major city region, but the composition of this presence varies. For example, the University of Ghana has a city centre campus in Accra, with the main Legon campus 13 kilometres north-east of this. The University

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[1] For example, the University of Malawi has colleges in the major cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, but the headquarters and largest college are in Zomba, a much smaller city, and so was excluded.

[2] This excluded several universities that would have otherwise met the criteria. For example, as of mid-2020 the University of the Gambia was recruiting for a staff member to write their plan and so was excluded. Other universities had a plan, but this was not in the public domain and the universities did not respond to my request to share it with me: the University of Botswana, the University of Dar es Salaam, the University of Nairobi, and the University of Sierra Leone. More information on strategic plans is given in chapter 6.

of Mauritius is in Moka district, which directly adjoins the capital of Port Louis, whereas the University of Cape Town has a commanding presence overlooking the city. Yet despite these differences – and a distance between some of thousands of kilometres – there is more that binds these institutions than separates them, as we will see from the flagship profiles in chapter 5.

All ten flagships are primarily based in a city region. The notion of the city region and its relevance in the Global South is covered in section 3.2, but the central idea is an urban core with links to a semi-urban and rural hinterland (Watson, 2019, p. 3). This allows us to examine the broad local engagement activity of universities without being confined to the administrative or political boundary of a city. There are two implications worth noting. First, using city regions as a unit of analysis allows us to consider cities with different formal statuses. The University of Ibadan is the oldest degree awarding institution in Nigeria, but the university is the only one in this study not in a capital city (Ibadan is the third most populous city in Nigeria, although it was the largest in 1960 at the time of Nigerian independence). Cape Town is the legislative capital of South Africa, but the second-largest city. Nonetheless, both Cape Town and Ibadan are large cities and have the economic clout (and development challenges) to match their capital city counterparts. Second, it allows us to consider networks and linkages extending out of an urban core. This has particular relevance at the University of Rwanda, the major case study site in this study.

The University of Rwanda was formed in 2013 following a merger of seven public higher education institutions. There are six colleges across nine campuses: three campuses (including the headquarters) are in the capital and largest city, Kigali, and the remainder are in satellite cities (near the capital), secondary cities, or in smaller towns or rural areas. Although the focus of this research is the University of Rwanda in the Kigali city region, relations with campuses in towns and cities outside the capital exert considerable influence on the role and engagement functions of the university and are explored in chapters 7 and 8. In addition to these dynamics, there are several reasons why the University of Rwanda is the primary case study. First, it is relatively under-studied. Second, it is a new flagship university, and the newest flagship in the study, allowing us to examine whether it shares characteristics or traits with its longer-established continental counterparts, many of which were forged in the era of African independence in the 1960s. However, the University of Rwanda was not created on a blank sheet: have its predecessor institutions shaped its activity, or constrained its role? Third, Rwanda itself has a strong, centrally driven development ethos, captured in the *Vision 2050* national development strategy. After Mauritius, it has the smallest landmass in this study. This

may suggest an overriding national focus, yet there is also a strategy of economic decentralisation by building up eight secondary cities. These complexities make the University of Rwanda a good test case for whether a local turn is taking place.

1.2 Research questions and aims

My research question is: *What is the role of flagship universities in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions, in particular the University of Rwanda?*

My sub-questions are:

1. What are the characteristics of African flagship universities, and how do these shape local engagement activity?
2. How do African flagship universities frame their local role in their strategic planning?
3. To what extent and how do African flagship universities coordinate or participate in local engagement activity in their city region?

The research questions are designed to generate new knowledge to further our understanding of flagship universities and local engagement at city region level. In answering the research questions, my objectives are:

1. To revisit and to understand the distinctive contribution of African flagship universities.
2. To use the knowledge generated to conceptualise drivers, opportunities and obstacles and inform the local engagement efforts of universities and governments in other city regions.
3. To contribute to the debate over the role universities can play in development, in particular within their local area.

'Engagement' is defined in this study as projects, programmes, activities and relationships with external parties outside of the university. These may include research, innovation and community-focused projects, and social, cultural, environmental and economic programmes of work. Activities may be led by staff or students, or by an external partner with university support. 'Local' is a broad term that encompasses sub-national areas, such as a city region, a city, a province or a district. Different conceptualisations of universities are defined and explored in chapter 2, although it is worth acknowledging up front that understandings of universities and higher education have evolved over time, and in a study such as this one with a historical dimension, it is important to recognise the likelihood of different views and interpretations across different times and contexts (Carpentier, 2017).

To explore these issues, interpret my data and answer the research questions, I employ a Comparative Case Study methodology, detailed below. This provides an overarching structure which is supported by several theoretical frameworks. These include notions of the flagship and developmental university introduced in chapter 2, and typologies of engagement such as the triple helix of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000) and multi-scalar understandings of 'glonacal' (global-national-international) interactions (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) in chapter 3. Three frameworks of local engagement are also introduced. The first (in chapter 7) shows how three components – history and institutional setup, demands made by external stakeholders, and the actions of staff – shape the extent of engagement. The second (in chapters 7 and 8) is adapted from a study on universities and climate change, and sets out the process of engagement: from the University of Rwanda to 'bridging actors' (such as government and local communities), and then to society. The third (in chapter 9) shifts to an internal perspective within the university, and is a decision tree showing the path to starting a local engagement programme. Whilst these models have emerged from studying African flagships, they also seek to be sufficiently generalisable so that they can be tested in other, diverse, settings.

1.3 Structure of the study

In examining the local role of African flagship universities, two separate threads of academic study need bringing together. The first, the subject of chapter 2, is the role of African higher education institutions in development. The idea of the developmental university, the flagship university, and the role of universities in the UN Sustainable Development Goals are explored in turn, illustrating different framings and conceptualisations of African universities since the 1970s. Chapter 3 zooms in from these global and national scales by surveying the literature on the local role of universities, and the growing expectations that universities 'do more' for their locality, and looks at work in both the Global North and South. This role has emerged in parallel with the burgeoning field of regional and urban studies and a richer understanding of 'place', as well as popular narratives on the 'rise of cities'; these are also examined.

With this foundation established, chapter 4 introduces my methods and the Comparative Case Study (CCS). Two major data components form the main part of the study: thematic analysis of the strategic plans of ten flagship universities, and elite interviews with 16 senior staff and officials from universities, government, and other organisations working in Rwanda. The CCS as developed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2016) is a valuable means of bringing together different scales to build a more complete, and contextualised, picture. The approach has three *axes*: a

vertical one that emphasises the global, national, and local facets of a case; a horizontal axis looking at how the phenomena have unfolded in other locations by comparing the case with other cases; and a transversal one that intersects the other axes by situating the cases in historical perspective (see figure 2). This multi-scalar approach also complements the glonacal agency heuristic introduced in chapter 3.

Figure 2: Comparative Case Study of the local role of flagship universities
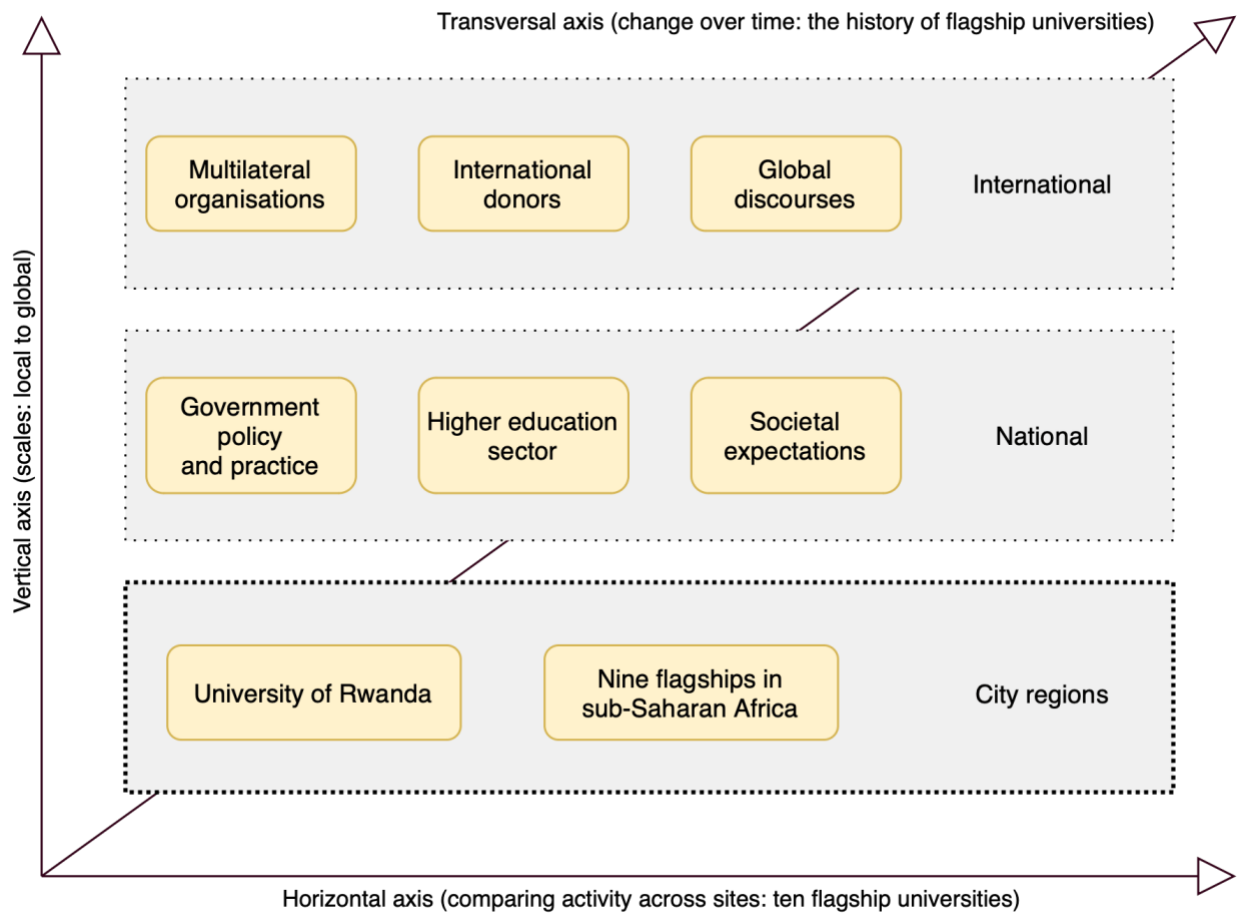
Adapted from Bartlett and Vavrus (2016, p. 3).

My study is grounded in African flagship universities in city regions. My major case is the University of Rwanda, with a higher-level comparison of activity at nine other universities in African city regions, forming my horizontal axis. The influence of national and international policies, practices and ideas forms my vertical axis. The historical formation of flagship universities, including their changing roles over time, the idea of the developmental university, and the role of higher education in society and development, constitutes the transversal axis.

All three axes are designed to answer the question of whether the local engagement activity of Africa's flagship universities is growing.[3]

In chapters 5 and 6 I take a broad view of the engagement activities and local development roles of all ten flagship universities. Chapter 5 profiles the history of each university, and we see that many of the defining traits of African flagship universities today are visible in their past. Chapter 6 analyses the strategic plans of the ten flagships; previous academic studies have used such plans as the basis of examining the role of universities in society, but predominantly of universities in North America and Europe. Chapters 7 and 8 focus in detail on one flagship – the University of Rwanda – first taking a view of engagement from within the institution, and then exploring pathways for external engagement. An overarching framework captures the engagement process set out across the two chapters. Chapter 9 brings everything together into a discussion framed around the research questions, and chapter 10 takes a step back to look at the significance of the topic for universities and governments, and offers suggestions for future work. To begin, we visit the 1970s and the birth of a new model of university in sub-Saharan Africa.

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[3] Somewhat crudely, chapters 5 to 8 form the horizontal axis. Chapters 2, 5 and 7 form the transversal axis. The vertical axis is a theme running throughout and predominantly focuses on the relationship between the national and local, although the international dimension does feature – for example in the discussion of international influences in section 8.1.

2. Universities and development: a neglected local role

This chapter focuses on three key framings of African universities: the idea of the developmental university that emerged following the wave of independence in the 1960s, flagship universities – a type of university considered a 'mother' institution, often since independence and continuing to this day – and, more recently, the role of universities as part of the wider development agenda of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The concept of the developmental university was an ideal type promoted by leaders, governments, and international organisations, calling for universities to be engines devoted to supporting national development. Flagship universities are large public institutions, often perceived as one of the most prestigious institutions in their country, and wield considerable influence. Although the ten universities in this study have been selected on the basis of being flagship institutions, several were also expected to be, and strove to become, developmental universities in the 1970s – they are not mutually exclusive. The discussions in this chapter aim to capture broad trends and are necessarily generalised; individual histories of the ten universities in this study are told in chapter 5, although it should be noted that these only represent a subset of African universities, and Anglophone ones at that.

Any work on universities in Africa taking on a development role needs to be situated in the history of African higher education institutions (HEIs) – their colonial origins, the relationship to national development projects and identities (and the influence of higher education projects from other times and places on this in turn), their proliferation and growth post-independence, and their subjugation to the policies of supranational agencies in the 'lost decades' following this. This history of African higher education continues to be contested and challenged, with studies emphasising, for example, how the sheer weight of the colonial legacy continues to stymie universities today (Assié-Lumumba, 2006, p. 15; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). A failure to understand this history, and the global discourses, power relations and policies that continue to shape and constrain universities in Africa today, means any exploration of the role universities play in national – let alone local – development will be hampered.

The study of the contribution of higher education to development is not a new phenomenon. However, discussions over a successor set of global development targets to the Millennium Development Goals – which ended in 2015 – launched a fresh re-examination of the role of universities in achieving the goals, whilst revisiting older debates about the relationship between higher education and development. This chapter concludes by examining this

relationship through the lens of the SDGs, and finds that the local dimension of higher education is missing from the discussion.

2.1 To solve concrete problems: a brief history of the idea of the developmental university

The idea of the developmental university emerged in the 1970s as 'an institution that is in all its aspects is singularly animated and concerned, rhetorically and practically, with the "solution" of the concrete problems of societal development' (Coleman, 1986, p. 478). As McCowan (2019, p. 97) sets out, the traditional university pillars of activity take on a distinctive form: teaching focuses on courses to train professionals with the skills to meet local or national development needs, research is predominantly applied in nature and guided by national and local priorities, and community engagement takes on a greater importance – lecturers are encouraged to work as consultants and advisers to local and national government, and community outreach projects are complemented by services such as legal advice, health clinics and continuing education for adults.

Coleman's definition of a developmental university, above (and also adopted in this study) views this model as an 'ideal type', a fourth variant of other concepts: Cardinal Newman's idea of the university, the idea of the modern university, and the idea of the multiversity (Coleman, 1986, p. 477). The Weberian notion of the ideal type does not necessarily correspond to pure form or actual instances, but is subjectively formed from a set of characteristics ('ideal' referring to ideas rather than a notion of perfection) (Swedberg, 2018). As such, the idea of the developmental university was far from uniform in practice. As Wandira (1981, pp. 255–6) noted, 'Mozambique, Somalia and Tanzania may, for instance, feel that universities should play an important role in the building of socialist societies. This view may, however, not be accepted in Kenya where the very definition of "African socialism" may differ from that of Tanzania… the diverse nature of African society dictates a diversity of patterns of university organisation'.

This ideal type can be traced in loose form through the outputs from three major conferences on African higher education. At the Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa in Tananarive (now Antananarivo) in 1962, participants agreed that African universities should be 'the main instrument of national progress' (UNESCO, 1963, p. 13). This lofty expectation continued to grow, demonstrated at a workshop of university leaders in Accra in 1973. Participants felt that the African university 'must be accountable to, and serve, the vast majority of the people who live in rural areas'. It should be 'committed to active participation

in social transformation, economic modernisation, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite' (Yesufu, 1973, p. 42). In the mid-1990s, Ajayi (1996, p. 200) reflected upon the idea of the developmental university and asked the question: "how much did all that discussion, all that protracted debate really matter? If these issues were important in determining the effectiveness of the universities' contribution to development, how can we justify the failure to resolve them? If they did not matter, then the debate itself must somehow have missed the point. What explanation can we find for this?". They conclude that the 'preoccupation with the training of manpower equipped purely with university degrees has, in major ways, put limits on the creative responsiveness of the university to other developmental problems' (Ajayi, 1996, p. 201). Further reasons for the decline of the model are set out below.

Four main features characterise the developmental university model. First, it is an institution designed to serve society. Second, it looks beyond a focus on the elite and includes the poor and marginalised. Third, it aims to bring economic or social benefits to society that are non-academic in nature. Fourth, it does this by applying knowledge with practical and immediate effect – to be useful and to tackle challenges (McCowan, 2019, p. 98). As we will see, these features are remarkably similar to the principles behind the formation of land-grant colleges in the United States in the 1860s, which is unsurprising given they were used as a model for the developmental university.

Coleman detailed what an 'ideal' developmental university looks like. Sitting across the three reworked pillars of university activity are a 'formidable range of functions' which include aligning the development plans of the university with national development plans, and coordinating with public and private agencies, including across different levels of education and with other universities (Coleman, 1986, p. 485). Given many developmental universities were the sole higher education provider in their country in the decade or two following their founding, the addition of this coordinating function demonstrates how the role of the developmental university evolves over time. Coleman also presciently describes the expectations made of African flagship universities today, who often align their strategic plans with those of their government and act as a mentor for education providers throughout their country – a legacy of the developmental model which persists today.

The origins of the developmental university idea

The developmental university model that took root in Africa in the 1970s was influenced by higher education movements from previous eras and other parts of the world. Coleman (1986,

p. 477) traces the idea of the developmental university to three previous traditions: the land-grant universities established in each US state in the mid-nineteenth century with a focus on 'extension', Japan in the 1880s as part of a national push to a 'path of forced modernisation', and the Soviet Union, which emphasised both the 'rigorous fit' between the university and the 'manpower' requirements set out in five-year plans, and harnessing the university as a tool to fight inequalities in society and to indoctrinate students. The main ideas from both sides of the Cold War – the land-grant movement and the Soviet model – are worth exploring in more detail.

Land-grant colleges in the US arose from the Morrill Act of 1862, the 'charter of America's quietest revolution' (Taylor 1981 in Mcdowell, 2003, p. 34). The features of land-grant colleges are notable for their similarity to the idea of the developmental university, and for the break they represented with the HEIs that preceded them – a shift that would likely resonate with African leaders in the 1970s. Mcdowell (2003, p. 36) explains that the land-grant system was revolutionary for three reasons. First, its classrooms and degrees were accessible to the working classes; second, it encompassed a far wider breadth of subjects and curricula; and third, it provided access to knowledge to those who would not qualify or seek to attend traditional lessons in classrooms. As such, land-grant colleges ruptured the model of higher education – opening campuses to young people whose previous experiences was 'on farms, in machine shops, in bakeries, or in factories', and 'making the work of cow barns, kitchens, coke ovens, and forges the subject matter of their investigation'. The effect was twofold: to solve some of agriculture's practical problems, and to challenge the view that higher education was reserved for the upper classes (Mcdowell, 2003, pp. 34–35).

However, this first strand – solving problems in communities, outside of the university walls, formalised as 'extension' – only properly took off in the twentieth century. As the decolonisation of Africa took hold in the 1950s and 1960s, across the Atlantic it was the 'golden age' for land-grant universities and the extension system, with the agricultural sector 'judged as one of the most productive sectors of the US economy' (Huffman and Evenson 1993 in Mcdowell, 2003). Service and extension functions made the leap across the ocean from the early 1950s in the form of grants to universities in Africa from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), where the land-grant model was used (Coleman, 1986, p. 780).

In the Soviet Union, the state had tight financial and political control of HEIs, which effectively become an arm of government. As Johnson (2008) explains:

> Russian and then Soviet higher education grew from its modest domestic influence and marginal global status in the early 1900s to become one of the largest and most comprehensive systems of higher education and research in the postwar era… the close integration of higher education and science policy with the highest echelons and priorities of the Communist Party and Soviet state leadership contributed directly to these massive investments (and networks of patronage), as Soviet higher education, professional training, and research became tightly connected with the planned economy and rapid technological development. (Johnson, 2008, p. 162)

However, this tight control led to destructive interventions into higher education and academic research by factions of the Communist Party (Johnson, 2008, p. 163). As a result, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (and too late to provide a cautionary tale for African leaders in the 1970s), the higher education system was 'especially ill-suited to adapt to the economic crises of the 1990s' and the same factors that previously provided the backbone for higher education strength and expansion became systematic weaknesses (Johnson, 2008, p. 159). Nonetheless, Soviet higher education attracted the attention of researchers, including in the US, for the rapid, large-scale professionalisation of labour in pursuit of technological advancement (Schwarz, 1957, p. 67). This link between universities and meeting 'manpower' needs is explicit in the developmental university model, and is closely linked to the ascendency of human capital theory in the 1960s (Oketch, 2014, p. 98).[4]

The land-grant and Soviet influences shared a national orientation – modernising the agricultural sector, driving a five-year plan – even if the beneficiaries may have been local: a veterinarian in Volgograd or a farmer in Fort Worth. It is worth noting that locally-focused higher education movements are not cited as antecedents: in the US, institutions such as the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle were founded as urban universities in the 1960s, with a strong focus on being locally embedded (Goodall, 1970). In England, nine civic 'redbrick' institutions including the University of Birmingham and University of Liverpool were founded in the nineteenth century with the stated purpose of meeting local needs (Sanderson, 2016). It is perhaps understandable that there is little evidence of African leaders or nationalist intellectuals casting their eyes to locally-oriented models of higher education. The English redbricks, for example, were funded by wealthy industrialists in major industrial cities – a difficult model to emulate in recently-independent African states (Cannadine, 2014). The local, urban focus adopted by the likes of the University of Illinois was also at odds with sweeping

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[4] This focus on 'manpower' was not confined to the public policy of post-independence African states and the Soviet Union. For example, the UK Department of Scientific and Industrial Research aimed to bring scientific research and industry closer together, and 'scientific manpower' – the provision of a pipeline of people with research skills – underpinned this (Flanagan et al., 2019, p. 15). The department was dissolved in 1965.

ambitions of national transformation; rapid urbanisation across the African continent would not become a policy concern for several decades.

Although different international models had varying degrees of influence on the developmental university – helped in part by donor money – we should be careful not to overstate the influence of any one model. Whilst the strong alignment with national needs, for example, could be considered a norm or a trend shared by other societies looking to overturn traditional models of higher education, it was also a product of the process of decolonisation and a pragmatic, necessary, single-minded focus on creating a state that could stand by itself and survive. These endogenous pressures manifested in several ways: the government needed civil servants and skilled workers, universities recognised the changing times and shifted their missions as a form of self-preservation in the face of scarce resources, and, perhaps above all, there was a 'voluntary and spontaneous sense of civic or national responsibility of university authorities and members of the professoriate, expressed individually or collectively, that the intellectual and physical resources of the university should be placed at the service of the nation' (Coleman, 1986, p. 780). These pressures are reflected in staggering growth: annual university enrolments in Africa increased nearly 11 percent each year between 1960 and 1980 (Hinchliffe 1987 in Kamola, 2014, p. 605). The developmental university also had its own distinctive traits, some of which – such as attempts to indigenise staff and curriculum – are explored in chapter 5.

Nor should we assume homogeneity amongst the new African institutions that emerged. The 1970s saw widespread calls for newly independent governments to dismantle the 'fossilised colonial model of institution', and instead establish universities that could support the creation of inclusive societies, yet few were created in the mould of being of the people and for the people (McCowan, 2019, p. 92). Perhaps closest to this ideal was the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, with President Nyerere a vocal advocate for developmental universities across the continent. Approaches diverged between institutions: Court (1980) shows how the paths of Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and Dar es Salaam were shaped by their respective political regimes. Battles were also fought within institutions: campaigners at Makerere University in Uganda favoured academic freedom and traditional scholarship, whereas reformers at Dar es Salaam called for an interdisciplinary, nationalist curricula; excellence was pitted against relevance (Mamdani, 2018). These debates can be traced back to discussions amongst Western powers in the nineteenth century about the purpose of education in the colonies, and are echoed in the rich arguments between Black activists (in particular W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington) during the civil rights

movement in the US (Assié-Lumumba, 2006, p. 42). And, as we will see in chapters 6 to 8, the debate continues in African societies today – with the quest for relevance appearing to dominate.

The decline of the developmental university idea

As a state-owned, state-funded institution, a high-profile developmental university had built-in limitations even before fiscal constraints and donor pressures began to hit. As Aina (2010, p. 8) notes, the 'increasingly authoritarian postcolonial political leaders of Africa in the 1970s and 1980s did not take kindly to their universities fulfilling their role of providing independent critical thinking'. Mamdani (2008) adds:

> The University was of course an incubator of both critical thought and of a counter-elite whose critique sometimes veiled ambition. The more professors sounded like ministers-in-waiting and sometimes even Presidents-in-waiting, the more their critique began to sound self-serving. In a single party context, the university began to take on the veneer of the opposition party, giving rise to confrontations that often led to strikes and shutdowns. (Mamdani, 2008, p. 6)

As such, 'the crisis of the developmentalist university was part of the larger crisis of nationalism' (Mamdani, 2007, p. 259). As a concept, the developmental university was used to support often controversial policies, limiting university autonomy and the scope for critical inquiry. Universities were targets of nationalist projects, and nationalist leaders had a tendency to interfere and impose their views on universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p. 65; Lebeau, 2020, p. 444). There were other limitations too. McCowan (2019) summarises the critiques of Coleman and Court in the 1980s:

> Funding and support for the universities were precarious in the context of changes in government; capacity among staff members for implementing the developmental vision was limited, given the fledgling nature of the higher education systems and institutions; many had been trained in traditional (colonial) institutions and so struggled to change their mindset; and traditional university functions of teaching and research were seen to suffer through excessive engagement of staff members with government and development agency work. (McCowan, 2019, p. 108)

The expectations made of universities following the developmental model were significant, and illustrate the disconnect between the idea and reality. Universities were 'expected to carry the burden of African nationalism, which claimed to express African aspirations' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Both Coleman (1986, p. 492) and Court (1980, p. 668) make the point that effective institutions must be built before they can deliver results, with the latter noting that land-grant colleges in the US needed to prioritise their own development before that of their country – half a century passed before they became a force in national development, and the 'golden age' of land-grant colleges came almost a century after their founding. Perhaps the

greatest limitation of the idea of the developmental university was the expectation of short-term results.

The oil crisis in the late 1970s and resulting recession had severe implications for the funding of African higher education. At the same time, the World Bank produced revised calculations as to the economic benefit of universities compared to primary and secondary institutions, stating that 'top priority should be given to primary education as a form of human resource investment' (Psacharopoulos, 1981, p. 333). As African governments applied to supranational institutions such as the IMF for loans, conditions were imposed that limited spending on social services, including cuts to higher education (Kamola, 2014, p. 606). Chapter 5 tells the stories of how these cuts affected several of the universities in this study; Mamdani (2018) captures the stark effects this had at Makerere, illustrating a broader phenomenon felt by many African universities:

> By the late 1980s, the IMF had taken charge of the Ugandan treasury, and the World Bank was running Makerere's planning. The Bank proposed a threefold reform premised on the assumption that higher education is a private good. First, it argued, given that the benefit from higher education accrues to the individual, that individual should pay fees. Today, nearly 90 per cent of students at Makerere are fee-paying. Second, the university should be run by autonomous disciplinary departments and not by a centralised administration. This was achieved by means of a simple formula, requiring that 80 per cent of student fees go to his or her disciplinary department or faculty. The Bank had managed, very effectively, to starve the central administration of funds. Third, the curriculum should be revised to make it market-friendly and more professional: the geography department began to offer a BA in tourism, and the Institute of Linguistics a BA in secretarial studies. (Mamdani, 2018, p. 32)

The repercussions are felt today: whilst Makerere attempts – in efforts reminiscent of the drive for excellence in the 1970s – to shed 'market-driven' degree programmes and cap student numbers (Kigotho, 2020), it is nonetheless keenly sensitive to graduate employability and is continuing a programme of decentralisation (see section 6.6). As with the University of Rwanda (section 7.3), degree programmes are axed in the name of quality – but the job market is the arbiter of quality rather any intellectual or academic criteria. When it comes to relevance, however, neoliberal reforms may have ultimately served to accelerate notions introduced by the developmental university model. In their book, *Democracy and the Discourse on Relevance Within the Academic Profession at Makerere University*, Felde, Halvorsen and Myrtveit (2021) found that recognition and status within Makerere (and other African universities) is driven by alignment with economic development and a 'knowledge economy'. Academics become consultants, short-term research is prioritised, and relevance is determined by external priorities rather than through independent academic inquiry. Perhaps we should not be

surprised that the developmental ideal morphed into a more commercial model: historians have persuasively argued that the land-grant movement in the US was largely driven by economic concerns, rather than (as commonly assumed) educational ones (Key, 1996).

In summary, the rise and fall of the idea of the developmental university forms a distinct chapter in the history of the African university, preceded by the colonial model and succeeded by a market-led, managerial model. Aina (2010, p. 3) describes these periods as each introducing waves of reform to address the perceived deficiencies of the last era, and, because they are framed as emergencies, they fail to address long-term goals. The result, he concludes, is that 'the terrain of African higher education continues to resemble a thick forest of institutions, systems, and practices lacking clear and distinct tracks, values, and goals, or a mission and vision that connect the institutions and systems sufficiently to the major challenges of their contexts (whether global or local)'. Few would dispute this description. But it is one arguably shared by most, if not all, higher education systems, rather than being a distinctively African phenomenon. The developmental university idea was shaped by international models, but was nonetheless rooted in context of African nations. The question is whether a distinctly African institution has emerged from the thick forest of institutions and the discourse on relevance.

2.2 'High clout and influence': introducing African flagship universities

Notions of what an African university should be have evolved over time, shaped by political exigencies, societal expectations, and the pressures of international donors and lenders. Models for national development from the US or the Soviet Union gave way to the global 'massification' of higher education, hitting African universities particularly hard (Mohamedbhai, 2014). As the following chapters will show, new African universities borrowed frameworks and structures from the likes of the University of London or the University of Durham in the 1960s. By the millennium, a new university in Cameroon was running strategy workshops with the University of Manchester. Just over a decade later, planners looking to form the University of Rwanda drew inspiration from the Indian Institutes of Technology.

African flagship universities have been subject to these ideas and models, and they have been shaped by the developmental university movement and the market-led period (and the proliferation of public and private institutions) that followed. Flagships have an explicit development function, and they have needed to adapt to meet the demands of massification – not only in terms of their own student numbers, but also often fulfilling a mentoring role for

other institutions in their country; just as they have often borrowed their own structures from overseas universities, in turn they create fledgling institutions in their own image. The flagship university is often the most prestigious and largest institution in the country, predominantly in the capital or at least in an urban setting, and almost always a public institution. As Teferra (2017, p. 2) notes, flagship universities wield considerable influence, 'shaping higher education systems and [standing] as flag-bearers and trendsetters of the academic ethos in their respective countries'. McCowan (2019, p. 102) adds that they are 'highly sought after by students and [have] a close relationship to government… very often there have been struggles over the direction of these institutions, moving between more universalist, colonial and globalised orientations, or alternatively more nationalist, decolonised and locally engaged ones'. Their history as highly visible sites of national discourse and protest (see Lebeau, 2008) makes them uniquely influential yet simultaneously vulnerable to state interference.

Multi-country studies of African flagships

There are two significant academic studies of flagship universities in Africa. The first is the Higher Education Research Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) project funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation and undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Trust (CHET) in South Africa, with several publications providing an empirical overview of eight flagship universities in Africa over the period 2001-2015 (Bunting, Cloete and Van Schalkwyk, 2013; Cloete, 2015; Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018). The second was led by Damtew Teferra and supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and culminated in a book edited by Teferra (2017) with contributing authors from 11 flagship universities. Table 2 indicates the six universities included in the Teferra study, and the four from HERANA, which also feature in my study.

Table 2: Involvement of case study universities in previous flagship studies

Flagship university	HERANA	Teferra
Addis Ababa University		◇
Makerere University	◇	◇
University of Cape Town	◇	
University of Ghana	◇	◇
University of Ibadan		◇

Flagship university	HERANA	Teferra
University of Mauritius	◇	◇
University of Namibia		
University of Rwanda		
University of Zambia		◇
University of Zimbabwe		

The HERANA study identified eight universities as the most prominent public university within their country, all of which shared broad 'flagship goals'.[5] These are: to have a high academic rating, which would make it a world-class university or at least a leading or premier university in Africa; to be a centre for academic excellence; to engage in high-quality research and scholarship; and to deliver knowledge products which will enhance both national and regional development (Bunting, Cloete and Van Schalkwyk, 2013, p. 1). The project explored the factors influencing the ability of Africa's flagship universities to 'transform themselves into research-intensive institutions' (Cloete, 2015, p. 13), whilst recognising the distinction, and tensions, between 'flagship' and 'world class' universities (discussed further in section 9.3). In particular, the HERANA project developed the idea of a 'research-intensive flagship university', one which is 'committed to the creation and dissemination of knowledge in a range of disciplines and fields, and featuring the appropriate laboratories, libraries and other infrastructure which permit teaching and research at the highest possible level' (Cloete, 2015, p. 22). However, the authors also recognised the arguments of Douglass (2014), who maintains that flagship universities, whilst emphasising research, also have wider recognised goals and place less importance on global rankings than a university 'merely' aspiring to be world class. Nonetheless, as the HERANA project evolved and the project focus narrowed to the knowledge production function of universities, the nomenclature shifted from 'flagship universities' to 'research universities', concluding that 'only a university with certain research capacities can contribute to development' (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 23) – an assertion that would appear to depend on how 'development' is defined.

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[5] The University of Botswana, the University of Cape Town, the University of Dar es Salaam, Eduardo Mondlane University, the University of Ghana, Makerere University, the University of Mauritius, and the University of Nairobi.

As part of the second major multi-country study, Teferra (2016) examined the 'neglected contribution' of African flagship universities, specifically enrolment patterns, profiles of academics, graduate output, and research productivity. Teferra's definition of a flagship is reproduced in full, as it is the one adopted in this study:

> …flagship universities in the African context are described as among those first higher education institutions established prior to and post-independence and have been considered as the leading institution, in their respective countries, at the present time. These 'mother' institutions would typically have the largest number of academic programs, senior academics, as well as enrolments.
>
> They are also the largest producers of graduate students, research, and publications and play an important role in national capacity building and innovation efforts. Flagship universities tend also to be the most internationalised in their countries in terms of institutional cooperation and linkages. They are also by the process of isomorphism trend setters in their respective countries in terms of curriculum content, academic culture, and policy issues.
>
> Flagship universities in Africa are also the most important contributors of academics to the new 'sibling' institutions. Most typically the flagship universities are based at the capitals of the respective countries and are at the heart of the social, cultural, educational, and political fabric of their nations.
>
> Invariably flagship universities in Africa are public and urban – and are virtually all based in the nations' capitals. They are held with highest national esteem – a mother institution from where the social, political, and economic elites graduate – and maintain high clout and influence. (Teferra, 2016, p. 82)

As a framework, this definition of flagship universities captures the key characteristics all ten universities that feature in this study: namely their size, public status and influence, and location in the capital.[6] As a set of criteria, this describe a fairly broad and diverse group of universities, rather than an 'ideal type' to which they may be aspiring towards, or are expected to become. Flagships may, however, also be under pressure to conform to ideal types, as was the case with the concept of the developmental university, and is the case with world class universities or research universities – see section 6.3. Chapter 5 describes the history and roles of each of the ten cases in this study.

A book followed in 2017, systematically examining academic staff, funding patterns, governance, leadership and management, graduation, research and publishing, internationalisation, and academic freedom within 11 flagship universities.[7] Universities were

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[6] The most notable exception is the University of Ibadan, which is not in Nigeria's capital Abuja, or largest city, Lagos. It is, however, in a major urban area (see section 1.1 for the selection criteria for the universities in this study).

[7] The University of Botswana, Cairo University, Addis Ababa University, the University of Ghana, the University of Nairobi, the University of Mauritius, the University of Ibadan, Cheikh Anta Diop University, the University of Dar es Salaam, Makerere University, and the University of Zambia. 15 universities were shortlisted, but not all authors submitted work; the identity of the four omitted universities is unclear.

selected to ensure geographical representation including sub-Saharan Africa, 'Arab' Africa and major island states, and coverage of two major language groups – English and French (Teferra, 2017, x).

These two major studies of African flagship universities, whilst providing a valuable academic foundation, do not focus on the local (that is, sub-national) development role of these institutions. This study addresses this gap, looking specifically at engagement with communities, government, city hall and others in the local areas that flagship universities call home. It also revisits the concept of the flagship university, expanding the analysis to include three institutions not previously included in multi-country studies (the University of Rwanda, the University of Namibia, and the University of Zimbabwe), deepens the analysis with a detailed study of a new flagship university (the University of Rwanda), and introduces a new lens for exploring priorities, plans, and values – the university strategic plan. In doing so, this study identifies the distinctive traits of modern flagship universities, and their role in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions.

The tension between consultancy and service

As the profiles of the ten flagships and the detailed analysis of the University of Rwanda will show, traits that appear distinctive in the modern flagship model often have historic roots; the university is both a reflection of how society changes and a key actor in its evolution. African flagships today carry an inheritance from the developmental university and the decades that followed, and this is illustrated by the tensions between consultancy and service that continue to this day.

The idea of the developmental university was conceived in part to make a contribution to development through 'service activity'. This meant academics serving on committees, conducting evaluations, helping to inform national policy, and sometimes undertaking private consultancy work – all of which were seen as helping to address priority problems, but also distracting staff from teaching responsibilities (Court, 1980, p. 662). Coleman (1986, p. 492) agreed that the benefits of academics working on 'real life problems' was substantial, from increased productivity and public recognition to allowing the university to retain top staff. However, the attention of researchers shifted to meeting the needs of external bodies, it resulted in overcommitment and a diffusion of interests ('frequently resulting in superficiality'), and teaching and university service suffered. The result was 'commercialised scholarship', and Coleman cited consultancies paying $300 per day (around $800 today) – a substantial sum for a public sector employee in a low-income country. Writing about the experience of academics

in Nigeria, Yesufu (1973) explained that university salaries were so uncompetitive that staff were forced to either work elsewhere, or supplement their income through private salary. This was not well received.

> Civil servants openly frown on what is generally referred to as 'outside commitment' of university staff. This allegation of outside commitment has been so trumpeted as to portray university staff as money-mongering vampires, who neglect their university teaching and research, and concentrate instead on private businesses. It has gone to the ridiculous extent that student examination failures have come increasingly to be blamed on 'absentee professors and lecturers' engaged in private business. Every time a lecturer is not located in his office, it is presumed he is on 'outside commitment'. Of course, the truth is that some university staff to have outside commitments and even private businesses. But it is equally true that those of them motivate primarily by private greed are in the minority, and much of their commitment is generally in academic and public interest. (Yesufu, 1973, p. 265)

These tensions survived the developmental university era. In 1996 three former African vice chancellors reflected on the future of universities in a report for the Association of African Universities, and lamented the trend of university staff running businesses alongside their core academic roles. In a commentary in *African Affairs*, a reviewer noted that the three vice chancellors ignore the 'problem of feeding and educating one's children, often on less than £1,000 per year' (Peil, 1997, p. 124). As many universities have become more commercially-minded and budgets for staff remain limited, these pressures persist today with the 'consultancy culture among some academics in low-income countries being a significant distraction from teaching and research responsibilities' (McCowan, 2019, p. 108). Mamdani (in Kamola, 2014, p. 606) argues that the 'galloping consultancy culture' and 'the NGO-isation of the university' is the result of a decades-long push towards a market-driven model of African higher education. However, marketisation may have merely served to validate and institutionalise consultancy work: the low salaries and tradition of balancing multiple roles that encouraged 'outside commitment' in the 1970s both survived the developmental university era and are powerful motivators for staff to seek additional income.

McCowan (2019, p. 98) distinguishes between the developmental university focus on serving society and the entrepreneurial university focus on generating income through consultancy – which is sometimes also badged as serving society. The developmental university primarily serves the state and knowledge is produced with this in mind, whereas the entrepreneurial university – which emerged in the 1990s – 'follows whichever paymaster happens to be present'. We can also learn once more from land-grant colleges. Mcdowell (2003, p. 43) argues that both consultancy activities and public service can make positive contributions to scholarship, and indeed for many academics consultancy is their main source of exposure to real-life problems. However, he adds that 'usefulness' needs to be judged in terms of societal

benefit: 'the notion has long been rejected that what is good for General Motors is good for America'.

The line between pure service work for local or national development and commercial consultancy will inevitably blur, especially with the near-universal pressure on universities to generate and diversify income. These tensions are evident in analysis of strategic plans in section 6.5. The priorities and mandates of multilateral agencies or philanthropic organisations can further muddy the waters, a point we return to in section 9.3. Dependence on external funding sources (leading to little discrimination in which work is accepted, a dilution of mission and focus, and encroachment into teaching and academic research), or reliance on state funding without a degree of independence or the ability to be critical, are both problematic. I argue that the modern flagship university is neither a spiritual successor to the developmental university, nor a corruption of its ideals, but rather a pragmatic organisation carefully and continuously balancing a complex set of pressures. I expand on this in chapters 7 and 8.

However, old concepts have a tendency to resurface – reformed and reworked to meet new challenges and changing contexts. Mtawa (2019, p. 60) tracks the 'revitalisation' of the developmental university model over the past decade or so, in particular calls for universities to strengthen their societal mission. For McCowan (2019, p. 92), the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals has given the idea of the developmental university 'a new lease of life'. We now turn to the role of universities in this global development agenda.

2.3 Higher education and the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in September 2015 by all 193 UN members. Goal four ('ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') includes explicit reference to higher education: 'ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university', and 'substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries… for enrolment in higher education' (UN, 2015, p. 19). Yet, as we will see, the other goals will also require the participation of HEIs to be successful.

The SDGs build on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000. The world has changed substantially since then, and this is somewhat reflected in the goals – not least the emphasis on global sustainability and reducing inequality. Significant changes have also taken place since 2015, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means 'an urgent rescue effort for the SDGs' is needed (UN, 2022b, p. 2). As we pass the half-way point to the

2030 end date, progress is slipping on many of the targets, including those for higher education (UN, 2022a).

The United Nations Development Group led the process of formulating the SDGs, and tried to address the widespread criticism that the MDGs were too top-down (for example Bond, 2006). A process of 100 national consultations formed a 'global conversation' on the content of a set of post-2015 goals, including capturing the voices of 22,000 people on the role of education in the goals. However, this conversation was perceived as being dominated by experts and agencies in the Global North (Soudien, 2013, p. 839; Chankseliani, Qoraboyev and Gimranova, 2021, p. 112). Power imbalances have also played out in wider education debates, with the World Bank seen as being able to shape education policy through the use of funding mechanisms in low- and middle-income countries to a greater extent than UNESCO; the former tending to favour a human capital approach to education that focuses on the skills needed to increase productivity and growth, and the latter emphasising rights-based and capability-driven approaches that give individuals the freedom to do what they value (Regmi, 2015, p. 564).

How are the SDGs relevant for African flagship universities? As a global development compact, national governments are the primary signatories to the goals, and flagship universities – given their size and prominence – have an outsized role in national development; any government taking the goals seriously will depend on the contribution of its largest universities. As Chankseliani and McCowan (2021, p. 6) observe, many universities have been doing the kinds of development-oriented teaching, research and engagement activity demanded by the goals long before the SDGs were formulated, and this is especially true for flagship universities. Nonetheless, a few flagship universities plan to align their activities around SDG priority areas (see section 6.5), reflecting both the influence of global agendas and a close relationship to national development.[8] The content of the goals, the assumptions and trade-offs inherent in their formulation, and how these are translated at national level, are therefore likely to have an outsized impact on a flagship university compared to, for example, a small private institution, and as such are important to examine.

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[8] As such, the greater environmental emphasis in the SDGs has repercussions for flagships, which will be expected to lead their higher education sectors in terms of changes to the curricula, campus sustainability and other climate change policies. Given their size, they may have a large impact through the number of students they educate (McCowan, 2020, p. 14).

Direct and indirect contributions to the SDGs

The SDGs call for both greater access to and greater quality of all levels of education. Ilie and Rose (2016, p. 435) note that wide inequalities in access are present in primary and secondary education in many countries, and that as levels of higher education participation increase, so do wealth and gender inequalities within higher education. They conclude that unless inequalities earlier in the system are addressed, we are highly unlikely to reach the higher education access target set in the SDGs. Reconciling quality with wider (and more equitable) access brings significant challenges, in particular in countries with limited resources. Attempts to address this through, for example, the dual track approach of government and private funded places within the same institution (as seen in East Africa) risks a deterioration in quality, increased teaching loads, and the erosion of time for research (Oketch, 2016, p. 532).

Issues of quality and access relate specifically to goal four, on education itself. It is here where the higher education sector plays a direct role. Yet universities have an indirect role in many of the other goals, even if they are not explicitly mentioned. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing (goal three) requires trained health professionals. Sustainable industrialisation may call on the expertise of universities, and encouraging innovation and increasing the number of research and development workers will require active and engaged universities (goal nine). Indeed, professional, scientific and technological knowledge and training are required to deliver all of the goals (Unterhalter, Peppin Vaughan and Smail, 2013, p. 819).

In addition to contributing directly and indirectly to the goals themselves, higher education has a wider, cross-cutting role; Unterhalter and Howell (2021, p. 13) describe these as 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' pathways respectively. The intrinsic pathway includes convening networks and partnerships, and providing a space for debate and critical review. Through these activities, universities can help develop social cohesion, especially in societies recovering from conflict (Smith, 2013, p. 807). HEIs may also have a role in the collection and analysis of data and the contextualisation of results (Unterhalter, Peppin Vaughan and Smail, 2013, p. 819).

Higher education is in an unenviable position in relation to the SDGs. Universities will play a wide role in tackling each of the goals, but will largely be judged on access to higher education – an easy-to-measure target but one that is in part dependent on addressing wider inequality – and quality – a difficult-to-measure target requiring education systems to reconcile widening access and uniform quality within financial constraints. This is complicated by the interdependence of the different stages of the education system – the quality and equity of

primary and secondary education determines access to (and completion rates for) higher education; the quality of teacher training is dependent upon the universities or training colleges that provide it. Ilie and Rose (2016, p. 452) stress the need for a 'system-wide approach' that recognises this interplay between different stages of education.

Furthermore, concerns over Northern dominance of the goals has been reflected in fears of Western universities 'promoting a standardised model of education and the hegemony of Western knowledge', driven in part by their commercial interests (Barrett, 2013, p. 826). Whilst there is much that universities could usefully learn from different higher education models, there is little acknowledgement of the variety of higher education traditions around the world, how vulnerable they may be to the decisions of supranational agencies, and to the understanding these agencies have of what makes for a 'good' higher education sector (McCowan, 2016, p. 507).

Barrett (2013, p. 826) described the SDGs as 'the most significant re-balancing of the notion of international development since the concept of international development emerged in the 1950s', but bemoaned the lack of articulation of this within the education debate. Others have said that education as a whole was not prioritised by the high-level panel overseeing the discussions over the goals, and called for a louder voice from the higher education community (Sayed and Sprague, 2013, p. 790). However, Unterhalter, Peppin Vaughan and Smail (2013, p. 820) recalled the 'perverse consequences' of the MDGs and argued against a specific target for higher education, and instead encouraged discussion on the role of secondary and higher education in addressing poverty, sustainability and equality. Given the role that education can play in reproducing inequalities (Unterhalter and Howell, 2021, p. 9), a strong case can be made for a university that plays a more equal role in development, focused on reducing inequality, meeting the needs of society, and inculcating these values in students (Boni and Walker, 2016). Furthermore, whilst the goals may have a limited (although ambitious) explicit role for higher education in widening access and delivering quality, there is a far wider role for universities in delivering the other goals, which will draw upon the boost to social development and economic growth that higher education can bring, but require deliberate work to do so in an inclusive and equitable way.

Academic discussion on higher education and the SDGs has focused on issues of access and quality, the direct and indirect role of universities in the goals, and on the wider framing of higher education as a means to human capital formation. From an institutional perspective, the focus has been on individual implementation of the SDGs – from campus sustainability to

curricula reform (Serafini et al., 2022). There has been little discussion of the broader spatial role of universities within these debates, and little recognition of the relationship between universities and local places and communities – as education providers, development actors, and centres for innovation and skills training in towns, cities and rural areas.

The missing local dimension

The shortcomings of using goals to inform development policy have been well articulated by scholars (for example, Fukuda-Parr, 2017). Global development goals are a political tool – a measurable set of targets and indicators that allow straightforward comparison and policy formulation. Although goals may engender accountability and political commitment, they prioritise clarity over complexity, single issues rather than interconnectedness, the tracking of trends in a 15-year vacuum rather than a longer-term historical framework, and – crucially – nations and continents rather than sub-national areas.

It is therefore unsurprising that discussion on the role of universities in the goals is predominantly national-focused, and exists quite separately from the literature on the local role of universities (covered in chapter 3).[9] The broader literature on the SDGs does, however, have a local dimension. Lucci et al. (2016) have asked whether cities are on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Jiménez-Aceituno et al. (2020) have looked at local bottom-up initiatives in Africa; Mejía-Dugand, Croese and Reddy (2020) looked at SDG implementation in cities in the Global South in the context of the pandemic. In an OECD report, Moreira da Silva and Kamal-Chaoui (2019) estimate that at least 100 of the 169 SDG targets can only be achieved globally through the involvement of subnational governments.

As such, the local role of universities and their relationship with subnational governments is pertinent to broader discussions on higher education and the SDGs. A better question than 'how relevant are the SDGs for African flagship universities?' may, therefore, be 'what local role should flagships play in helping to meet the SDGs?'. Flagships have a presence in many major African cities and towns, are designed to educate and train the workforce of tomorrow, and often provide an important economic and social and urban regeneration role. In some cases, the university provides an array of other services – medical treatment, electricity, internet

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[9] There is some discussion of the need for regional partnerships between countries to help governments learn from each other and build higher education capacity – for example Owens (2017, p. 418). Chankseliani, Qoraboyev and Gimranova (2021, p. 116) attempted to view higher education contributions to the SDGs through a 'glonacal' (global, national, and local) lens in Kazakhstan and Georgia, but merged the local and national categories when the challenges identified for each were broadly similar; they do, however, acknowledge that HEIs may need to work with local government to support local communities (2021, p. 120).

access, venues for community events and corporate meetings (McCowan, 2016, p. 511). Goal 11 calls for inclusive and resilient cities – universities can play an important role in meeting this goal through their dual role as being physically 'of' the city, but also by shaping its future development; urbanisation itself crosses several of the goals: healthcare, education, and climate change.

This chapter has introduced African flagship universities, institutions who, in some cases, were closely linked to developmental states and aspired to the developmental university model, and were later shaped by global trends in the structure and delivery of higher education, including massification. Although land-grant and Soviet university models may have influenced the idea of the developmental university, there was a contemporary of the new wave of African institutions that perhaps better illustrates what many large, African universities later became. In early 1960s California, Clark Kerr introduced a new model of public research university, and another ideal type: the 'multiversity'.

> The multiversity is not only larger but has many more "moving parts". The multiversity acquires ever more "accretions", the product of new opportunities and new problems, yet when conditions change it cannot rid itself of those accretions. In the multiversity there is an irreducible plurality of communities, functions, disciplines, internal interests, external constituencies, agendas, and beliefs. (Marginson, 2016, p. 23)

The 'accretions' of the US multiversity include administrative functions and external consultancy. For African flagship universities, accretions arrived upon the tide of marketisation and massification: increases in student numbers, new disciplines and courses, engagement with policymakers and businesses, regional campuses, and a mentoring role for other HEIs. Those universities following the developmental university model often reverted to being traditional flagship institutions (McCowan, 2019, p. 97), later bringing further accretions as new frontiers opened: from consultancy and skills training to international partnerships and SDG targets. As the national focus widened to accommodate international obligations, has there also been a local turn? Do flagships play a role in their communities? If so, have the responsibilities of universities to the towns and cities they call home become a further accretion? This study seeks to answer these questions. First, however, we need to understand what is meant by the local role of universities, and why 'place' is important.

3. Understanding university engagement and city regions

The contribution of universities to their place and their locality, and their engagement beyond teaching and research, has come under increased scrutiny over the past couple of decades. The vast majority of academic work on this contribution has focused on the Global North, and includes the positioning of 'third mission' activity and the recalibration of the university model to more closely integrate 'place'. Part one of this chapter looks at the limited literature that has emerged from the Global South, and then considers the implications of the 'North-South divide' – both for this study and broader work in the field. Part two examines place more closely, with a particular focus on cities and city regions and how their role in tackling global challenges is portrayed. The complex interplay of international discourses, national policymaking, and translation and interpretation within the local context means no one scale can be seen in isolation: the concept of the 'glonacal' (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) is introduced as a means of understanding the interrelation of global, national and local scales of place. The final part ties universities into these discussions by exploring different typologies of engagement including the triple helix and the engaged university, and examines how universities simultaneously engage across multiple scales.

3.1 University engagement in Africa

Literature on engagement in Africa often has a single-country focus, and in many cases employs a single university as case study. Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma (2021) examined the motivations for university-community engagement within a public university in Tanzania, and found that this activity is often treated as an 'add-on' to advance the interests of academics. They call for better institutional support to drive genuine engagement with communities. Mupeta et al. (2020) studied 'civic entrepreneurship' – projects undertaken for the greater good of society with no expectation of financial benefit – at the University of Zambia. Although this contribution is an institutional priority, they find that there are numerous challenges in implementation: political interference in the governance of the university, bureaucracy, inefficient communication processes across and within departments, and a lack of money. Also in Zambia, Zulu et al. (2019) reflect on a community engagement project which failed to secure the consent of most participants, and share the importance of building trust and understanding local values. Onwuemele (2018) looked at community engagement at several Nigerian universities, and concludes that incentives and promotion structures fail to reward work that benefits local communities. Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati (2019) and Ssembatya (2020) both

examine the processes and complexities around securing research funding to meet local needs, and both use Makerere University in Uganda as a case study. They call for more balanced partnerships with donors and other institutions, and improved appointment and promotion policies for university staff. There is a more developed literature on engagement in South Africa. In *Anchored in Place: Rethinking the university and development in South Africa*, Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk (2018) present case studies of city-campus relationships at several universities. The book seeks to promote a greater role for universities as agents of place-based growth and socio-cultural change, noting the role some universities play in this regard in Europe and North America (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 6). Other notable examples from South Africa include a highly-developed understanding of partnership dynamics between the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the local community set out by Mutero (2021), and an assessment of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's (NMMU) engagement with place by van Schalkwyk and de Lange (2018). The authors find that despite a strong place-based focus, engagement at NMMU is largely opportunistic rather than motivated by the problems faced by the city's communities.

Several volumes extend beyond national borders. In a study of university engagement with communities in secondary cities (primarily in South Africa, but also in Cameroon and Kenya), the authors find practices of engagement have roots in the founding principles of African universities as well as traditional societal values, although the emphasis on benefits for broader society have been tempered by globalisation and neoliberal pressures (Fongwa et al., 2022, p. 7). Analysis of community engagement through service learning by Mtawa (2019) is again rooted in South Africa, but is written with a view to wider debates in sub-Saharan Africa and the Global South. Service learning is an approach whereby 'staff and students and external communities establish sustainable partnerships and participate in activities that empower them' (Mtawa, 2019, p. 9). Rather than a panacea for deep-rooted societal challenges, service learning is presented as a means for promoting human development and the common good. Finally, an edited volume by Watson et al. (2011) presents case studies from members of the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, with contributions from multiple continents, including African representation from South Africa, Sudan and Tanzania. This examination of civic engagement foretells one of the common challenges from the studies above, published more recently: that appropriate incentives and reward structures are vital for sustaining this activity. The study also concludes that departments and institutions with less prestige are often more pioneering in their engagement activity (Watson et al., 2011, xxviii). That the editors found so

many issues in common across universities in the North and South, and that institutions in the South have a greater emphasis on improving community conditions and do so with smaller budgets, suggests there may be a valuable transferability of the learning from African flagships in this study to counterparts elsewhere.[10]

Occasionally one also encounters isolated examples of local university engagement elsewhere, such as the literature on urban development. Addis Ababa University has established a Railway Engineering Institute to train engineers to maintain the city's new light rail transit; all students are employed by the Ethiopian Railway Corporation (Kassahun, 2021, p. 166). In Kisumu, Kenya, the two local universities have partnered with the city and county administrations, civil society and the chamber of commerce to form the Kisumu Local Interaction Platform, and have addressed urban planning problems in the city, including the redevelopment of marketplaces (Smit, 2018, p. 71). Caution should, however, be extended to these examples. Whilst they may provide an insight into what is possible, they may not be representative (perhaps having been selected for their novelty), and the notion of 'best practice' is problematic. Pike, Rodríguez-Pose and Tomaney (2007, p. 1263) observe that whilst questions such as 'what works?' and 'what are the successful models?' appear to be neutral, they cannot be considered within a vacuum, outside politics. They add that the search for pragmatic, short-term solutions can limit difficult but sustainable public policy responses to local and regional development challenges.

This study builds on this previous literature by adopting a Comparative Case Study approach (covered in section 4.1) that incorporates engagement practice in ten countries, and focuses on flagship universities in particular. Our understanding of the challenges and incentives of engagement, covered in prior studies, is deepened – in particular by analysis of work at the University of Rwanda – and these are set within broader frameworks of the role of universities in society, their historical origins, and their relationships with government. These are developed into several models that aim to be transferable and generalisable: a framework of the engagement process in chapters 7 and 8, and a decision tree to show the path to starting a local engagement programme in chapter 9.

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[10] It should be noted that the universities featured in Watson et al. (2011) self-identify as 'engaged'. As of September 2023, the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities has 431 signatory member institutions in 85 countries (Talloires Network, 2023). Of these, the University of Cape Town, the University of Ghana, Makerere University, the University of Rwanda and the University of Zimbabwe are part of this study.

Divides and commonalities between North and South

Much of the literature on local engagement and the role of universities in society – including that cited in the sections that follow – originates from, and is concerned with, the Global North. Whilst often recognising that a simplistic split between North and South masks a great deal of variation within each, academics in the South have called for the contextualisation of theories and concepts imported from the North, and to strengthen the production of work grounded in the South (sub-Saharan African examples include Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 7; Mtawa, 2019, p. 6; Fongwa et al., 2022, p. 3).

There are two further observations regarding the relationship between North and South that relate specifically to the generation of knowledge on local university engagement, and therefore are relevant to this study (my role as a researcher from the North is covered in section 4.2). First, and as covered in section 3.2, cities across the North and South are seen as important actors in coordinating responses to global challenges, and are active participants in networks and other fora that cross continents. This partly reflects that a city dweller in Durban, South Africa may have more in common with a resident of Dundee, Scotland than with their fellow citizens in a village 50 kilometres away. It also underscores the interconnected nature of global challenges, illustrated by COVID-19 but perhaps more accurately demonstrated by climate change. What happens in one place has repercussions elsewhere, with little distinction between North and South, and no acknowledgement of national borders. The result, as called for by Oldekop et al. (2020), is a need for 'global' rather than 'international' development, for recognition that the North does not have all the expertise to tackle global challenges, for multi-directional learning, and for a focus on all countries and places rather than nation states in the North 'helping' those in the South. As such, the contribution of flagship universities in city regions in Africa to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, is of relevance to multi-faculty institutions in the UK and elsewhere.

Second, although the literature on universities and development (in chapter 2) and the literature on universities and place (this chapter) are mostly separate, there has been some recent mutual interaction between the broader fields of local and regional development (historically focused on Europe and North America), and the international development literature (largely concerned with low-income countries). These two large, multidisciplinary fields have in the past operated on separate tracks from one another (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose and Tomaney, 2017, p. 48), but as inequality has become a deep concern, globalisation has been critiqued, and the implication of interdependence between nations is increasingly apparent, the overlap is being explored.

Underpinning this is a recognition that there is no one 'correct' development path, and mutual learning is needed. On one side, MacKinnon et al. (2021, p. 11) suggest policymakers focused on local and regional development consider a broader view of development beyond measures of GDP, productivity and growth to include livelihoods, wellbeing and social infrastructure (such as community services, housing and belonging). This so-called endogenous development is inspired in part by research in development studies. In addition, the concept of 'inclusive innovation' has become prevalent in public policy and particularly as part of urban planning. It has its roots in the field of international development (Lee, 2020). So too does inclusive growth, a 'new mantra' for local economic policymaking (Lee, 2019, p. 432). On the other side, notions such as 'decentralised development co-operation' (covered in section 3.2) reflect a reinvigorated appreciation of the importance of sub-national governance and local processes for development and for the SDGs – mirrored in widespread devolution unfolding across much of Africa (Iddawela, Lee and Rodríguez-Pose, 2021, p. 3). Work on 'translocal development' bridges local and international development by emphasising the flow of people, capital and ideas (Westen et al., 2021).

This study aims to provide a similar point of intersection between these fields with higher education at the centre. The remainder of this chapter first takes a more expansive view of place, how city regions are theorised, and the role of cities, before locating universities in these discussions.

3.2 Understanding place, cities and city regions

The meaning of 'place' has been debated within the academic field of regional and urban studies for decades.[11] Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) explore the many 'turns' that have taken place in understanding sociospatial relations, and promote a fourfold approach that highlights the importance of territories, places, scales, and networks. Privileging any one dimension is, in their view, a mistake: to be place-centric, for example, treats a place as a discrete entity and ignores its broader economic, social and political linkages (Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008, p. 391). As a result, the coherence of 'the city' as a unit of analysis and the future of urbanisation has been challenged, with Rickards et al. (2016, p. 1539) concluding that 'materially, practically and conceptually, the figure of a neatly bounded city space has long proven illusory'. Martinez, Bunnell and Acuto (2020, p. 1101) agree that the city is no longer

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[11] Note that 'regional' here – and in the chapters to follow – refers to sub-national areas rather than blocs of countries.

the default unit of analysis in urban studies, and instead 'planetary urbanisation' has prevailed: the entire world is affected by the process of urbanisation, which has no boundaries and no simple 'inside' and 'outside'. But they also acknowledge that this academic understanding takes place at the same time the city has achieved recognition and status in international policymaking – explored in the following subsections. The focus of policymakers on cities has also led to universities being considered a key actor in city-based economic development strategies (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 12) – covered in section 3.3.

For this study the concept of the city region is used. This keeps the connection to cities that has captured the interest of policymakers and decision makers and is reflected in policies and strategies, but reflects a move towards the multidimensional understanding that places are more than a spatially-bounded location. A widely-adopted definition is that used by UN-Habitat.

> The term city-region refers to the concept of an urban core or cores, linked to peri-urban and rural hinterlands by functional linkages. The city-region approach shifts away from administrative boundaries and sectorial development strategies towards territorial strategies, characterised by vertical and horizontal structures of governance and sectors and focuses on the interconnectivity of an urban agglomeration and its hinterland. (UN-Habitat, 2017, vii)

According to Rodríguez-Pose (2008, p. 1026), the focus on city regions signals a shift from development focused on sectors to one focused on territories, and as a result there is a great need to reflect diversity of local contexts in policymaking. It also entails much broader and more complex governance structures, including more participatory ones. However, Watson (2019, p. 6) reminds us that the notion of the city region emerged in the North, and needs to also be grounded in the South – or, more precisely, in the individual contexts of individual places. She concludes that 'one size fits all' approaches are especially insufficient when examining low-income or emerging city regions, given that assumptions made in settings in the North regarding governance structures, resources, the informal and formal economies, civil society, and historical context are unlikely to apply.

The UN-Habitat conceptualisation of the city region, whilst extending the 'container' of the city to encompass relationships with the hinterland, does not acknowledge the wider networks (economic, political and social connections, interactions and flows) and scales (the local, regional, national and international) that cities are entangled in – dimensions recognised as defining the city region by some academics (Watson, 2019, p. 4). Addie (2019a) has shown how universities are embroiled in the shaping of these dimensions. Large multi-faculty institutions in particular are well-placed to transcend the physical boundaries of the city region through their activities and networks and the production of knowledge; in doing so, Addie

argues, they are key actors in constructing the region. However, universities are also shaped by territorial ties such as funding and governance arrangements, and competition amongst institutions means some realign their offer to the city region, whereas others shun regional discourses and look more broadly (Addie, 2019a, p. 17). This theorisation of the dual relationship between the university and the city region – to shape and reimagine the region, but also to be shaped and be subject to it – emerged from practice in Europe and North America, and the following chapters examine the quite different context that the ten public African flagship universities operate within.

Theorising about place and work to understand and reconcile multiple scales has also, quite independently, taken place in the field of higher education studies. Marginson and Rhoades (2002) introduced their 'glonacal agency heuristic' to guide work in comparative higher education and help understand how phenomena unfold, with an emphasis on looking beyond the nation state as the sole frame of reference.

> One of our aims is to advance the significance of studying *glo*bal phenomena. Yet we do not see such phenomena as universal or deterministic in their effects; thus, we also feature the continued significance of the *nat*ional dimension. Further, as we do not see either global or national phenomena as totalising in their effects, we feature the significance of the *lo*cal dimension. For these reasons, we construct the term, "glonacal". (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, p. 288)

The use of 'agency' refers to both entities or organisations as an agency (the World Bank, a government agency or a university), and the ability to exercise agency, either individually or collectively – the framework explores how both manifestations of agency play out across the glonacal. The authors emphasise the non-hierarchical interplay and flows between the levels of place, and between the two forms of agency, and build several additional dimensions into the model (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, p. 291). 'Reciprocity' refers to the two-way interactions of ideas and activity. 'Strength' references the availability of resources, and the force and size of activity and influence. 'Layers and conditions' are the historic structures on which this activity and influence is based, and which provide the means for interaction between the levels. Finally, the 'spheres of agency' and activity determine the geographical scope of activity and influence. In a paper published twenty years later, Marginson (2022, p. 1365) revisited the glonacal agency heuristic and noted that it has been used as the basis for higher education research, but that 'single-scale nation-bound methods still have a strong hold'. The paper integrated insights from human geography, echoing some of the discussions above and as such represents an interaction between the two academic disciplines (2022, p. 1371). It also reiterated the pitfalls of methodological globalism and methodological nationalism – the

privileging of the global or national scale respectively, with the view that it ultimately determines what happens on the other scales – and called for these single-scale visions to be 'cleared away to bring a fuller geography of higher education to life' (2022, p. 1390).

We will return to the roles of universities across scales of place both in the next section, and as a core feature of the Comparative Case Study in chapter 4, but for now we zoom in to popular debates over one particular physical form of place: the city.

Cities and global development

Cities are an important lens through which to analyse both development challenges and the role of universities. They are often simultaneously the home of and the solution to many pressing global issues. For example, cities account for 70 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and so the forefront of the battle for sustainable development will take place in cities themselves (Khan, 2017, p. 909; Wu et al., 2020, p. 1). Cities often suffer from significant inequalities and public health problems (Kuddus, Tynan and McBryde, 2020), yet they generate 80 percent of global GDP (World Bank, 2020). In Africa, cities drive employment and education opportunities, but 'exploding' African megacities can drain talent and resources from their hinterland and from rural areas (Ammann and Förster, 2018, p. 4).

Cities have become a prominent focus of policy and academic attention. Sustainable Development Goal number 11 targets sustainable cities. 'We are now, it seems, an urban species', notes a foreword to a special edition of the journal *Urban Studies* – 'the plight of humanity has come to be seen as inextricably tied to the welfare of cities' (Rickards et al., 2016, p. 1524). Others echo this, adding that cities have a superior ability to nation states to make progress in addressing certain international issues such as inequality, disease, terrorism and sustainability (Moir, Moonen and Clark, 2014). Such responsibilities are heightened by decentralisation which – whilst varying by country – adds a formal mandate for many regional or city governments to address development challenges (Lucci et al., 2016, p. 7).

Global narratives on cities have changed, with the World Bank embracing urbanisation (the shift in population from rural to urban settlements) as a potentially positive force for development in the World Development Report 2009, a notable shift from published views at the turn of the century a decade before (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014, p. 19). One does not need to look far to see statistics quoted on the proportion of people living in cities – more than half of the world's population – or the rise of global megacities; urban populations are projected to increase by 2.5 billion over the next 30 years (Mahtta et al., 2022, p. 1). In Africa,

urbanisation has a relatively short history but its pace now exceeds all other continents (Ammann and Förster, 2018, p. 24); the urban population will be greater than that of Europe within a decade (Bekker, Croese and Pieterse, 2021, p. 1).

The opportunities to tackle problems at a more local level may be positive, but the challenges faced are great. As urbanisation brings people to cities, 'social misfortune, distress and risk have effectively urbanised too' (Patel et al., 2015, p. 1). Cities can 'embody and reproduce' destructive forces such as violence, inequity and environmental degradation (Kasper et al., 2017, p. 5), with every city facing a unique configuration of future challenges (Moir, Moonen and Clark, 2014, p. 16). Such issues are equally applicable to high income country cities as low income ones. In the UK, economic inequalities have deep roots that can be traced back to before the inter-war years (Martin et al., 2021, p. 108), and the three cities perhaps commonly associated with research and innovation – Cambridge, Oxford and London – are also the three most economically uneven (Farmer and Gabriel, 2020).

Why have cities become so important? The central paradox of the modern metropolis is that 'proximity has become ever more valuable as the cost of connecting across long distance has fallen', writes Ed Glaeser in his ode to urbanisation, *Triumph of the City* (Glaeser, 2011, p. 8). Proximity means people, businesses and universities are packed closely together, enabling new ideas to grow, knowledge to spread and innovation to flourish. Although video conferencing may be free, ideas spread better face-to-face (Morgan, 2004). This thinking is not new. In 1890 Alfred Marshall wrote:

> When an industry has thus chosen a locality for itself, it is likely to stay there long: so great are the advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from near neighbourhood to one another. The mysteries of the trade become no mysteries; but are as it were in the air, and children learn many of them unconsciously. Good work is rightly appreciated, inventions and improvements in machinery, in processes and the general organization of the business have their merits promptly discussed: if one man starts a new idea, it is taken up by others and combined with suggestions of their own; and thus it becomes the source of further new ideas. (Marshall, 1890, p. 332)

The benefits that arise from proximity as described by Marshall are known as agglomeration effects. Agglomeration is the 'basic glue' that hold cities together, and the efficiencies that result are one of the defining features of urbanisation (Scott and Storper, 2015, p. 6). More recent work has built on these theories to argue that innovation and entrepreneurship do not simply happen in cities, but *require* cities – urban regions and cities are not mere containers but active partners for innovation (Florida, Adler and Mellander, 2017). Others add that the dynamism and new ideas that emerge from agglomeration are dependent upon a 'sufficient infusion of new blood' in the form of migrating workers (Fujita and Krugman, 2004, p. 162).

Universities also play an important part in this process, a role recognised in high-profile policies in the UK such as attempts to 'level up' poorer cities and regions by creating economic clusters – the gold standard of agglomeration in practice (HM Government, 2022, p. 39). This is partly because successful places often have 'institutional thickness', which describes the broad range of industries, actors and institutions which contribute to knowledge and innovation production. Universities also contribute to the 'social buzz' and cultural offer of cities and clusters (Borsi and Schulte, 2018, p. 1144).

The aggregated effect of agglomeration is a close correlation between the level of urbanisation and economic status (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014, p. 4). This relationship is two-way: economic development tends to lead to greater urbanisation, and cities in turn provide the foundation for continued growth (Scott and Storper, 2015, p. 6). The understanding that cities are a force for development yet simultaneously are home to a concentration of development challenges has led to greater attention on the future of cities. This has manifested in several areas, including interest in city leadership, in 'resilience', and in the external relations of cities.

Cities shouldering responsibilities

First, city leadership has been viewed as a bridge covering the gap between the need for urban decision-making and problem-solving, and a lack of formal city powers. As a result, leaders have needed to be creative and inventive, building coalitions and promoting reforms (Moir, Moonen and Clark, 2014, p. 52). Others note that cities are 'defined by pragmatism and collaboration', and call for a return to the Hanseatic-style leadership of cities, with mayors empowered to tackle humanity's most intractable problems (Barber, 2013, p. 4). Beyond the city, the role of mayors and city hall is one often one of soft power, attending international assemblies of nation states as partners or observers (Acuto, 2018, p. 135).

Boosting the power of city leaders is not always straightforward. Decentralisation and localism is often promoted as bringing efficiency gains, improved accountability, and economic growth, yet the mayors that often accompany the shift of power from central to local government have not, at least in the case of the US, presided over a democratic renewal. For every story of an ascendant New York driven by visionary leadership there is a declining Detroit, accompanied by mismanagement and corruption. Devolution needs to be designed so existing local elites and power structures are not simply reinforced (Tomaney, 2016). Further challenges arise from renewed nationalism, illustrated by the UK vote to leave the European Union and the US election of Donald Trump in the mid-2010s. International disengagement may strengthen local identities and local leaders might be able to address the concerns of citizens through developing

a shared agenda, or regions could be further pulled apart by fear and conflict (Turok et al., 2017).

Second, the notion of resilience has been popularised through initiatives such as the World Bank Resilient Cities Group and, in particular, the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities programme.[12] Although definitions vary, resilience typically refers to how a region responds to shocks and disturbances, and is distinct from long run adaptive growth. It has been perceived as an idea 'whose time has come' within development agencies and national governments, with cities under pressure to demonstrate their resilience (Martin and Sunley, 2015, p. 1). As the concept gained traction in the early 2010s, leaders began to shoulder growing responsibilities for their city to tick the latest urban and regional policy boxes – to be sustainable, smart and resilient. However, as Vale (2014, p. 191) has written, some parts of cities will be more resilient than others, and 'uneven resilience threatens the ability of cities as a whole to function economically, socially and politically'. Boosting resilience at a local level requires substantial resources and reliable support over long periods of time.

Beyond higher education being listed as a stakeholder for consultation, universities are not obvious in the literature over city leadership or urban resilience.[13] The efficacy of leadership and degree of resilience affects the autonomy and independence of cities, their place within international governance networks, and local policy development. Universities can contribute to these efforts, and there is a dearth of work on the relationship between higher education institutions and city halls. This is all the more surprising given their proximity: as Acuto (2016, p. 613) notes, 'the average distance between a city hall and the closest major university is just under four kilometres in four of the major networks (C40, WHO Healthy Cities, UNESCO Creative Cities and UCLG)'.

The third area is the external-facing activities of cities. Policymakers commonly assert that cities thrive when they are in constant connection with other cities (Clark and Clark, 2014, p. 51); academics remind us that cities have always functioned as nodes in complex systems of region, national and international trade – indeed it is their *raison d'être* (Scott and Storper,

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[12] The 100 Resilient Cities programme itself proved to be less than resilient, and closed in August 2019. Four universities in this study were in member cities: Addis Ababa, Cape Town, Ghana and Kigali. It offered a useful window into the different priority areas of cities – water pollution and housing in Accra, rapid urbanisation in Addis Ababa, drought and crime in Cape Town, and disaster plans and infrastructure development in Kigali.
[13] An exception is a study by Spaans and Waterhout (2017) of Rotterdam's participation in the 100 Resilient Cities programme. It positions the programme as a platform for debate between academics and stakeholders in cities.

2015, p. 6). There are clear shared advantages for cities and universities of being internationally engaged. International migrants, including university staff, share their skills and knowledge amongst their new colleagues. Working together on internationalisation can bring advantages for both city hall and universities, and sometimes marginalised communities too (Ransom, 2018). As long-distance scientific and knowledge exchanges increase, so do similar local interactions (Scott and Storper, 2015, p. 7). Internationalisation opens up new opportunities for selling goods and services, and attracting students, workers and visitors.

The formalisation of city connections is perhaps best embodied through the growth of formal city networks – from 55 in 1985 to more than 200 in 2016 (Acuto, 2016, p. 612). Although the scale of networks has grown, networking has long been the 'dominant tool by which to pool scarce local resources', from ad-hoc collaboration in the late 19th century to a 'golden age' of internationalism in the interwar years (Ewen and Hebbert, 2007, p. 337). Today, ambitious city regions across Europe have overseas offices (often in Brussels) and a complex web of relationships around the world. There are pushes too for deeper collaboration beyond wealthier cities: the OECD calls for 'decentralised development co-operation' between sub-national governments, in both high- and low-income states (Moreira da Silva and Kamal-Chaoui, 2019).

In many instances cities have embraced the responsibilities that have been devolved to them, with progressive cities prioritising development challenges whilst becoming more inclusive and participatory (Douglass, Garbaye and Ho, 2019, p. 3). A historical analysis of European city networking concluded that cities have to look for innovative ways to compete in a world still dominated by the nation state, but that the 'spirit of the Hanseatic League is alive and well in Europe's town halls' (Ewen and Hebbert, 2007, p. 328). African cities are active in several of the major networks, especially those focused on sustainability, with South African cities in particular well represented (Dietz, 2018, p. 148).

However, the promise of cities is 'hampered by patchy collaboration with national governments, limited access to global governance processes… meagre funding for collaboration, and poor data collection and sharing' (Acuto, 2016, p. 612). We also need to be careful not to overstate the capabilities of cities, and their ability to solve problems that have proved intractable for nation states. 'If the nation doesn't work, cities won't', states Mario Polèse (in Vidovich, 2020). And as Pike, Rodríguez-Pose and Tomaney (2017, p. 55) have noted, whilst cities and regions can shape their history, they remain constrained by and entangled within broader economic and political systems. That cities often have limited agency

is especially evident when we consider the primacy of national development in Rwanda in chapters 7 and 8.

Shifting the *power* to tackle local issues and to respond to wider challenges from nations to local governments and city halls offers the potential to make progress against the likes of the SDGs, and to better meet the needs of residents. But if only *responsibility* is transferred, without accompanying resources to enhance local institutional capacity and capability, it is unlikely that resilience, or decentralisation, will be successful. It is within this context that we can examine the local engagement role of universities.

3.3 Universities and their local role

In a high-profile 2007 report, the OECD called for universities to 'do more than simply educate and research': they must 'engage with others in their regions, provide opportunities for lifelong learning and contribute to the development of knowledge-intensive jobs which will enable graduates to find local employment and remain in their communities'. The report acknowledged that higher education institutions have been helping to serve the needs of local economies in many countries for hundreds of years, but these links have tended to be 'sporadic rather than systematic' until recently (OECD, 2007, p. 2).

Others echo this shift to a regionally relevant higher education system. Birch, Perry and Taylor (2013, p. 7) describe how the concept of higher education has 'morphed' from the notion of an unengaged ivory tower to a 'new, highly engaged, place-based or community-based concept'. In the UK, the pressure for universities to engage with local business is part of the 're-scaling' of local development and central government policy emphasis on local decision-making, together with budgetary pressures on governments and universities and a push for knowledge transfer from higher education to business (Pugh et al., 2016, p. 1359). More generally, although many older universities may have been 'in denial' of place or nationally focused, this is changing and there is a growing awareness of their surroundings (OECD, 2007, p. 12; Addie, 2016, pp. 3–4; Brennan et al., 2018, p. 6). A recent embodiment of this in the UK is the formation of the Civic University Network (Sheffield Hallam University, 2020), reflecting the prominence of local engagement on the agenda of leaders: 63 percent of UK higher education leaders think their university needs significant changes to adapt to the civic university and local growth agenda (NCEE, 2022, p. 10).

There are a few motivations that explain this shift. Driven by tightening public purse strings, there are pressures on institutions to be seen as relevant and to demonstrate societal value

(Addie, 2016, p. 2), and regional development agendas (themselves also often driven by public spending concerns) usually require coordination with local partners (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000, p. 478). There are pull factors too: local engagement can bring benefits to universities, including improved community and local government relations, increased student enrolments, and income from consultancy and training.[14] Perhaps above all, the fates of places and their universities are entwined: when one declines, all parties suffer; a dynamic recognised both in the UK and in South Africa (Christopherson, Gertler and Gray, 2014, p. 214; Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 2).

Typologies of engagement and the urban dimension

As McCowan (2019, p. 93) notes, there are strong parallels between the developmental university (covered in section 2.1) and the 'engaged university', the 'civic university', the 'service university', 'anchor institutions', the 'utilitarian university', and discussions on higher education and public good – the common denominator is a focus on service to external communities. Typologies of engagement that focus on the local and urban dimensions are covered below, but first it is worth stepping back to examine frameworks that aim to capture the university role in innovation systems. Gibbons (1994, p. 263) developed the idea of knowledge produced in the context of its application, known as 'Mode 2' research. The underlying driver of knowledge production in Mode 2 is usefulness to industry, government or society, and government plays a key role in promoting 'institutional permeability' and transdisciplinarity (Gibbons, 1994, p. 259). Complementing this is the triple helix model of innovation, emphasising university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000). Given the tantalising possibility of transformational economic change, the triple helix model has been popularised by policymakers outside of academia, and has spawned an annual international conference, an association in Rome, and an institute in Silicon Valley (ITHI, 2023; Triple Helix Association, 2023).

At the core of the triple helix model is the relationship and interaction between three primary institutional spheres: universities, industry, and government. The government provides funding and support, industry brings innovations to market, and universities have an important role in generating and disseminating knowledge, providing human capital, and helping new firms

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[14] Chatterton and Goddard (2000, p. 491) provide a breakdown of university teaching- and research-related drivers to greater regional engagement. They also provide a list of barriers to engagement. From the other side, the often-complex, multi-departmental and multi-site structure of many universities means it can be difficult for external actors who wish to engage with a university to do so (Goddard, Kempton and Vallance, 2013, p. 57).

(Etzkowitz et al., 2000, p. 315). The triple helix later became the quadruple helix, incorporating the public sphere (including media and culture), and then the quintuple helix, adding the environmental sphere and socio-ecological interactions, although these have gained less traction in academic studies (Galvao et al., 2019). However, and despite work to transfer the model to low-income settings (Etzkowitz and Dzisah, 2008), the triple helix has been criticised for largely overlooking non-Western contexts where there may be fewer resources (including limited research capacity), relatively weak linkages between sectors, and other barriers such as less developed intellectual property rights (Williams and Woodson, 2012). The applicability of the model in practice is further explored in section 8.3. Other models, often positioned with low-income or emerging economies in mind, include inclusive innovation (covered above in section 3.1), frugal innovation, with its low-cost, no-frills focus (Weyrauch and Herstatt, 2016, p. 12), and elevating the role of Indigenous knowledge in innovation systems (see section 10.2). There is an additional, more universal limitation of innovation models such as the triple helix: that the productivity growth they may engender in individual firms and businesses does not automatically lead to regional productivity growth, meaning efforts to boost innovation and regional development need to be explicitly linked (Marques and Morgan, 2021, pp. 14–15). This suggests an (even more) nuanced and important role for universities in these models through bringing in the local dimension.

Three notable concepts try to capture the local role of universities: the engaged university, the anchor institution and the civic university, and there is considerable overlap between the three. First, and underpinning the acceptance of universities playing a role in their regions, is the notion of the 'engaged university' with an implicit social or community focus, popularised by Watson et al. (2011). In parallel, the idea of the 'anchor' institution has grown in popularity – an institution embedded in the region, geographically rooted, acting in the long-term interest of the area and community, and partnering with other regional institutions such as museums, hospitals and community centres (Birch, Perry and Taylor, 2013). However, anchor institutions have been criticised for promoting an 'inclusive rhetoric' but instead perpetuating geographical inequalities through top-down governance structures (Addie, 2016, p. 5).

Complementing these concepts, but drawing more on the mission for which many (older) universities were founded, Goddard (2009) has pushed for a return to the civic university.

> The engaged civic university which I propose is one which provides opportunities for the society of which it forms part. It engages as a whole with its surroundings, not piecemeal; it partners with other universities and colleges; and it is managed in a way that ensures it participates fully in the region of which it forms part. While it operates on a global scale,

it realises that its location helps form its identity and provides opportunities for it to grow and help others, including individual learners, businesses and public institutions, to do so too. (Goddard, 2009, p. 5)

Goddard and colleagues have since developed the seven dimensions of the engaged civic university: it actively engages with the wider world as well as the local community; it treats engagement as an institution-wide activity; it recognises its location helps to form its unique identity as an institution; it has a sense of purpose, understanding what it is good for; it is willing to invest to have impact beyond the academy; it is transparent and accountable to stakeholders and the wider public; and it uses innovative methodologies in its engagement activities (Goddard et al., 2016, pp. 10–11). The notion of the 'engaged civic university' notably incorporates engagement with business, and reconciles a global role with a local role – both of which are sometimes absent in discussions over 'engaged' universities or 'anchor' institutions. The regional role of universities is a varied one, and goes beyond meeting the perceived skills needs of the region through education and training and tailoring research to local challenges. Chatterton and Goddard (2000) provide a comprehensive analysis of university roles, including in formulating regional development plans:

…in the search for inward investment there will be room for institutional participation in overseas delegations; in regional technological development programmes there will be opportunities for higher education institutions to provide expertise to assist with product and process innovation through consultancies, student placements and management development; in skills enhancement linked to raising regional competitiveness there should be a place for targeted graduate retention and continuing professional development initiatives; in cultural development, there will be scope for joint planning of provision of non-vocational education and of opening up of higher education facilities to the general public; and in terms of regional capacity building, higher education staff and facilities can be mobilised to promote public debate. (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000, p. 493)

Universities often provide evidence and support to those responsible for regional strategic planning, including seconding staff or writing the strategies themselves. However, Pugh et al. (2016, p. 1360) argue that the university can build on these sometimes disparate activities and can have an economic governance role, acting as 'animators' of regional development. For them, this means 'universities can occupy spaces of governance, take a developmental role, link up with policy at various levels and provide leadership, joined-up policies and incentives for regional economic development'. The relatively politically neutral position of universities in the UK mean they can effectively act as intermediaries between different levels of government. Finally, universities also often have an important regional role in other societal areas including public health, arts and culture, and sustainable development; as a result, the relationship between higher education institutions and their local area is 'a multifaceted one of

distinct but interrelating physical, social, economic and cultural dimensions' (Goddard and Vallance, 2013, p. 1).

University activity aimed at increasing local engagement – especially that concerned with industry partnerships and technology transfer – has often been grouped together under the banner of 'third mission activity', as distinct from 'core' research and teaching activity. Nelles and Vorley (2010, p. 342) cite several scholars who have criticised third mission activity for detracting from the 'core' purpose of a university, or for prioritising commercial relationships and contract research over teaching. However, the authors find little evidence to support this, and make a strong case for embedding the third mission with research and teaching and viewing the three missions as part of the inherent make-up of the contemporary university, observing that research and teaching are now seen as (but were not always seen as) mutually reinforcing. Nabaho et al. (2022) conducted a limited analysis of the conceptualisation of the third mission in African universities and also found that it was seen as a complement to research and teaching.

A decade and a half ago, the OECD (2007, p. 17) proclaimed that the region can be seen as 'a laboratory for research projects, a provider of work experience for students and a source of financial resources to enhance the global competitiveness of the institution'. This portrayal of the region as a source of bountiful opportunity for the university rather than an equal partner has perhaps been more nuanced in practice, although financial diversification doubtless remains a factor in regional engagement. Tuunainen (in Nelles and Vorley, 2010, p. 6) details the evolution of the third mission, growing from 'commercialisation and licensing to encompass a wider range of activities ranging from the application and exploitation of knowledge in an economic domain to harnessing the social and community orientated capabilities of universities'. Trippl, Smith and Sinozic (2012) show how third mission activities in several countries are converging towards broader societal objectives. More recent contributions have called for third mission activity to be strengthened (in this case in South Africa) by building the capacity of communities as well as that of the university (Petersen, Kruss and van Rheede, 2022). Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk (2018, p. 9) explain how third mission activity over the past two decades sought to engage more effectively with local communities, and has morphed into 'a new vision of universities as place-makers'. Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020, p. 20) warn of isomorphism – the tendency to emulate 'world-class' universities – in third mission activity; a theme revisited in chapter 10.

Much of the discussion on local engagement applies equally to universities in cities or in rural settings, but there are some specific considerations for urban universities. The idea of the urban university is not new. Over 50 years ago, Goodall (1970, p. 45) outlined three goals of the urban university: to continue to be a university – that is, to commit to teaching, research and public service; to particularly emphasise the public service component of this; and to effectively relate research and teaching to the urban environment of the university. Similar messages abound today: the university needs to 'mobilise its global knowledge' around areas of expertise and translate these for the benefit of the city (Goddard, Kempton and Vallance, 2013, p. 59). Cities themselves have come to see universities as a key institution for achieving local and global competitiveness and ensuring cultural vitality (Addie, 2016, p. 5). But linking the university research, teaching, third mission and community service roles is a 'massive challenge' (Pugh et al., 2016, p. 1361) – and one that, as we will see, is equally if not more onerous for African flagships.

An urban university, or a university in a city, faces particular challenges – two of these in particular concern the role of the university in (perhaps unwittingly) reproducing inequalities present in the city owing to their close coexistence with local residents. Reflecting on Ohio State University in the US, Bose (2015, p. 2616) positions the university as a neoliberal institution forced to compete, accumulate, build alliances and exacerbate 'existing cleavages of class and race' in the race to redevelop and expand its campus, destroying neighbourhoods and furthering inequalities – a dynamic that has also been observed in South Africa (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 19). Second, Addie (2016, p. 7) calls for the discussion on urban universities to be re-theorised as universities in urban society, and identifies a gap between the development of the university and broader urbanisation processes. He remarks that 'much academic and grey literature treats both "the city" and "the university" as rational, monolithic and capable actors whose spatial relations continue to be viewed instrumentally, separated from the contingencies of place'. Further, both city and university leadership often perceive the role of universities as centres for knowledge transfer and for producing outputs for furthering economic development, whereas more attention ought to be paid to 'alternate urban social relations' such as environmental sustainability or urban inequality. Urban and regional theorists are often missing from conversations over the future of the urban university, he notes (Addie, 2016, p. 4).

In addition to analysing these challenges, there are further reasons for distinguishing the role of higher education in cities from universities in regions. Some are not new – Goodall (1970,

p. 46), himself a university vice-chancellor, noted that most people and most problems are concentrated in 'metro-urban' areas. This concentration has only increased since, and with this shift has come changes in the practices of urban higher education, whose institutions are becoming more attuned to their urban environment (Birch, Perry and Taylor, 2013, pp. 8–9). However, Patel et al. (2015) acknowledge that it is not always clear what needs to be done to make cities work better. Part of addressing this is understanding the culture of knowledge production in universities in cities, and the implication that knowledge is culturally shaped by the institutions that generate it. Drawing on work in South Africa, the authors caution against importing 'best practice' models from other (predominantly Northern) cities, and instead co-producing local knowledge by bringing academics and practitioners together – for example by placing doctoral students in city hall. They conclude that the challenge of addressing urban sustainability 'rests on both research and policy innovation and on a much tighter interaction within and between the two' (Patel et al., 2015, p. 2).

Prioritising locally generated knowledge does not repudiate the need for international links between cities, or for cities to learn from one another, but underlines the importance of understanding individual context and increasing local capacity. Indeed, the links between local, national and global are particularly important in understanding the role of universities in city regions.

Universities and scales of place

For universities, the local, the national and the international (the 'glonacal') are often interconnected and interdependent – and sometimes in tension – and through the process of global engagement, universities represent their locality. Collinge and Gibney (2010, p. 386) suggest that university leaders face new complexities as a result of representing places rather than organisations: outcomes are difficult to measure, they lead initiatives without formal power but with responsibility, and they must accommodate the views of historically marginalised groups and organisations (such as social enterprises).

Somewhat paradoxically, it can be more difficult for universities to represent their locality within a city or a region than internationally, if they coexist with other universities or higher education providers. Where there are more than one or two universities, starting conversations with city leaders and building partnerships towards an agreed goal is a complex undertaking, particularly in a globally-integrated city where university leaders have to fight especially hard to be heard in a congested governance arena (Addie, 2016, p. 6). This raises fundamental questions about how universities should work together across and within areas – questions

further complicated by competition (for students and funding), and national policy contexts that seek to build internationally-competitive knowledge economies (Naidoo, 2011, p. 41). These questions are pertinent in sub-Saharan Africa given the proliferation of institutions over the past half-century, and especially so for flagship universities, who have an outsized influence over national higher education sectors.

These relationships are further complicated by mixing what Goddard, Kempton and Vallance (2013, p. 58) call 'transactional' relationships with civic partnerships – the former including matters such as estate management. They advise keeping the two separate so any disagreements arising from one sphere do not negatively affect relations as a whole. But at a more basic level, there are often significant cultural and mission-related differences between university leaders and local or city leaders, with one side finding it difficult to understand the drivers or even the terminology of the other (Goddard, Kempton and Vallance, 2013, p. 57; Christopherson, Gertler and Gray, 2014, p. 214). However, whilst leadership decisions can give an indication of the strategic direction of universities and cities and their willingness and desire to cross different scales of place, the bulk of the interaction between universities and their place will take place at a lower level – between staff, students, the public, businesses and officials – adding to the complexity of the interaction but also potential breadth of impact.

Many universities have international links through staff and student recruitment, networks of alumni and researchers, membership of international bodies and organisations, the formation of branch campuses and international partnerships, and departments focussed on global relations and the politics, history or development of specific regions of the world. In turn, universities can help internationalise their region (OECD, 2007, p. 16) and act as global gateways for attracting inward investment (Brown, 2022). Universities are simultaneously global players whilst significantly affecting their local environment; they operate on 'multiple and overlapping territories' and the challenge is to mobilise these connections to benefit the local area (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000, p. 478).

It is helpful to remind ourselves how different scales of place can coexist. Paasi and Metzger (2017, p. 9) recognise that the region is a 'flexible, malleable and mutable object of analysis'. Allen and Cochrane (2007) go a step further and propose that regions are political constructs.

> …the governance of regions, and its spatiality, now works through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from the networks of relations that stretch across and beyond given regional boundaries. The agencies, the partnerships, the political intermediaries, and the associations and connections that bring them together, increasingly form 'regional' spatial assemblages that are not exclusively regional, but

> bring together elements of central, regional and local institutions. In the process… a more fluid set of regional political relationships and power-plays has emerged that call into question the usefulness of continuing to represent regions politically as territorially fixed in any essential sense. (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p. 1163)

As such, actors such as central government are not bodies that sit over or apart from regions, but are entangled in regional governance structures. Applied to higher education, the international activities of an urban university, for example, are very much part of that city region, if we are willing to look beyond the city as a purely geographical concept. As Addie (2016, p. 4) observes, universities are 'implicated in the global extension of urbanisation processes that, alongside the expansion and fragmentation of metropolitan space, defy the reduction of "the city" to an administrative unit or "the urban" to the local scale'.

There is therefore a clear divide between viewing the city, or the region, or the city region, as an inter-spatial concept that is both local and inherently international, and as an administrative unit that merely forms a constituent part of a greater whole. Officials governing the local and the regional will continue to be constrained by serving their fixed, territorial constituency, with the global being primarily a policy concern. Higher education has no such fixed constituency, and needs to 'define its sphere of influence in a flexible way' (OECD, 2007, p. 4).

Universities can simultaneously engage with multiple scales of place, and arguably this is most evident in cities, which themselves – owing to the dense network of institutions, people and businesses within them – draw on the international and shape the national, and are in turn moulded by both. To echo Goddard (2009), universities can be locally rooted and internationally engaged – and later chapters will assess the extent to which African flagships aspire to do this, are able to do so, and the trade-offs incurred and tensions involved. Before this, chapter 4 sets out the methodological foundations of the study, and the multi-scalar Comparative Case Study framework which provides the structure.

4. Researching African flagship universities

This chapter details my methodological approach: the use of a Comparative Case Study, my data collection and analysis, how I ensure valid and trustworthy findings, and the ethical considerations I faced. It concludes with some brief thoughts on the construction of global and local knowledge relating to my study. To answer the research questions in section 1.2 – to understand the role of flagship universities in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions, their characteristics, how they conceptualise their role in society, and whether they coordinate local engagement activity – I combined a broad survey of what universities themselves are saying and planning (through their strategies), and in-depth interviews with key individuals at a flagship university, the University of Rwanda. I frame my research as a Comparative Case Study, with thematic analysis of these two data components forming the main part of the study: the strategic plans of ten flagship universities, and interviews with 16 senior staff and officials from universities, government, and other organisations working in Kigali, Rwanda. This chapter sets out the choices I made and discusses these within the wider philosophical context of generating new knowledge.

4.1 Comparative research and Comparative Case Studies

The following sections reflect on the nature and implications of comparative research, explain why a case study approach was adopted, and explore the merits and limitations of the Comparative Case Study.

On comparative studies

There is a history of debates on the possibilities of comparison within the field of comparative education (Cowen, 2000; Green, 2003). This study seeks to illuminate the phenomenon of local engagement across flagships in Africa rather than provide a rigorous comparison, but the contours of comparative study are nonetheless worth briefly visiting. Teichler (1996, p. 432) states that comparative study can be indispensable for understanding a reality shaped by common international trends, but studies benefit most when they have a clearly defined hypothesis to be tested, and researchers are open to new and surprising findings that require their conceptual framework to be restructured. Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) observe that it is one of these common international trends – that of the internationalisation of education policies and the proliferation of benchmarking, ranking, and comparisons between nations – that has driven a renewed interest in comparative research. They call for comparative education

studies to become less a political tool for educational policy and more a means of intellectual inquiry; a historical journey rather than a mode of governance. Two of their prescriptions in this regard are especially pertinent for my research. First, they call for the focus on comparative education to be on problems rather than facts or realities.

> By definition, the facts (events, countries, systems, etc.) are incomparable. It is possible to highlight differences and similarities, but it is hard to go further. Only problems can constitute the basis for complex comparisons: problems that are anchored in the present, but that possess a history and anticipate different possible futures; problems that are located and relocated in places and times, through processes of transfer, circulation and appropriation; problems that can only be elucidated through the adoption of new zones of looking that are inscribed in a space delimited by frontiers of meaning, and not only by physical boundaries. (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003, pp. 436–437)

Considered within their historical, political, social and economic contexts, the problems facing flagship universities as institutions, together with the development challenges facing the communities, city regions, and nations they inhabit, provides a suitable basis for such complex comparisons. Second, Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003, p. 426) note the paradox of global benchmarks and indicators serving to promote national policies in the field of education, which is perceived as a field where national sovereignty can still be exercised. In my research I observe the complex trade-offs involved when flagship universities are subject to similar international comparisons and benchmarking (for example competing in global university league tables, and aspiring to become a 'world-class university'), whilst also inhabiting a public, national, and sometimes local role that demands the university to adapt and be relevant to society.

Responding to such critiques, Carney (2009, p. 79) argues that globalisation has fundamentally reconfigured how we should see comparative education, and suggests a shift from the traditional focus on contained national studies towards recognising global interconnectivity. He proposes 'policyscapes' which are 'transnational in character and have at their core a particular constellation of visions, values, and ideology', and allow us to view states as they manoeuvre in and around global discourses. The thread connecting his three cases – Denmark, Nepal, and China – is that, although successful development and the role of the state is understood differently in each, in all three the state 'references its reform efforts to "best practices" and "accepted knowledge" gained from exposure to the standard as perceived to be practiced in the West and uses these justifications to impose a range of new educational arrangements' (Carney, 2009, pp. 71–72). Through a Comparative Case Study, my research examines how internationally accepted notions such as global connectivity, international competitiveness, knowledge societies, civic engagement, employable graduates, and research

excellence may be shaping flagship university engagement activity at the local level in African city regions.

Adopting a case study approach

My study has one primary case (the University of Rwanda) and nine secondary cases (other African flagship universities). This research design allows me to ask how these flagship universities see their role in society today, and specifically in city regions. It allows me to then tell the story of how these institutions, by definition giants of higher education within their countries, have needed to evolve from their historic roots as national developmental universities to a complex role balancing the local, national and international, in the face of growing competition and resource constraints, and a forever-shifting political, social and economic landscape. Choosing the University of Rwanda as a primary case meant I could explore this role in depth and detail in the city of Kigali; nine secondary cases allowed me a broader perspective and the identification of common trends and individual differences. In contrast, a survey of 200 university leaders across the continent, for example, may permit common challenges to emerge, but it would not let me study the dynamics of flagships in particular, and not in any detail, nor could I situate these universities within the local areas they inhabit, let alone city regions. In short, a case study approach best allows me to answer my research questions and understand whether a local turn is taking place in African flagships.

Debates over case study approaches have traditionally focused on the definitions and parameters of cases. According to Yin (in Yazan, 2015, p. 4), a case is 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context'. Stake (2013, p. 3) contends that cases are bounded and have an 'inside' and an 'outside': some components are within the system and the case and other features are outside, helping to define the environment. He adds that multiple case studies allow us to see how phenomena perform in different environments. Merriam (in Yazan, 2015, p. 8) understands a case as a phenomenon occurring in a bounded context, as long as researchers can specify the phenomenon of interest and draw its boundaries or 'fence in' what they are going to inquire.

When a comparative case study is adopted, the approach of Evans et al. (2000, p. 106) is fairly commonplace. Studies make either a two- or three-way comparison, driven by a specific question or rationale pertinent to the chosen countries, or asking questions about multiple examples, often with a view to the development of typologies or identifying 'effective practice'. Studies are motivated by the need to either borrow, advise, evaluate or the 'curiosity-

motivated need to find out and describe practices from other cultures'. Whilst these fundamentals are present in my study – I ask questions relating to multiple examples across different city regions; I explore how phenomena unfold in different flagships with unique local contexts and histories – I adopt a specific approach, that of the Comparative Case Study (CCS), as developed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2016).

The Comparative Case Study (CCS)

Although there are numerous benefits to case studies, the traditional method has come under criticism. Dowling and Brown (2012, p. 171) describe Stake's approach as 'a mythologising of research and a romanticising of the world in general'. They take issue with the notion that we can create a bounded system – 'even a single actor participates in a multiplicity of research sites upon which research acts selectively' – and suggest instead that case studies are framed as a form of sampling, a 'case of an object that is defined in the following terms…'. Nisbet and Watt (in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 77) highlight several other limitations of case studies: they may not be generalisable, they are not easily open to cross-checking, and they are prone to problems of observer bias.

A reevaluation of the function of case studies in light of these criticisms laid the ground for the CCS approach. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013, p. 78) reference the work of Robson and Yin, arguing that case studies opt for 'analytic' rather than 'statistical' generalisation. As such, the concern 'is not so much for a representative sample (indeed the strength of the case study approach is that the case only represents itself) so much as its ability to contribute to the expansion and generalisation of theory… which can help researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations, i.e. there is a logical rather than statistical connection between the case and the wider theory'. Case studies can offer a 'thickness' of description, allow exploration of complexities and multiple perspectives, and combine sources and methods into a narrative rooted in reality; they can present 'a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 73).

The CCS differs from conventional case study methodologies as it emphasises the global, national, and local facets of a case – and in doing so complements the glonacal agency heuristic covered in section 3.2. This multi-scalar understanding is at the core of the CCS approach, which evolved from the 'vertical case study', also developed by Bartlett and Vavrus (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006; Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009). The CCS differs from the vertical case study as there are two additional axes: a horizontal one looking at how the phenomena have unfolded

in other locations (adding an additional dimension to the glonacal agency heuristic), and a transversal one (mirroring the 'layers and conditions' of the glonacal approach) that situates the case in historical perspective (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016) (see figure 2 in section 1.3 for an illustration of the axes). The resulting lack of a strictly defined 'in' and 'out' is a hallmark of the CCS. The case is often grounded in a particular site, and examines the way that broader national and international policies, ideas, and discourses impact locally on this site, as well as situating it in historical processes and developments. As the authors put it, 'local understandings and social interactions should not be considered demographically or geographically bounded… understanding of the microlevel is viewed as part and parcel of larger structures, forces, and policies' (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006, p. 96). In doing so, the CSS helps to address concerns about a limiting focus on one scale.

> One common approach [in development studies] is for non-local forces to be 'scaled away', i.e. non-local factors are relegated to the national or international level of scale and are thus viewed as a relevant 'context'. For instance, important loci of legislation, governance and market forces impinge on the localities under consideration, but are not considered as an integral and active part of the livelihoods of local people. (Zoomers and Westen, 2011, p. 378)

The CCS also departs from traditional case studies by adopting an explicitly qualitative approach. In developing their theoretical underpinning of the CCS, Bartlett and Vavrus (2019) draw on the critical realist approach of Joseph Maxwell. The critical realist combines a realist ontology ('the belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our beliefs and constructions') with a constructivist epistemology ('the belief that our knowledge of this world is inevitably our own construction, created from a specific vantage point, and that there is no possibility of our achieving a purely "objective" account that is independent of all particular perspectives') (Maxwell, 2012, vii). Emphasis shifts from scientific notions of validity and reliability to an 'iterative, emergent research design which follows the inquiry' (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p. 7). Approaches that promote single cases to avoid comparisons or the setting of firm case boundaries are eschewed in favour of a *tracing* logic: 'comparing how policies or processes unfold as they are influenced by actors and events over time, in different locations, and at different scales, including transnationally' (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2019, p. 3).

There are numerous advantages to employing the CCS approach in my research, given the need to examine how the functions of complex organisations are changing over time, and situating these within national and international policy environments. Bartlett and Vavrus (2019, p. 1) suggest that by encouraging a 'logic of tracing' as a means of comparison, CCS can boost theoretical generalisability. The approach can also avoid privileging the nation-state as the

primary scale, potentially placing what happens at the local level 'on a more equal footing with official, authoritative knowledge' (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006, p. 98). But most importantly, the model is well suited to examining practice and policy (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, pp. 1–2). By effectively shedding traditional case study boundaries and embracing a multi-scalar approach to place, I can simultaneously examine the influence of international norms and societal needs on national policy, and how this unfolds locally. In other words, the CCS can coherently reconcile activity at different scales within a case. This is helpful as changes in interpretation and implementation of policy, for example, can be traced through the scales (and also through the other axes of time and place). Bartlett and Vavrus (2016, p. 2) draw on Bourdieu's practice theory to explain how the CCS approach can help unpack the complex process of *appropriation*, where actors interpret and adapt policies and ideas developed in other places and at other times to meet their own needs (this is a notable feature of Rwanda's development model, as seen in section 8.1).

The CCS methodology has been critiqued, most notably by Sakata, Oketch and Candappa (2020). They call for greater recognition of how a mixed methods approach can strengthen the (traditionally qualitative) CCS process, whilst highlighting the lack of academic scrutiny of the methodology, and noting that the term 'comparative case study' insufficiently captures the interaction between the three axes which is an intrinsic part of the framework. There is also, in my view, the opportunity to further integrate a more profound understanding of 'place' as more than a spatially bounded location, drawing on work in the fields of both education and regional development (see chapter 3). The use of city regions with their interconnectedness between the centre and the periphery, and flagships with their links between regional campuses, is a first step in extending the model.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

This section is split into two parts, setting out and reflecting upon the main methods I employ in this study – thematic analysis of strategic planning documents, and interviews (which themselves are also thematically analysed – see figure 3). Thematic analysis is a reflexive process with the researcher's role in knowledge production at the heart, elevating the unique insights of the researcher, formed through sustained engagement with the texts, to the fore. Interviews explore the mindsets of individuals working in, around, and behind the scenes of matters close to the research topic. Together with the frameworks and theories that I take to the data *a priori* (summarised in section 1.2), these methods allow me to tackle the research questions. The role of flagship universities in the development of sub-Saharan African city

regions is one clearly open to contestation and a multiplicity of views, but the methods encourage the synthesis of different viewpoints – including my own – in understanding this, whilst recognising tensions and ambiguities. Similarly, the combination of documents and interviews are complementary. Strategic plans are ways to balance institutional ambitions (attract international students, for example) and external expectations (such as accountability for public money) (Stensaker et al., 2019, p. 541). They offer, as explored further in section 6.1, a window into the priorities, plans, and values of an institution, and can reflect and in turn reproduce wider societal discourses. Interviews (analysed in chapters 7 and 8) allow us to explore the scaffolding around the strategic plans. What motivates institutional priorities and why? What else is the university doing? What is changing and why? What are the obstacles, the challenges, and the opportunities? Interviews offer a window into individual perspectives on the role of the university and, sometimes, an unofficial view that can reinforce, explain, oppose, or contradict the official view presented in the strategic plan. As such there is interaction between the interviews and documents – they can corroborate each other but also reveal tensions.

Figure 3: Data collection methods used to study flagship universities in sub-Saharan Africa
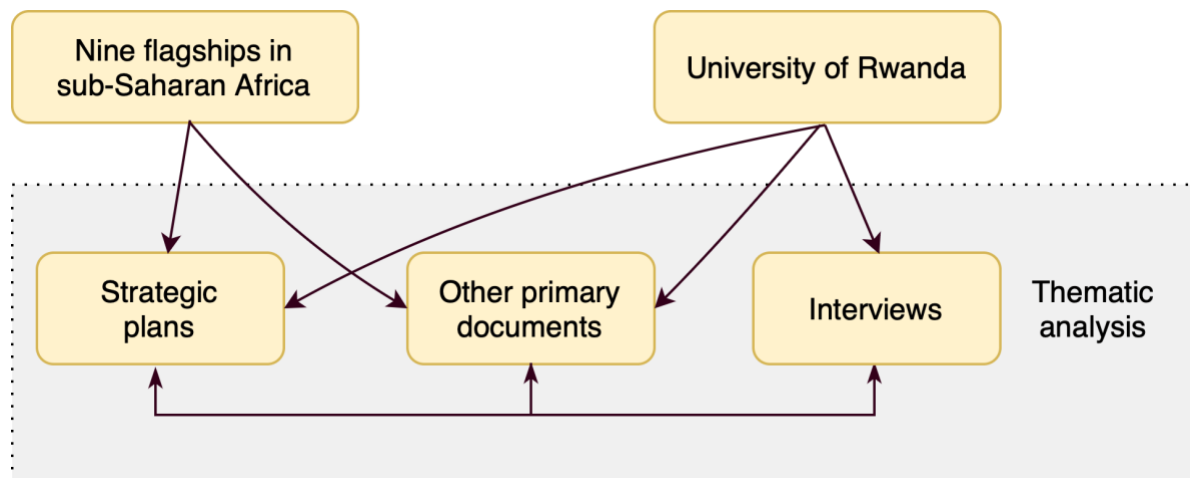
Thematic analysis of documents and interviews

Table 3 in chapter 6 provides details of the strategic plans for the ten flagship universities. For the University of Rwanda, I also gathered supplementary materials. These include evidence of university collaboration, networks, and partnerships including press releases and newspaper coverage, national and sectoral development strategies, and city masterplans.

As Tight (2012, p. 304) notes, documents are not neutral or objective media but should be viewed in light of the cultural context in which they were written, and as tools to construct social reality and a version of events. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013, p. 34) add that policy reports in particular can reveal assumptions that underlie reforms, represent outlooks and ideologies, and embody the tensions of state policy (the limitations of strategic plans are explored in section 6.1). The close links between flagship universities and their national governments are discussed in some detail in the coming chapters; the often complex interrelations between national governments and multilateral organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank complicate this further.

An additional consideration is those documents that I was unable to secure access to, whether intentionally (files that are withheld or confidential, or never created in the first place) or because they are lost or otherwise unavailable, and the importance of recognising that as a researcher I will only ever be offered an incomplete picture, and the picture I construct will be a triangulation of my interviews, document analysis and personal observations. This picture captures a snapshot in time, and even by the time of writing may be dated. Above all, one of the criteria for selecting the flagship universities in this study is the availability of strategic plans for my analysis (see section 1.1), and as such my sample is determined by the extent of documents in the public domain.

Guided by my research questions, I qualitatively analysed flagship university strategies and my interview transcripts using *thematic analysis* – an iterative process of finding 'patterns of meaning' within a data set by reading, coding, and generating themes. Examples of themes include the history, external pressures and the mechanics of work that form the three 'components' in chapter 7. Thematic analysis is a flexible method allowing complex and nuanced understandings, but this flexibility and scope for different approaches means it is particularly important to be clear about epistemological assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). There are six main phases (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87; and Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594):

1. Familiarisation with the data: transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.

2. Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

3. Generating initial themes: collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. Reviewing themes: checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.

5. Defining and naming themes: ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. Producing the report: the final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

There are numerous assumptions and issues that need to be addressed. The way we perceive the development of knowledge often falls somewhere along a continuum between two opposing perspectives. My approach primarily aligns with a *constructionist* perspective, where I investigate how the priorities, actions, and processes detailed in strategy documents are influenced by broader societal discourses. This differs from an *essentialist* or *realist* perspective, which would place more emphasis on objectively representing the experiences and realities of the participants (in this case, the authoring institutions) and less on examining the external factors that may have shaped their perspectives. However, there is necessarily an element of this reporting: I also needed to know what institutions say they want and intend to do, and how wider narratives and discourses are being interpreted and harnessed at the local level. As such, I am listing the furniture in the house, but directing most of my attention to examining why these items are there and how they got there. This complements my overall thesis framing of a multi-level Comparative Case Study, which explores the interplay of global, national and local discourses.

It is primarily an *inductive* analysis, a bottom-up, data-driven exploration of the strategies to generate codes and themes without a preconceived notion of what these might be. This is especially important given I am analysing documents written in a cultural, political and geographic context dissimilar from my own as a researcher from the Global North. Yet there is an unavoidable *deductive* element, as my experience and research interests unavoidably shaped the codes and themes I generated, and my research questions informed my coding rubric and acted as a filter on the information I paid more attention to (for example, any discussion of external engagement activity); as Braun and Clark (2006, p. 84) put it, data is not coded in an 'epistemological vacuum'. Finally, I took a *latent*, as opposed to a *manifest*, approach to generating and labelling themes, which entails going beyond surface, semantic content and exploring the underlying influences, assumptions and meanings of the text.

Similar studies (see section 6.1) have tended to use content analysis as opposed to thematic analysis. The two methods are similar, and indeed are often confused, or used interchangeably (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p. 398). Krippendorff, a prominent voice for the content analysis school, notes that the main motivation for using content analysis is that the answers sought cannot be found by direct observation, although inferences drawn can be validated, at least in principle. The text is a 'vehicle of communication' for unpacking and understanding motivations and assumptions; the physicality of the text itself is of little interest (Krippendorff, 2010, p. 234). The goal of content analysis, therefore, is to link results to their context or to the environment in which they were produced (Downe-Wambolt 1992 in Bengtsson, 2016, p. 9). This is a useful frame to borrow, and I explore the purpose of strategic plans section 6.1.

However, there are two main reasons why I have chosen thematic analysis and not content analysis. First, content analysis aims to make replicable and valid inferences from data, and is divorced from the authority of the researcher (Krippendorff, 2010, p. 234). In other words, it is a scientific tool that should enable other researchers to reproduce the findings. In contrast, the form of thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke is explicitly framed as a reflexive process, with the researcher's role in knowledge production at the heart. Instead of a replicable study with multiple coders and statistical reliability measures, the emphasis is on a continuous, transparent and documented process of reflection, decisions and assumptions, based on a rigorous and consistent process of coding and generating themes (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594). The unique insights of the researcher, formed through sustained engagement with the text, is regarded as a strength rather than a methodological weakness.

Second, content analysis approaches can favour an element of quantitative analysis by, for example, scoring strategies against a set of criteria (Fitzgibbons and Mitchell, 2019) or the ratio of certain concepts within text (Gaffikin and Perry, 2009). Such an approach may have generated interesting comparative data. But the shortcomings are, in my view, significant. Although latent and non-quantitative variations of content analysis exist (for example Taylor, Fitzgibbons and Mitchell, 2020), those with quantitative elements lend themselves to a deductive framework of values and weights which cannot, in my view, be fairly applied across the highly varied contexts of the universities and city regions I am analysing, and could inadvertently reflect – as a Western researcher – the global norms and discourses I seek to interrogate. Furthermore, the act of assigning scores and values not only presumes one form of strategic plan is 'better' or more effective than another, but lends itself to the production of

league tables and rankings, a development I am uncomfortable with promoting given the tendency of such devices to encourage homogeneity and suppress adaptation to local needs (Lim, 2018, p. 417). In summary, content analysis resembles an interview with the data, whereas thematic analysis is an open conversation – an approach best suited to tackling my research questions and to uncovering the traits of modern flagship universities and their role in local development.[15]

Interviews with elites and senior officials

I conducted 16 interviews with academics and leaders from the University of Rwanda, officials from the Government of Rwanda and the City of Kigali, and senior staff at other organisations working in Rwanda. This sample captures four constituencies essential for answering my research questions: academics and university staff responsible for delivering university activities, senior figures who lead on strategic direction, officials and advisors who are influential behind-the-scenes to implement these policies, and individuals based at other organisations but who work with the University of Rwanda or are familiar with its operations. Five interviewees were employed by the University of Rwanda; nine worked within higher education including for other institutions in Kigali; five were civil servants or in political positions; and four worked for international or civil society organisations. However, and in what became an example of an important phenomenon as my research unfolded, some interviewees have worked within both the government (or other public bodies) and higher education institutions in Rwanda.[16] Where this is the case, I have used the most relevant post when pseudonymously identifying them in the text (section 4.4 covers this in more detail).

Interviewees were selected on the basis of seniority within their institution (to capture the views of leadership teams and insight into the strategic positioning of the organisation) and domain expertise (in external engagement, urban development, and higher education). Individuals were initially identified through their authorship of articles and planning documents, involvement in

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[15] The same logic holds when considering other qualitative research methods or philosophical approaches. For example, critical discourse analysis (as a method) and post-structuralism (as an approach) both differ from thematic analysis in their underlying theoretical assumptions and research focus. Critical discourse analysis emphasises the exploration of language's role in constructing power dynamics and ideologies, whereas thematic analysis primarily concentrates on identifying and reporting patterns within the data. In contrast, post-structuralism challenges the stability of meaning and fixed social structures, often leading to the deconstruction of established concepts (Mason and Clarke, 2010). Thematic analysis, on the other hand, seeks to organise and present recurrent themes within the data without necessarily questioning the stability of meaning or social structures. As such, whilst these methodologies or approaches are concerned with revealing hidden assumptions, contradictions or biases, thematic analysis focuses on providing a rich and detailed account of the studied phenomenon based on the patterns that are generated from the data.

[16] This is also why the total for the aforementioned categories exceeds 16 people.

relevant research projects (including, for example, UK-funded Global Challenges Research Fund projects), and a search of institutional websites and the professional networking site LinkedIn. However, following my initial interviews, 'snowball' sampling – where existing study subjects recruit or recommend future subjects from among their acquaintances – became the main driver for identifying interviewees. In some cases, an interview was willingly granted after a brief introduction by email. In other cases, for high-profile individuals, multiple gatekeepers granted access as my request was passed upwards through increasing levels of seniority, a process of securing access that seemed unsurmountable without personal introductions from contacts trusted by the gatekeepers.

Interviews lasted an average of approximately one hour. Many were supplemented by emails or additional calls where I clarified points and asked further questions, and seven were preceded by meetings where I introduced myself and my research before being granted a full interview at a later date. Nine interviews were conducted in-person in Rwanda, and seven interviews were conducted remotely due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

My remote interviews took place in mid-2021, and several factors meant I was in the fortunate position to be able to continue my interviews during the pandemic. By this date, video calls were an accepted alternative to face-to-face meetings within the government and higher education sectors following protracted lockdowns in Rwanda (my video interviews were roughly the same duration as the face-to-face ones). I had met several of my remote interviewees in person before speaking remotely, easing the transition to an online interview. I also benefitted from the significant investment Rwanda has made in internet infrastructure, a characteristic of the 'developmental state' model of governance (covered in section 8.1) and a core part of the country's ambition to become a knowledge economy (Gagliardone and Golooba-Mutebi, 2016). This investment meant, at least for the 'elites' I interviewed in the government offices and university headquarters in Kigali, the call quality was mostly on par with one I would make to London. Yet there are also important differences between remote and face-to-face interviews, which I resumed when travel restrictions allowed. The most significant is the lack of contextual data, explored in more detail by de Villiers, Farooq and Molinari (2021). When I returned to Rwanda, I had a greater awareness and appreciation of context afforded by being in the research setting: the university leader pointing out the window to the road that will be built following the signing of a new memorandum of understanding with City Hall; the lecturer sketching on a notebook a map of the informal settlements where students are taken on walking tours; my taxi driver reminiscing about how much has changed

in the city in the past decade, or describing the difficulties of finding a job, or explaining how to navigate security at the campus gates.

My data collection was facilitated by a mandatory research permit granted by the Government of Rwanda – a process which took several months. Much has been written about the ease (or otherwise) of doing research in Rwanda, and of the administrative complexity of the research permit process (Gebauer (2015), Jessee (2012), Park and Shema (2019)). Loyle (2016) discusses the risks of self-censorship on the part of the researcher in seeking a research permit. However, my experience has more in common with Schräpel (2015, p. 34), who reflects that:

> it seems that I had serendipitously designed a research that was in line with government's initiatives and the future vision of the country. Consequently my experiences with government institutions were rendered to the complete opposites of what some colleagues reported.

My research questions and interview questions, drafted before I was even aware that I needed a research permit, remained largely unchanged throughout the process. I visited Kigali in February 2020 and November 2021, and during this period I was a Research Affiliate at the University of Rwanda, with a supervisor from the College of Education – a precondition of my research permit, but one that opened doors and offered a sounding board for ideas and deepened my understanding of the role of the university. My research affiliation and research permit both expired before I could complete my interviews, but extensions were relatively straightforward. Whilst COVID-19 delayed my data collection and slowed my overall research due to additional caring responsibilities, the impact was mostly manageable. In other areas related to my study topic, the effects are more significant. As the analysis in section 7.4 shows, the pandemic impacted university engagement activity. The broader impact of COVID-19 on higher education in Rwanda had an urban dimension, with students in rural areas and those from vulnerable families worst affected, in large part due to poorer internet connectivity (Twesige et al., 2021).

Interviews were semi-structured (see the appendix for an example of my interview questions; these were tailored for each interviewee). A semi-structured approach offered the opportunity for interviewees to reveal new information and insight and identify areas that I may have missed, whilst covering the major areas of analysis: the role of the university, relationships with other organisations, and opportunities and challenges. Interviews were transcribed and then thematically analysed following the same process used for university strategic plans (earlier in this section).

Again, there are numerous assumptions and issues that need to be addressed. I interviewed senior leaders and officials for my research, and this focus brings challenges and opportunities. The literature on so-called 'elite' interviews has grown in the past 25 years as the benefits of 'studying up' and the particular difficulties of this have been recognised. Most authors note the reversal of the traditional power asymmetry discussed at length by the likes of Kvale (2007, p. 15), whereby in most qualitative research interviews the interviewer 'has a scientific competence, he or she initiates and defines the interview situation, determines the interview topic, poses questions and decides which answers to follow up, and also terminates the conversation'. Neal (1995) details her experiences of powerlessness, anxieties over her status as a PhD researcher and dilemmas over the physical presentation of self whilst interviewing higher education elites. Conti and O'Neil (2007, pp. 72–74) explore issues arising from interviewing senior WTO officials, in particular meetings being cancelled or cut short due to a lack of time, frequent interruptions, and persistent questioning of the interviewers' legitimacy. They advocate using feminist methodologies to make more transparent the power relations inherent in elite interviews: 'researchers must strive to understand both the complex subjectivities and social locations of themselves and interviewees in the research process… this understanding, in turn, must underpin the representations of interviewees and knowledge claims in the documentation of the research' (Conti and O'Neil, 2007, p. 67). Kezar (2003, pp. 396–397), as a critical theorist, goes a step further and advocates using feminist methodologies to transform elite interviewees – to empower the people she interviews to 'challenge power structures that limit their humanity' – although she acknowledges that 'not all elites need transforming'.

Elite interviews are characterised by the often subjective nature of responses elicited and accounts given, and – as with any interview – are prone to bias and exaggeration. This leads to issues of validity and trustworthiness. Richards (1996, p. 2) concludes that 'elite interviewing should not be conducted with a view to establishing "the truth", in a crude, positivist manner… its function is to provide the political scientist with an insight into the mind-set of the actors who have played a role in shaping the society in which we live and an interviewee's subjective analysis of a particular episode or situation'. Berry (2002, p. 681) adds that 'it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth… consciously or unconsciously, they've thought about what they want to say in the period between the request and the actual interview… they're talking about their work and, as such, justifying what they do'. He adds that there is often a paradox with elite interviewing: the flexibility and insight that open-ended

questioning affords exacerbates the issues of reliability and validity of that approach (Berry, 2002, p. 680). Yet having borne this in mind, it is important not to overstate the importance of individuals: as Conti and O'Neil (2007, p. 79) discovered, their research subjects were 'elite actors embedded in vast bureaucracies and deep historical social structures' – a description that can apply to universities, government departments and city halls alike.

A further consideration of particular relevance is the 'local' dimension of my research. The term 'elites' is often synonymous with powerful national or international figures, or those who have significant political influence (Richards, 1996, p. 2). This reflects the field of higher education research which tends to be pitched at institutional, national or international level, rather than the sub-national (city region, or local) level (Tight, 2012, p. 342) – although as chapter 3 illustrates, the field of local and regional higher education studies has matured in recent years. In my research, the elite interviewees are typically 'of' the city region, and have been invited to participate in the study because of their local roles, but are simultaneously part of national structures. The University of Rwanda has a close relationship with the Government of Rwanda, and senior staff members often transfer to and from government leadership roles. The City of Kigali, despite a defined territorial remit, is part of national civil service structures, and so too are staff members. These local elites are often connected to one another, and are part of wider national and international networks. Issues of sampling and the limits of my case arise: as Cochrane (1998, pp. 2126–2128) notes, the powerful may choose to remain obscure (and thus my 'snowball' sampling likely eluded them) or they may live outside the places where they hold influence (this is perhaps less likely given I examined a capital city, but international funding bodies, for example, may shape local relationships but have a regional manager based in Nairobi or New York).

My approach to interviewing was mindful of these issues. The research interview is a 'construction site for knowledge' (Kvale, 2007, p. 21) and I am an active participant. Although power asymmetry dynamics associated with elite interviews surely shaped my discussions – Neal (1995, p. 523) makes the observation that PhD researchers are relatively low within the academic hierarchy – I felt the relationship was not as clear-cut as the literature suggests. My position as a comparatively wealthy (and white male) outsider from the Global North – and one representing a so-called 'world-class research university' – visiting a low-income country perhaps altered this dynamic and the information offered. To ensure adequate consideration of reflexivity, Cochrane (1998, p. 2130) advises researchers to build a process of self-reflection into their fieldwork, assessing the structure and interaction of each interview. Pierce (2008, p.

17) suggests this takes the form of an ethnographic account building in observations, events and key quotes. My diaries consistently record two themes: that I was nearly always warmly received and made to feel welcome, and that my topic was met with interest: the very act of asking questions will likely encourage my interviewees to think more about local engagement.[17] Berry (2002, p. 683) recommends a systematic approach to common problems to increase confidence in the data collected and to counter any issues of validity and reliability. This includes ensuring consistency in the use of 'probes' and branching questions, and triangulating information by using multiple sources. In my interviews emerging themes were tested and developed in subsequent interviews, and I was often able to find supporting information in newspaper articles, press releases and planning documents.

4.3 Validity and trustworthiness

This research has been designed to comply with the central tenets of 'trustworthy' qualitative research design: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba in Bryman, 2016, p. 384). Credibility (*how believable are the findings?*) is maintained by thorough documentation of my methods and epistemological assumptions, respondent validation (sharing findings with interviewees), and recognising possible external factors and influences through a reflexive focus on my relationship to the field of study. Transferability (*do the findings occur in other contexts?*) is partly a motivation for conducting nine secondary case studies to broaden the study beyond the primary case, yet I recognise that not all the findings are immediately transferable, given they are rooted in the individual context and histories of each city region. To satisfy the condition of dependability (*are these findings likely to apply at other times?*) I study the particular socio-historical context of relations at each university in chapter 5; this is the transversal axis of the Comparative Case Study approach. Confirmability (*has the investigator allowed personal values to affect the outcome?*) was an ongoing process of self-reflection, supported by a peer-review process of the research design (with my UK supervisory team, my supervisor at the University of Rwanda, and through the extensive UK and Rwandan research ethical approval processes) before collecting data, constructing non-leading questions, and, put simply, maintaining an open-minded, inductive approach to research that does not presuppose any outcome whilst acknowledging the subjective nature of research and the preconceived notions that I, as a researcher, unavoidably

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[17] Indeed several interviewees would later send me a message with further thoughts that had occurred to them on the topic following our conversation. As a researcher, I had an impact within my research environment, however fleeting this may turn out to be.

bring to my work. As such, I have tried to ensure this research acknowledges the dominance of the Western-centric model of higher education, but is open to diverse conceptualisations and manifestations of university institutions.

4.4 Ethical considerations

This study received ethical approval from IOE (UCL's Faculty of Education and Society), and – as part of the mandatory process of securing a research permit from the Government of Rwanda – ethical approval was also granted by the University of Rwanda and the National Council for Science and Technology. Approval was also granted by all parties before I resumed my data collection in Kigali in November 2021: this was a stringent process to demonstrate how I would ensure the safety of research participants and myself given the risks of COVID-19, and how data could be collected whilst following the latest local laws and guidance.

In approaching interviewees, I emphasised my commitment to confidentiality but acknowledged the limits of this – a guarantee of anonymity is almost impossible in much qualitative research (Dowling and Brown, 2012, p. 230), and especially within my context of interviews with senior individuals within named institutions. As such, I made it clear that although quotes and other contributions will be pseudonymised in the thesis text and any publications, I could not guarantee that respondents will not be identifiable. I shared an information sheet and consent form with all interviewees. These included an outline of my research in lay terms and a summary of the possible risks and benefits of participation. Interviews were conducted on the basis of freely given and fully informed consent, and, as the research is GDPR-compliant, interviewees can opt out of the study after the interview. Through the information sheet and consent form, and a verbal introduction at the start of the interview, I ensured that participants were informed of the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, as well as confidentiality (and limits thereof) and the opportunity to review findings. I asked interviewees whether they were happy to be recorded: all but one agreed; I took detailed notes of the unrecorded interview.

I spoke to people in positions of power, and those who work within institutions with established hierarchies. Interviewees may have been used to setting their own agendas, or felt unable to speak freely. I tried to be conscious of such potential power dynamics in approaching interviewees and designing and conducting my interviews, as well as in ensuring fully informed consent. Ozga and Gerwitz (1994, p. 136) discuss the breaking down of researcher-subject boundaries as they formed friendships with their research subjects: 'we presented ourselves as

unthreatening and rather innocent', and they feel they gave a 'diluted version of their intentions' to gain access. Cochrane (1998, p. 2124) writes of the critical researcher appearing sympathetic to the interviewee to secure an interview, and the 'small victory' once this is granted. Such dynamics are perhaps inevitable, but I aimed to document these (see section 4.2), as they will have shaped the content and direction of my research.

Interviews were conducted in English. All interviewees spoke good English, although for many it was not their first language: Kinyarwanda is the national language of Rwanda, and English is an official language alongside French and Swahili. I was careful to consider the power relations, nuances, and subtleties that are inherent in language, and to be sensitive to the choice and meaning of words. In writing about urbanisation and city planning in Rwanda (a topic at the heart of my research), Berlanda (2012, p. 137) notes that words such as *city*, *village*, and *neighbourhood* can have different meanings in different languages, and must be 'contextualised in time and place' because 'meanings change within a same society as a consequence of its transformations… words are not neutral, but reflect the power relationships between population groups, which is even more important when dealing with countries with a colonial past'. Similarly, although my research does not directly touch on the 1994 genocide, I was careful to avoid discussion of race and ethnicity in Rwanda – a legal requirement as much as an ethical one (Loyle, 2016, p. 926).

I validated findings by offering to share interview transcripts with interviewees, as well as excerpts from chapters which drew upon their responses. Respondents were invited to confirm accuracy and provide supplementary comments or reflections: for transcripts the respondent could amend for accuracy and comment; for other outputs, the respondent could comment, with no guarantee amendments were adopted unless they presented factual inaccuracies, included identifying information or raised ethical dilemmas. On reviewing chapter excerpts, several interviewees requested that their identity be further pseudonymised. In practice this meant a further degree of abstraction by removing the seniority of the official or the department of the academic from the attribution of quotes, and removing portions of text that referred to particular initiatives or could have identified the involvement of specific offices. The omission of several examples of university engagement activities likely reduces some 'colour' from the description, but the overall analysis of the framework for engagement in chapters 7 and 8 remained largely unaffected.

Data that contained personal information, including recordings, transcripts and analysis, was stored on an encrypted laptop, and backed up on an encrypted USB stick. I used UCL email systems when emailing transcripts or thesis text to interviewees.

4.5 The construction of global and local knowledge

In their book chapter, *Sex, lies and audiotape: interviewing the education policy elite*, Ozga and Gerwitz (1994, p. 139) describe how the critical theory approach they adopted formed the backdrop to the theoretical positions they took, the methodologies used and the evidence selected. They acknowledged that the 'uneasy relationship' between theory and method was gaining recognition, as was understanding of the 'contaminating presence' of the researcher. Ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns continue to underpin higher education research, but they are also evolving alongside changes in the relationship between the academy, government and society. There is, for example, a trend towards more evaluative research, often externally commissioned and with a limited scope, raising questions over political intrusion into the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 48). In *Researching education elites twenty years on: Sex, lies and… video meetings*, Grek (2021, p. 41) reflects on Ozga and Gewirtz's seminal chapter and argues that the education elites of today are often policy actors: 'people who occupy multiple spaces and who are simultaneously national and transnational, experts and brokers, interdependent and in conflict, and visible and invisible in equal measure'. Although a handful of my interviewees might match this description of an education elite, the by-products of this cadre were clear throughout my research: the focus on evidence-based policymaking, sharing of international practice, global networks, data-driven reporting, policy roundtables and report launches.

Other debates have also shaped research methods. The internationalisation of higher education and higher education policy continues to raise specific questions about international enquiry and comparative study (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003), whilst the 'local' has emerged from being a separate sphere where wider national or global processes are 'worked out' to an intrinsic, interconnected part of global networks and flows (Cochrane, 1998, p. 2122), part of a more sophisticated understanding of 'place' developed over the past few decades (covered in section 3.2). Awareness of power imbalances between researchers (and the institutions they represent) from the Global North and South, as well as inequities within global research partnerships, has grown (Jentsch and Pilley, 2003; Walsh, Brugha and Byrne, 2016; Asare, Mitchell and Rose, 2020). More specifically, academic writing on Rwanda is dominated by non-Rwandan voices, especially those from institutions based in the Global North (Samson,

2019), although organisations such as Sida (Sweden's agency for development cooperation) have long-standing programmes to build this capacity.

In turn, these debates have shaped my research. Akin to most social science researchers, I have sought to employ research methods in the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed rather than the positivist outcome of a technical exercise – my collection of data is shaped by my understanding of the world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 3). Although I did not seek to actively transform my interviewees through the research process (as per Kezar, 2003) or feel that I had a mandate to 'change' the institutions and places I visited as an outsider, I identify with the critical theorist frame of Ozga and Gerwitz (1994, p. 128) in that my research can make a contribution through three means: it can challenge the assumptions forming policy, in particular where policies impact unfairly on particular groups; it can explain how inequalities are produced and reproduced; and it can provide a basis for developing strategies of social transformation. Given this research is case-study led, I would add a fourth: it can illustrate phenomena that are likely to have an impact beyond the profiled places – which we now turn to – and can be used to positively affect development more broadly through the provision of a Comparative Case Study.

5. The evolution of ten flagship universities

This chapter profiles the University of Rwanda and nine other flagship universities in sub-Saharan Africa, with particular focus on their origins and history. (Table 1 in chapter 1 provides a summary of all ten universities.) The universities are ordered from the oldest – the University of Cape Town – to the newest, the University of Rwanda, formed in 2013.[18] All have been selected on the basis of being flagship universities (see section 1.1), although some – for example the University of Mauritius – were also founded based on the developmental university model (described in section 2.1).

Many of the defining traits of African flagship universities today are visible in their past: complex relations with government, the circulation of staff between higher education and civil service, a mentorship role for the national university sector, the impact of alumni, a quest for relevance; these threads will appear again in coming chapters. As Tikly (2019, p. 41) has demonstrated, colonial legacies strongly influence education policies and structures today; we ignore the force of path dependency in setting the trajectory of institutions and systems at our peril. Understanding the history and evolution of flagships therefore helps us to understand some of the roots of the tensions they face today between their developmental origins and the expectations of society, a tension that defines the nature of their local engagement activity. Although previous studies (summarised in section 2.2) shed light on the battle between two polarised perceptions of the flagship university – a great national institution driving growth and development, or a beleaguered, near-bankrupt monolith outmanoeuvred by newer, more nimble competitors – none in doing so illuminate the role of flagships in their local area. The reality for most flagships sits somewhere between these two poles, a position that has evolved and continues to shift, opening up new local and international engagements alongside their historic national role.

A common structure is used for each profile, helping to shed comparative light on the case of the University of Rwanda. First, the historical origins and context are described, covering the establishment and evolution of each university. The middle sections cover national role and impact, and governance, looking at how the university contributes to the country – for example through policy influence and workforce development – as well as the relationship with

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[18] I have used the date the institution was awarded independent university status, and thus most closely resembles the definition of the flagship university used in this study. Many had predecessor colleges of higher education that long pre-date their current structure.

government. The final section covers challenges, summarising the issues and limitations faced by the university.

5.1 University of Cape Town (Cape Town, South Africa)

Few institutions better embody the role of universities as sites of national debate and contestation than the University of Cape Town (UCT). Founded in 1829 as the South African College, a high school for boys, UCT became a full university in 1918. British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes and his business associates provided substantial funding and, later, land for the university, in part with the aim of healing Boer-British animosity in the Union of South Africa (Crowe, 2017; UCT, 2020a). Historian Howard Phillips stresses the importance of understanding the roots of the South African higher education system when policymakers undertake reforms (which they frequently do: South Africa's Higher Education Act was amended nine times between 1998 and 2013 (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 187)). A simplistic analysis might trace these roots back to the British model, given the colonial heritage. But, as Philips points out, there was no single British model of higher education, with South Africa's first two teaching universities – UCT and Stellenbosch – 'enthusiastically embracing' the Scottish university system (explained by the preponderance of professors and senior administrators from Scottish universities at the South African College). Scotland's major universities in the nineteenth century were characterised by the provision of both a liberal education and professional training, and marked by an emphasis on hard work and frugality rather than aristocratic heritage – a contrast to Oxford and Cambridge (Anderson, 1995, p. 23). The features of this model, from the structure of degrees to the teaching methods, were then replicated by the subsequent waves of universities set up in South Africa over the next 70 years (Phillips, 2004, p. 122).

The UCT website describes the university's reputation as 'Moscow on the Hill' for its opposition to apartheid in the long decades before the 1994 elections (UCT, 2020a). Phillips, who has written a history of UCT, sees the relationship between UCT and the apartheid government as more mixed, and that 'until UCT has recognised both its beauty spots and its warts and confronted them directly, it will not easily be able to go into the future unequivocally' (UCT, 2020b). He describes two other important shifts in this period. The first is the change from a teaching institute to one focused on both research and teaching, which led to today's framing of the university as research-led. The second is 'the beginnings of indigenisation of teaching and research', with the first seeds of UCT considering itself an African rather than European university (UCT, 2020b). This recognition continued to grow in subsequent decades,

and manifested itself in the recent explosive calls for decolonisation of South African higher education.

UCT was a key site of nationwide student protests which erupted in 2015-16. These were driven by two factors: the #RhodesMustFall movement protesting the culture of historically elite, white universities such as UCT, and the #FeesMustFall movement against the exclusionary cost of higher education. The protests, though rooted in legitimate opposition to a discriminatory higher education system, nonetheless 'traumatised' staff and students, and threatened the notion of universities as spaces for free expression and debate (Jansen and Walters, 2019, pp. 23–24). The roots of these protests also lie in a system – and in particular elite institutions within the system – unprepared for the vast increase in students and expectations of change, creating a 'political pressure cooker' (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 15).

The student protests were notable for their violence at an institution no stranger to fierce debates. Ntsebeza (2020) gives an overview of the dramatic twists and turns of the field of African studies at UCT, a subject deeply intertwined with the university's understanding of itself and its role in South African society – and Africa more broadly. The School of African Studies in its various guises (from Bantu Philology, to informing a 'Native policy' in the lead-up to apartheid, to its temporary abolition in favour of interdisciplinary research in the 1970s) is partly the story of power struggles in UCT leadership. Ntsebeza (2020, p. 13) contrasted the vision of former UCT vice chancellor Max Price for the university to be an 'Afropolitan university' against a lack of support for the school, and called for the current leadership to take African Studies more seriously if it truly wishes UCT to take on a leadership role amongst African universities, as is reflected in UCT's strategic plan. The debate over African studies at UCT serves as a reminder of how individual academic fields within an institution can reinforce or undermine the broader strategic mission of the university.

UCT is something of an outlier in this study given the comparatively greater resources and international prominence of the university. However, given the tensions between fulfilling this international role (with the pervasive discourses and policy pressures that accompany it), and the significant needs of South African society, the difficulty of reconciling the past with the development needs of the present, and the esteem with which UCT is held as a research-led flagship university across the continent, means its inclusion is valuable.

Within South Africa UCT is a medium-sized institution, but it is especially strong for research output: the university was home to three percent of public university students in 2015 (a relatively high proportion of these are at postgraduate level), but produced 17 percent of research articles over the period 2010 to 2016 (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, pp. 192, 203). Maintaining academic standards whilst opening access has – in common with other South African universities – created tensions, but also necessitated a close focus on core functions. Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk (2018, p. 15) suggest that this has been at the expense of adopting a more outward-looking orientation. UCT is also subject to challenges facing the South African higher education sector more generally: from insufficient public funding to meet growing enrolments (Ashwin and Case, 2018, p. 6), to a perceived failure of the state to drive a place-based public good role for universities in the country (Molebatsi, 2022, p. 177).

5.2 Addis Ababa University (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

Addis Ababa University (AAU) was established in 1950 as the University College of Addis Ababa, before becoming Emperor Haile Selassie I University in 1961, and taking its current name following the overthrow of the Emperor in 1975 – a process in which the university was a key site of resistance that led to the new military government (Teferra, 2017, p. 13). Enrolment was low in the early years – 4,500 in a country with a population of 34 million – and the staff were all expatriates (in particular from the USA and UK), a practice that shaped the educational philosophy and introduced English as the language of instruction (Ayalew, 2017, p. 108).

In contrast to many flagship universities in other African countries, AAU was – at least in theory – unencumbered by colonial education structures. Whilst the university escaped the constraints of a single higher education system imported from a European metropole, external influences nonetheless dominated, with American aid playing a particularly outsized role (Gilbert, 1967, p. 6). Planners saw an opportunity to create an 'Ethiopian institution under Ethiopian leadership', and the result was an eclectic system with challenges of integration: AAU's leaders needed to reconcile a Swedish-influenced technical school and German engineering college into a single Faculty of Technology, and a British medical school with a US programme for training district health officers, for example (Wodajo, 1973, p. 244). The opportunity to realise an indigenous, bottom-up conceptualisation of a university does not appear to have been successful. The challenges of integrating different departmental and faculty models was complicated by the dependence on foreign staff; in the words of Balsvik

(2005, in Ayalew, 2017, p. 138), 'one may wonder what was worse: an Ethiopian teacher unqualified to teach the foreign curriculum, or a foreigner unqualified to see the curriculum in the proper Ethiopian perspective; and both necessarily adopting a defensive attitude to the content of the educational material'.

Today Ethiopian universities are subsidised by the government, with students contributing through a deferred payment taxation mechanism for graduates (Ayalew, 2017, p. 125). The relation between AAU and the state has historically been an uneasy one (as has been the case with other flagship universities), with Human Rights Watch reporting widespread government interference in AAU affairs and the suppression of academic freedom in a 2002 report; several senior AAU administrators and at least five professors resigned in protest (Human Rights Watch, 2003). AAU has numerous other challenges which it also shares with other flagship universities: shortages of qualified staff, inadequate IT and laboratory resources, and rigid financial and human resource policies (Ayalew, 2017, pp. 122–123).

Despite widespread challenges, the university plays an important role in national development efforts. This role has roots in the historical mission of the university as a service-oriented institution and not an ivory tower, and working to meet 'manpower' requirements in the early decades by creating special courses for statisticians and sanitary workers, health workers and geologists (Wodajo, 1973, p. 246). Under the Ethiopian University Service, all students spent an academic year working 'in the provinces', getting to know their country and their people (Wodajo, 1973, p. 248).[19] In recent years, and as the higher education system in Ethiopia greatly expanded, AAU supported new regional public universities and private higher education institutions through the training of staff, shaping of curricula, direct teaching and supervision, and the provision of models for governance and organisational structure. AAU is, as Ayalew puts it, the 'mother institution' for Ethiopian higher education (2017, pp. 140–141). This indirect influence, felt across the country, is important for considering the local and national impact of flagship universities.

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[19] This programme was apparently opposed by most students at its inception, and was seen as a form of payment for government-funded education (Gilbert, 1967, p. 8). Given the strong influence of the US Land Grant university model on the formation of AAU (Gilbert, 1967, p. 6), and on developmental universities more generally (section 2.1), one could speculate whether such a model was at least partially inspired by the US Peace Corps programme (founded 1961), and the concept of 'service'. The Ethiopian University Service programme no longer continues (Tamrat, 2019), but programmes of national service for graduates exist in Ghana (NSS, 2020) and Nigeria (NYSC, 2020); both programmes were established in 1973 and have an explicit focus on national development efforts.

AAU has also long provided research and consultancy to Ethiopia's public and private sectors, given the concentration of qualified staff at the university. Ayalew highlights national projects including railways, road construction projects, and the construction of the Renaissance Dam that have benefited from AAU expertise – but most of this was not centrally managed by the university, and staff tend to 'moonlight' as consultants alongside their day jobs as lecturers (2017, p. 143). As explored in section 2.2, a culture of juggling multiple jobs may help to build the experience and contacts of academic staff, but often has a negative effect on teaching and research at the university. An Office of Community Service was established at AAU in 2011 to coordinate the provision of training and consultancy services to government departments, business and other organisations, but 'striking success stories in this regard have not been easy to witness' (Ayalew, 2017, p. 143).

This concentration of expertise naturally lends AAU to being the hub for research activity in Ethiopia, with links forged with institutions across the world. These research efforts have, however, been criticised as fragmented and not aligned to national development priorities (Ayalew, 2017, p. 132). Significant research support, in particular to build infrastructure and related 'capacity building' activity, has come from donors such as SIDA, who have been active at AAU since 1980 (Ayalew, 2017, p. 126). Recent efforts to focus research efforts through specific institutes at the university, who in turn drop their teaching programmes, have been met with protest from staff, who wish to see a greater alignment between teaching and research (Nega, 2018); a focus on interdisciplinary thematic research as a means of tackling societal problems has been more warmly received, despite challenges in implementation (Wirtu, 2020).

5.3 University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana)

The University of Ghana was established as the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948 in association with the University of London, and renamed in its current guise in 1961 when it became a full university. The education system in Ghana was modelled on the British system, with the aim of training future civil service staff. During the 1960s a University of Ghana graduate (then few in number) was regarded by some as instantly employable in the public service, 'for his mind was so trained that he could turn his hand to almost anything' (Dickson, 1973, p. 104).

The role of the University of Ghana shifted over time from a Cardinal Newman-inspired view of a university (his work was reputed to be a favourite textbook in the 1960s), to an institution focused on Ghana's practical development concerns. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president

of Ghana and the first chancellor of the university, sardonically asked how the study of the Classics could help with the building of the Volta dam; scholarships were introduced for students studying science subjects. By the 1970s the university offered diplomas in areas requested by government ministries (Dickson, 1973, p. 107).[20]

The university has been a site of national debate and contestation, with a sometimes uneasy relationship with both military and civilian governments. Nkrumah attempted to use the university as a platform for promoting his socialist ideology and continent-wide policies, with his supporters organising a 'reign of terror' against students and staff. Jerry Rawlings came to power in a 1979 coup and was initially accepted by students, but relations deteriorated as Rawlings came to view radical students as an obstacle to his ambitions (Acquah and Budu, 2017, p. 174).

Before 1992 the president of Ghana was the chancellor of all public universities; following the 1992 constitution, universities have notionally had more independence. The chairman of the Governing Council of the University of Ghana is appointed by government, but the chancellor and vice-chancellor are appointed by the University Council (Acquah and Budu, 2017, p. 162). All education institutions fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The government remains a major funder of the University of Ghana, contributing 55 percent of the budget – but down from 90 percent a decade earlier. The university considers reliance on this subsidy to be 'a liability' (University of Ghana, 2014, p. 5).

The HERANA project examining Africa's flagship universities (see section 2.2) concluded that the University of Ghana is 'predominantly an undergraduate teaching university', with the numbers of postgraduate students (viewed by the project as a proxy for research intensity) failing to keep pace with a rapid increase in undergraduates (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 120). HERANA researchers also found that engagement projects 'are not connected directly to community needs, nor are they producing new knowledge characteristic of a research-led university' (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 119). Acquah and Budu (2017, p. 205) add that the University of Ghana is poorly integrated in national development strategies, as links between economic and higher education planning are weak.

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[20] Dickson (1973, p. 107) contrasts the University of Ghana to Fourah Bay college in Sierra Leone, where students took the same exams as students at the University of Durham, thus requiring no knowledge of Sierra Leone or West Africa. As such, the University of Ghana was seen as 'shedding its colonial skin' quicker than some other regional counterparts. Yet Nkrumah's concern over the utility of degrees persists in Ghana today, with even the university's vice chancellor bemoaning an excess of humanities graduates and 'educated joblessness' (Aryeetey and Baah-Boateng, 2016, p. 20).

The University itself has been honest about its challenges in its strategic plan, acknowledging issues around bureaucracy, overcrowding and inadequate teaching (University of Ghana, 2014).

Despite these shortcomings, University of Ghana academics regularly serve on public boards and committees, and as experts for bodies such as the National Economic Council and National Development Planning Commission. Commentary on the government budget from the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the university is 'looked up to' every year (Acquah and Budu, 2017, pp. 196–197).

Finally, the University of Ghana has extensive geographic reach. The university has three campuses, and operates satellite campuses in each of Ghana's ten regional capitals. It also supports smaller, newer institutes and colleges, supporting their academic course and administrative capacity. Such a role is seen as a 'national duty' but takes up significant resources and is rewarded with little compensation (Acquah and Budu, 2017, p. 174). This institutional mentoring is a little-recognised hallmark of the modern flagship university.

5.4 University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Nigeria)

The University of Ibadan was established in 1962. Previously University College Ibadan, a degree-awarding external college of the University of London set up in 1948, and in turn emerging from the Yaba Higher College, established in 1932 to support the colonial administration, the University of Ibadan is regarded by some commentators as 'Nigeria's premier university' (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 295). However, and unlike in smaller countries such as Namibia or Mauritius, Nigeria is also home to other large public universities that played important roles in decolonisation and development from the 1960s onwards (Livsey, 2017, p. 2). The University of Nigeria at Nsukka, for example, was founded in 1955 as an independent university modelled on the US land-grant universities, and could also lay claim to being a flagship university (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p. 65).

The fortunes of the University of Ibadan have been closely intertwined with those of the Nigerian state. Materu, Obanya and Righetti (2011) explore the shifting prospects of the university over several waves of change: the University of London years (1945-62), the era of the nascent national university (1962-66), and the 'turbulent' years (1966-99). The second, and briefest, phase highlights three themes commonly with other new flagships. First, criticism from some politicians over the courses offered, their relevance to Nigeria's developmental needs, and a desire to shift to a more indigenous model of higher education. Second, Ibadan

played the role of mentor to the next wave of new Nigerian universities in places such as Ile-Ife and Zaria. Their vice chancellors were trained at Ibadan, and links and influence ran deep. Third, new international relationships were established. In this case of Ibadan, this meant programmes and facilities funded by the Ford, Rockefeller, and Nuffield foundations (Materu, Obanya and Righetti, 2011, pp. 229–232). One such funder, the MacArthur Foundation, has become in recent years a significant donor to the university, with capacity-building grants shaping institutional decision-making, including moves towards being a mainly postgraduate university (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 297).

There are 171 universities in Nigeria (just over half are state or federal universities; 79 are private), with the sector experiencing tremendous growth over the past few decades (National Universities Commission, 2020). Activity is regulated by the National Universities Commission, which has restrained the autonomy of institutions by, for example, enforcing governance, leadership, and management structures and restricting new programs of study (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, pp. 299, 307). Such restrictions are not new. Periods of military rule from the 1970s onwards led to tensions over academic freedom and institutional autonomy; this period is also marked by the proliferation of new institutions, with the government keen to ensure an even distribution of universities throughout Nigeria's regions. This had three major implications for Ibadan (Materu, Obanya and Righetti, 2011, pp. 233–234). First, experienced staff left for better-paid positions at the new universities. Second, government funding was stretched across more institutions, so revenues fell at Ibadan. And third, greater competition led to Ibadan pushing into new areas to attract students and spending exceeded the available budget. The crises endured by the university throughout these 'turbulent years' have led to a legacy of dated infrastructure, brain drain, and limited funding (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 312). Crises continued through bouts of military rule in the 1990s, with the international student population dropping from 2.5 percent in the 1980s to 0.5 percent, and staff fleeing abroad (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 332).

Challenges around staff retention remain particularly problematic today. As with other flagship universities, Ibadan is – as a prestigious national university – a magnet for scholars. In turn, it is also a fertile recruitment ground for other institutions and for the government. As of 2017, there were around 30 Ibadan professors serving as vice-chancellors at other Nigerian universities, or as senior government officials (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 315). The esteem with which Ibadan staff are held does, of course, bring benefit to the university, which has been able to contribute to national policy formation and other developmental efforts.

National collaborations can have a ripple effect as approved policies serve as a blueprint for policymaking at state and local government level (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 335).

Meaningful community engagement has proven more challenging. According to Onwuemele (2018, p. 33), policies at the University of Ibadan to encourage community engagement have few incentives (such as being linked to promotion criteria), are not aligned to other institutional policies on research or intellectual property, and do not provide guidance on how much time should be spent on community engagement (and in any case, some staff understood community engagement to mean interacting with the university community). As one senior member of university management explained:

> Teaching, research and community service are the core mission statement of the university. In terms of balancing the three activities, within the university there is no law on specification of time allocated in the three; but I know that in some universities, they say 25% to teaching, 70% to research and 5% to community service. I must confess, there is nothing like that here. The primary responsibility is teaching. But there is argument that teaching should be part of promotion criteria. This is because teaching is the fundamental thing… (University of Ibadan manager in Onwuemele, 2018, p. 34)

Formal policies are important signals. They dictate what is valued in terms of working towards promotion, and prioritisation in the face of large workloads and limited resources. Vague or high-level policies will therefore limit community engagement activity, and any engagement that occurs may instead be to serve a separate agenda – such as research to be published in an international journal – rather than to work with and to benefit the community itself.

Despite these concerns, Ibadan has worked closely with a few communities to develop community-based research and service over many decades. These 'field laboratories' include a community health programme in the village of Ibarapa, coordinated by the government, donor agencies, and the university and resulting in over 160 research articles published in international and local journals between 1963 and 1988 (Udegbe and Ekhaguere, 2017, p. 324) – the programme continues today (see section 6.7).

5.5 University of Zimbabwe (Harare, Zimbabwe)

The University of Zimbabwe was established as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1952 in Harare (then Salisbury), the capital of a federation covering present-day Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with degrees issued by the University of London.[21] When the

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[21] Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was regarded as the economic heart of the federation, benefitting at the expense of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) which produced of many of the primary exports such as copper. Urban development (and the white population) was concentrated in Salisbury (Chigudu and Chavunduka, 2020, p. 2). This had clear ramifications for the University of Zambia, formed to meet the needs of the newly

federation was dissolved in 1963, the institution continued as the University of Rhodesia until independence in 1980, when it became the University of Zimbabwe. The expansion of the higher education sector was first mooted by the University of Zimbabwe itself in 1982 in a report on the inability of the university to meet the manpower requirements of the country, suggesting a new campus or institution be established (Shizha and Kariwo, 2012, p. 10). A wide consultation that followed led to the formation of the National University of Science and Technology as the second public university in Bulawayo in 1991. As higher education enrolment expanded in the 1990s against the backdrop of a collapsing economy, further universities were formed. These were geographically distributed to try to ensure all regions had a university, and were often developed as extensions to the University of Zimbabwe, cloning structures and regulations and then adapting these to meet provincial needs (Kariwo, 2013, p. 228; Gaidzanwa, 2020, p. 91).

The rapid expansion of the sector had several consequences for the University of Zimbabwe. First, the shift to a market-based model of higher education forced institutions to become entrepreneurial, described by Gaidzanwa (2020, p. 94) as the 'McDonaldisation' of Zimbabwe's universities: delivering 'fast' education on a huge scale all year round. Whilst income may have increased, at least on paper, classrooms and student accommodation became overcrowded, facilities and services suffered, and overworked teachers dropped their research and community engagement activity. Second, low job satisfaction coupled with the broader economic and political climate led skilled university staff to flee the country (Shumba and Mawere, 2012), with Zimbabwe becoming perhaps the best known and best studied example of brain drain in the 2000s. Despite these challenges, the University of Zimbabwe remains the country's most popular destination for students, and the leading producer of scientific knowledge (Lemarchand and Susan, 2014, p. 70). Academics have also been able to engage with industry, although the extent of this is unclear; a UNESCO report provides an example of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the university conducting over 30 production assessments of Zimbabwean companies (Lemarchand and Susan, 2014, p. 36).

It is the political sphere rather than the economic one, however, that has most significantly shaped the University of Zimbabwe. Cheater (1991, p. 195) notes that there is a 'long and honourable history of protest against state politics' at the university, although relations between

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independent nation in a way which Zambia's leaders felt the University College could (and did) not do (see section 5.6).

students and government began to markedly deteriorate in 1987 when Prime Minister Robert Mugabe became executive State President, and – as per the 1982 University of Zimbabwe Act – became Chancellor of the university. The subsequent history of protests, violence and the complete erosion of institutional and academic autonomy is told in detail by Cheater (1991), and her account is in itself an act of considerable bravery given her status as an academic staff member at the time. She summarises (1991, p. 206) (bearing in mind that her account is written ten years after independence) that the destruction of the university, and the silencing of staff and student 'dissidents', is viewed by politicians of new, weak states as necessary to consolidate their position, but that 'tomorrow, their persecutors will probably face the same fate'.

However, state control of the university intensified over the next three decades. Later accounts, such as that of Gukurume (2019) covering the tail end of the Mugabe regime in 2016 and 2017, describe a campus overrun with state security agents, where surveillance, imprisonment and brutality against students is commonplace, and academic staff are forced to self-censure. The campus became a political battleground: the ZANU-PF government saw the university community as supporting the opposition MDC party, and as such viewed controlling the university as essential for holding power (Gukurume, 2019, pp. 765–766). Although African flagship universities have often been sites of national debate and contestation (including several others in this study), the University of Zimbabwe stands out for the degree of complicity of some senior university staff.

> The former university Vice Chancellor Professor Levi Nyagura was largely viewed by my interlocutors as Mugabe's 'blue-eyed boy', directly appointed by the President. My participants told me that Nyagura acted as an authoritarian 'hatchet man' who cracked down on opposition political sympathisers on campus. For instance, I was told that academics aligned to MDC had little chance of being promoted. (Gukurume, 2019, p. 766)

This elision of the university administration and the ruling political party helped foment generations of student and academic activists that have shaped, and continue to inform, Zimbabwe's politics; one former activist described the University of Zimbabwe as 'a conveyor belt into national politics' (Hodgkinson, 2013, p. 883). Student protests, arrests, and allegations of human rights abuses have continued throughout the pandemic; Human Rights Watch accuses the government of using COVID-19 public health measures to control the opposition, including students (Gora, 2021).

5.6 University of Zambia (Lusaka, Zambia)

Unlike many flagship universities formed in Africa in the wave of decolonisation and independence in the 1960s, the University of Zambia had no direct predecessor. Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) was notionally covered by the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) before independence, an institution affiliated with the University of London. The University of Zambia opened in 1966 as a fully-fledged degree awarding institution, two years after the country's independence. The university was established to respond to the needs of the country, with – again unusually for flagships in former colonies – no relationship with any British universities (University of Zambia, 2016). Despite the desire for autonomy and a clean start, the university was still shaped by external influences. The very commission that advocated a break from the British model and set the agenda for the University of Zambia was led by Sir John Lockwood, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. The initial funding for the university was provided by the British and Japanese governments (Phiri in Kragelund and Hampwaye, 2015, pp. 86–87). And as late as 1974, 87 percent of academic staff were expatriates (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017, p. 485).

Today, the university has much in common with other flagships. Investment in infrastructure and facilities have not kept pace with great increases in enrolment (the University of Zambia is home to just over half of students in public universities), research output is low given poor funding relative to the size of the institution, and the prestige and strong reputation of the university sits alongside reports of graduates 'roaming in the streets' looking for employment (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017, p. 494). Whilst a far greater proportion of current academic staff are Zambian than in the 1970s, a shortage of qualified staff and 'brain drain' continue to challenge the university. Pipelines of trained staff and centres of academic expertise take generations to develop, and interruptions to these pipelines have long-term consequences. A 1996 Ministry of Education report paints a stark picture of the impact of staff leaving for overseas posts:

> The loss that Zambia has suffered through this exodus is serious. Between 1984 and 1994 the University of Zambia alone lost over 230 of its lecturers, 161 of them being PhD holders with considerable degree of seniority. This is 60% of its current total number of staff. The loss to the country, in terms of investment in training and expertise, is immense. The loss to the institution, in terms of replacement needs, disrupted programs, and demoralisation of ongoing staff, is incalculable. (Ministry of Education, Zambia in Masaiti and Mwale, 2017, p. 497)

However, concerns of qualified staff shortages and pipelines are perhaps misplaced given the state of the University of Zambia's finances today. The university is 'technically insolvent',

has been unable to pay pensions or utility bills, and is cutting staff numbers by 40 percent, resulting in pleas to the government to increase financial support (Mumba, 2021, p. 24).

The University of Zambia nicely illustrates two further traits of flagship universities. The first is their role as institutional mentors, significantly contributing to the development of national higher education systems. The University of Zambia has a history of affiliating with new institutions in the country before they become independent, creating new universities, transferring staff to manage new institutions, and of senior staff retiring from the university and establishing private universities. Masaiti and Mwale (2017, p. 510) make the point that transferring the University of Zambia model – either directly through the adoption of regulations and structures, or indirectly through the practices and cultural norms of the staff involved – offers reliability and sustainability, but perhaps at the expense of innovation and efficiency. As of 2017, the University of Zambia provided mentorship to more than 30 colleges and universities, and external examination for more than 20 colleges (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017, pp. 510–511).

Second, relationships between flagship universities and the government are often complex. Although University of Zambia lecturers can (and do) speak out against government policies, the dependence on government funding and allegations of government influence in university decision-making processes (Mupeta et al., 2020, pp. 679–680, and discussed in section 6.5) raise questions over the autonomy of the institution. Yet the university also exerts influence within government: nearly two thirds of senior government officials and members of parliament are University of Zambia graduates, academics often serve in government as ministers or officials, university departments provide research and consultancy services to government departments, and university academics wrote the previous government's manifesto (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017, pp. 512–513).

The focus on public good and national need embedded at the foundation of the university persists in government policy frameworks and, at least in part, in the form of *civic innovation* and *civic entrepreneurship* – described in a study of how such work is embedded in university governance by Mupeta et al. (2020, p. 676) as 'the free contribution of time and effort to a project for the greater good of society without expectation of financial benefit'. The authors found that government, students, lecturers, and the public actively support the implementation of civic innovation, but barriers include bureaucracy, financial constraints, the decentralised structure of schools and departments, and the hierarchical nature of the university, in which junior voices are not always heard. Where initiatives such as healthcare provision to local

communities takes place, there are twin drivers: to improve the quality of care, and to reduce the costs of delivery (Mumba, 2021).

The limited funding for societally-focused activity partly explains the drive towards internationalisation within Zambian higher education, and at the University of Zambia in particular – where the perceived economic benefits of participating in 'global markets' have led to a surge of activity (Masaiti and Mwale, 2020, p. 9). This includes the establishment of a Confucius Institute at the university in 2010, building on a history of cooperation between China and Zambia. Although framed as a shift from the power imbalances of traditional 'partnerships' led by countries in the Global North towards equitable South-South cooperation, Kragelund and Hampwaye (2015) conclude that exerting soft power is instead the underlying driver.[22] As such, the pattern of external influence in Zambian higher education that began during the formation of the University of Zambia continues today.

5.7 University of Mauritius (Port Louis, Mauritius)

The University of Mauritius was founded as a developmental university at independence in 1968, with three schools focusing on agriculture, industrial technology, and administration. The university has since grown in subjects and students, and the Faculty of Law and Management now produces the largest number of graduates and the Faculty of Agriculture the fewest (Li Kam Wah, 2017, p. 271). The shift from agriculture to law and management reflects global higher education trends, but also the importance of the service sector to the Mauritian economy – services form a higher proportion of the economy than in any of the other nine countries studied (World Bank, 2019b). The higher education sector in Mauritius has also grown to 65 institutions, of which ten are public and four are degree-awarding (Li Kam Wah, 2017, p. 257).

Given Mauritius is a small island state, and the University of Mauritius is the major higher education provider and research institution located within the only major city region in the country (Port Louis and adjacent towns), the distinction between the university's 'local' and 'national' engagement efforts is less prominent and less meaningful than in the other African flagship universities profiled. Three examples illustrate the tight proximity of university and state in Mauritius.

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[22] This conclusion is echoed in other studies of Confucius Institutes as instruments of Chinese foreign policy and soft power; see, for example, Lahtinen (2015).

First, Mauritius aims to become a world example of sustainable development and the university has supported the government in designing a development roadmap (Li Kam Wah, 2017, p. 281). The university has also aligned its mission with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 9 (to build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation). According to former vice chancellor, 'in all our endeavours, we strive to keep the SDGs at the centre of our focus' (Jhurry, 2020). Curricula are designed to reflect national efforts to promote sustainable development, faculties (such as science, technology and agriculture) have been merged to encourage the translation of research and teaching into local impact and bring together cross-cutting SDG issues (climate change and food security, for example), and the university is part of a consortium of eight small island state universities looking at green energy. A quarterly newsletter aims to inform the public of the university's SDG work.

Second, the HERANA project (see section 2.2) found the University of Mauritius to be unique amongst the eight flagship universities studied in that university leaders and government shared the same perspective of the role of the university in national development (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 34). In other HERANA countries, national government had a strong view of universities as 'engines of development', but these were rarely translated from science and technology policies and grand national vision statements to university strategies. The authors found a strong 'pact' between government and university in Mauritius, with both adopting the 'engines of development' discourse. Such a pact, they conclude, is 'essential' for institutions to contribute effectively to development (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 31).

Third, political and governance tensions have tested academic freedom. This is not, of course, unique to smaller states, but does stand out in a nation ranked top in Africa for political governance and control of corruption (the Ibrahim Index of African Governance cited in Jonker and Robinson, 2018). A 2012 audit report found there was 'a general view among University staff that the council [the governing body of the university] must be allowed to work more independently, in order to preserve the autonomy of the university… council must reinforce its position to manage any perception of interference in its internal affairs as this poses a reputational risk to the University of Mauritius as an autonomous institution' (Tertiary Education Commission of Mauritius in Li Kam Wah, 2017, p. 284).[23] A manifestation of this

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[23] The University of Zambia strategic plan expresses a near-identical sentiment (see section 6.5).

alleged government interference, exacerbated by internal disagreements, was a rapid turnover of vice chancellors from 2010 onwards, described by Likamwah as the university's 'leadership problem' (2017, p. 294).

In addition, academic staff are prohibited from participating in politics (for example standing in elections), but ostensibly enjoy academic freedom. Ramtohul (2012), an academic at the university, argues that this freedom is ultimately constrained by the university's reliance on government funding (the university is unique amongst Mauritian institutions as most students do not pay tuition fees). As such, academic freedom 'operates under a subtle veil of threat', with most academics reluctant to criticise government policy; over time the popular understanding of 'academic freedom' has morphed from free expression into flexible working hours (Ramtohul, 2012, pp. 16–17). One consequence of this is the relatively strong influence of the private sector, and weak influence of academics, in national policy formation processes (Ramtohul, 2012, p. 16; Jonker and Robinson, 2018, p. 239).

In common with other African flagship universities, the University of Mauritius has struggled with academic staffing levels, postgraduate recruitment, and research output – all hallmarks of a 'research led' university – in part due to government emphasis on increasing tertiary enrolment through undergraduate recruitment (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 273). World Bank funding in the 1990s helped procure equipment, but specialist machinery is only replaced or upgraded when consultancy or other one-off projects allow. The impact of limited funding and resources is exacerbated when university employees serve on government boards or commissions.[24] However, high staff mobility combined with a large pool of influential alumni (including ministers, a president, and academic leaders at the University of Mauritius and other institutions) have served to reinforce the university's role in national development through providing a qualified workforce (Li Kam Wah, 2017, pp. 265–266). And, although concerns are raised here too about the employability of graduates, the university has oriented its programmes towards the service industry, reflecting government economic planning and Mauritius' strategic geographic position as a 'gateway' between Africa and Asia (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 116; Jonker and Robinson, 2018).

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[24] Li Kam Wah (2017, p. 282) lists some examples: a Commission of Enquiry on Education, the Commission of Enquiry on the Bus Industry, the Committee on Legal Education, the Fact-Finding Committee on Land Use of Public Lands, the Truth and Justice Commission.

5.8 Makerere University (Kampala, Uganda)

Makerere College was established in 1922 as the first higher education institution in East Africa, and to serve the British colonial administrations in the region. The college later formed part of the University of East Africa, before becoming an independent national university in 1970. The early 1990s marked the third distinct era for Makerere: that of a university influenced by neoliberalism, following periods as a colonial and then a national institution (Bisaso, 2017, p. 426). Institutional autonomy was granted to Ugandan universities in the early 2000s.

Neoliberal reforms led to a push to recruit privately-sponsored students, a focus on decentralisation of faculties (one aim was to enable entrepreneurial leaders to respond to the market), and pressure to prioritise interdisciplinary research at the expense of deepening discipline-based expertise. According to Mamdani (2007, x), a prominent Ugandan academic, the result of this drive towards commercialisation was the erosion of institutional integrity and educational quality, and an institutional crisis. When the World Bank began to reappraise the view of higher education as simply providing a private good in a free market, Uganda's Museveni government 'held on to the dogma with the tenacity of an ideologue' (Mamdani, 2007, vii). The neoliberal model has widened access and allowed far greater numbers to study at Makerere, but the quality of education has been widely critiqued (Bisaso, 2017, p. 440).

The university has established the Makerere University Private Sector Forum (MUPSF) to work with other actors for national development, and has institutionalised other mechanisms for engaging in national policymaking, including a process in the mid-2000s to focus on human resource development for decentralised local government districts by developing new curricula in medicine, agriculture, computer science, engineering, and physical planning (Musisi in Bisaso, 2017, p. 468). The university is setting up grant offices in each of the ten colleges to coordinate community engagement activities, under the auspices of the centralised Directorate of Research and Graduate Training. This is part of a shift from *outreach* to *knowledge transfer* (framed as a shift to mutually beneficial partnerships from paternalistic relationships; see section 6.7), but, according to an analysis by Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk (2018, pp. 117–118), this function remains 'ad hoc and poorly managed' and disconnected from wider knowledge production efforts. This is partly explained by promotion criteria – Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati (2019, p. 1) find that although academics are producing knowledge useful for policymakers and society, the emphasis is on publishing scientific research in reputable journals – but also, as will be seen, by the nature of funding.

Makerere shares many traits of other African flagship universities: beginning as an exclusive provider of higher education and now a central part of a far larger and more competitive market (a proliferation of private institutions, and regionally-distributed public universities); a history of educating many of Uganda's political elite; a critical mass of researchers and research programmes far outweighing that of other institutions and taking on a leadership and capacity-building role as a result; and significant resource and capacity challenges. However, a particular trait emerges in recent discussions over Makerere, one shared by other flagships but pronounced in Uganda: the role of donors in research.

Makerere has received significant funding from international donors, mainly for research. This funding is around three million USD a year, or six percent of the university budget, and is seen as critical for supporting long-term research programmes at the university given the limited government funding for research (Ssembatya, 2020, p. 11).[25] Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati (2019) found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, academic research is increasingly driven by donor interests, and as a result the research agenda is drawn from a global perspective and not necessarily that of the university. The authors note that although legal frameworks governing research partnerships mean that any funded research will be aligned to national priorities, the lack of a secure funding base for community-oriented research means this strand is often neglected at Makerere.

5.9 University of Namibia (Windhoek, Namibia)

After the University of Rwanda, the University of Namibia (UNAM) is the youngest of the flagship universities surveyed in this study. In common with many of its continental counterparts, the university has roots in an older institution, in this case the Academy for Tertiary Education, formed in 1980 as the first higher education institute in colonial Namibia. The binary model of South African higher education – elite research universities and black teaching institutes – was extended to Namibia, with the Academy placed firmly in the latter category with a focus on liberal arts, education and public administration (Kirby-Harris, 2003, p. 360). UNAM was formed in 1992, two years after independence. The relatively recent formation of UNAM sheds light on the challenges of establishing a flagship university.

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[25] Comparable figures for other flagships are hard to find. However, research income accounted for at least 23 percent of total university income at the University of Cape Town in 2020, roughly 94 million USD (UCT, 2021a).

The founding vice chancellor and his team 'enthusiastically' built the university almost from scratch, improving access and achieving gender representation within ten years (Amukugo, 2017, p. 86). Gone was the apartheid higher education model, replaced by the curricula, traditions and structures of the British system (Kirby-Harris, 2003, p. 360). Despite the 'powerful symbolism' of this new university ushering in a post-colonial era (White, 1998, p. 134), a nation-building focus on education, service and development, and a rapid expansion in student numbers, geographical representation proved challenging. The majority of UNAM's facilities and programmes were concentrated in the central capital city of Windhoek, despite large swathes of the population living in the north of the country. Outreach remained a core goal of the administration, but the desire to develop a 'coherent personality' trumped decentralisation and engagement outside Windhoek was largely through distance education via the Centre for External Studies (White, 1998, pp. 134, 150). Over time, however, 12 campuses have opened across the country to improve geographic participation (Amukugo, 2017, p. 86). A UNESCO policy review (2016, p. 77) suggests developing these campuses to follow the model of the University of Rwanda – developing specialised colleges with some autonomy, but able to collectively respond to current national and global needs – and to consider decentralising even further as per the University of Nairobi, the University of Dar es Salaam or Makerere University. In time, the authors suggest, these specialised colleges could be transformed into full universities (UNESCO, 2016, pp. 77–78).

There are several implications. First, any decentralisation would need to be balanced by effective linkages. Coordination between UNAM and the Polytechnic of Namibia (now the Namibia University of Science and Technology) proved an issue following independence and led to the formation of the National Council for Higher Education in 2003 to better coordinate the higher education offer (Amukugo, 2017, p. 87); UNESCO (2016, p. 73) themselves concede that gaps remain between higher education and vocational training. Second, Namibia has a population of around 2.5 million – five times smaller than Rwanda in an area 31 times larger (World Bank, 2019a). Specialised institutions need to be sustained by a critical mass of students and well-trained staff; although enrolment has grown, Namibia lacks qualified staff (UNESCO, 2016, pp. 71–72). Third, the experience of UNAM suggests the need for new universities to establish themselves, to centralise, before they can consider decentralisation. This institutional maturity likely takes decades, and decentralisation (despite a popular policy prescription) should be approached with caution: the mixed success of market-driven decentralisation at Makerere (section 6.7) and the transformation of small public institutions

into colleges under a university umbrella in Rwanda (section 7.2), a centralising effort, suggests the need for highly-personalised approaches based on individual contexts.

Although UNAM was founded 30-odd years after, for example, the universities of Ghana and Ibadan, it shared many of the same tensions in its childhood and adolescence. Friction arose between the government's view of the university as an instrumentalist tool for national development, and the university's view of itself – borrowed, as elsewhere, from the British model – as an independent bastion of academic inquiry (Kirby-Harris, 2003, p. 360). Limited autonomy meant UNAM could develop existing courses, but had less freedom to initiate new ones (White, 1998, p. 159). Yet institutional leaders were often drawn from the same pool as, and mixed with, government officials. This meant a high degree of formal and informal consultation of university staff on government policy, a complex relationship which meant UNAM had strong influence but also responded to 'unarticulated' government policy – for example by establishing programmes in areas aligned to government interests, and distance education – to try to increase the university's bargaining position with the state (Kirby-Harris, 2003, pp. 366–368). That new nation states were struggling through the same growing pains as their flagship universities perhaps explains the close yet tense relationships between the two.

UNAM continues to share issues in common with its flagship peers. The employability of graduates and relevance of the curricula is questioned (UNESCO, 2016, p. 75), despite schemes established to provide students with work experience, on-the-job training and 'practical' skills (Shaketange, Kanyimba and Brown, 2017). Research and outreach work is determined by the availability of external funding and is therefore ad hoc, with no specific strategy for research at the university (UNESCO, 2016, p. 76). However, a priority of the Multidisciplinary Research Centre at UNAM is to collect and study Indigenous knowledge, viewed as an important means of understanding the livelihoods and ensuring the resilience of local cultures (Chinsembu and Hamunyela, 2015, p. 362).

5.10 University of Rwanda (Kigali, Rwanda)

The University of Rwanda has two origin stories. The first begins with Rwandan independence from Belgium in 1962, and the request of Grégoire Kayibanda, first President of Rwanda, for international assistance to set up a university. As Gendron (2007, pp. 64–65) explains in his account of the outsized role of the Canadian government in this process, the new leadership was keen on maintaining links with the French language and Christian faith, but ideally without the colonial baggage of France or Belgium. This paved the way for Father Georges-Henri

Levesque, a Canadian priest and professor of social philosophy, to be appointed the first Rector of the new National University of Rwanda (NUR) in 1963. The NUR became one of the largest Canadian aid projects during the 1960s, and millions of dollars of support continued until the mid-1990s (Gendron, 2007, p. 85).

The NUR was based in Butare (now officially Huye), leading the city to become the academic and intellectual heart of the country and attracting students and researchers. Over time, the presence of the university helped to form an academic corridor between Butare and the capital Kigali, joining long-standing medical and administrative corridors (Jaganyi et al., 2018, p. 65). The NUR was implicated in the 1994 genocide, and the role that academics played is a subject of annual reflection at the University of Rwanda today. "While the National University of Rwanda's motto was to be the light and service to the people, the university never walked the talk to prevent the genocide," said former vice-chancellor Professor Alexandre Lyambabaje in 2021. "The role of the [NUR] in the preparation and execution of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi was significant", added a historian based at the university (Mbonyinshuti, 2021c).

The second story tells the origin of the University of Rwanda half a century later. Whereas a key driver for the NUR was to stem the flow of students studying abroad and not returning (in particular to neighbouring DR Congo), a major impetus for the formation of the University of Rwanda was consolidation. Existing public degree-awarding institutions were seen as too small and inefficient; although concerns were raised by staff that some of these were still young and needed time to grow, the Minister of Education stressed that the new institution would retain the specialisms of its predecessors, rather than becoming a set of geographically-distributed colleges offering the same curricula (The New Times, 2012). In an echo of the role of the international community in the formation of the NUR, an international review was conducted, and support was provided by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, Sida (Sweden's government agency for development cooperation), and American foundations (MacGregor, 2014). The University of Rwanda was formed in 2013, merging seven institutions: the National University of Rwanda, the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology; the Kigali Institute of Education; the Higher Institute of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, the School of Finance and Banking, the Umutara Polytechnic Higher Institute, and the Kigali Health Institute. James McWha from Northern Ireland, a former leader of universities in Australia and New Zealand, became the first vice chancellor. His top three priorities for the new institution were access, research, and community engagement (MacGregor, 2014).

Today there are six independent, self-governing colleges at the University of Rwanda, spread across nine campuses, including three in Kigali. The majority of the Board of Governors, including the Chair (a Canadian), are appointed by Presidential Order, although the university has the autonomy to appoint the Chancellor (this role was previously given to the Minister of Education). The university sits within the wider higher education apparatus of Rwanda: there are 40 higher education institutions, 60 percent of which are in Kigali; all but three institutions are private, enrolling 57 percent of students (Manirakiza et al., 2019, p. 299; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2019). As state-funded organisations, the public institutions – the University of Rwanda, Rwanda Polytechnic, and the Institute of Legal Practice and Development – are required to align their research and teaching with the national development agenda (Twiringiyimana, Daniels and Chataway, 2021, p. 9). There are also a couple of notable parastatals: the sector is regulated by the Higher Education Council, an independent government agency that reports to the Ministry of Education. And in 2017 the National Council for Science and Technology was established to govern science, technology innovation and research, and to manage the National Research and Innovation Fund; it reports to the Government of Rwanda and is co-chaired by the Minister of Education.

The institutional setup of the University of Rwanda is covered in more detail in chapter 7, and the broader context of its activity in chapter 8. The university has been the subject of less academic scholarship than most of the other flagship universities in this study. This is partly explained by its recent formation: the University of Rwanda is a new flagship (a major reason for it being the primary case). However, the university is indelibly shaped by its predecessor institutions, and these too have received less attention than regional counterparts such as Makerere and Addis Ababa. The following chapters collectively analyse the engagement activity of all ten flagships – despite their deep roots in particular places and contexts, they nonetheless have a great deal in common – before diving more deeply into the University of Rwanda.

6. Geographic scales of engagement activity in strategic plans

This chapter analyses the engagement activity presented in the ten flagship university strategic plans shown in table 3. It begins by situating the strategic plan as an object of analysis within academic enquiry and within sub-Saharan Africa. It then explores how the ten strategies were developed and the implications for local development activity, before looking at different geographic scales of activity, how local engagement is measured, and what this activity tells us about the role of flagship universities in society (the methodology is detailed in section 4.2). It finishes with a discussion on how flagships face difficult decisions and tensions as they plan for the future.

Table 3: Flagship university strategies analysed

Flagship university	Period covered	Title (citation)	Notes
Addis Ababa University	2020-2030	A Ten-Year Strategic Plan (Addis Ababa University, 2020)	
Makerere University	2020-2030	Unlocking the Knowledge Hub in the Heart of Africa (Makerere University, 2020)	
University of Cape Town (UCT)	2016-2020; 2020-2030	Distinguishing UCT: A Strategic Planning Framework (UCT, 2016); Vision 2030: Unleash Human Potential for a Fair and Just Society (UCT, 2021b)	
University of Ghana	2014-2024	Strategic Plan (University of Ghana, 2014)	
University of Ibadan	2015-2020	Agenda for the Accelerated Development of the University of Ibadan through Consolidation and Innovation (Olayinka, 2015); My Stewardship as Vice-Chancellor (2015-2020): Partial Listing of Fundamental Achievements (Olayinka, 2020)	Olayinka (2020) is a summary of activities, rather than a forward-looking strategic plan
University of Mauritius	2015-2020	Strategic Plan (University of Mauritius, 2015)	
University of Namibia	2019-2024	Strategic Plan (University of Namibia, 2019)	
University of Rwanda	2018-2025	Strategic Plan (University of Rwanda, 2018b)	

Flagship university	Period covered	Title (citation)	Notes
University of Zambia	2018-2022	Strategic Plan (University of Zambia, 2018)	
University of Zimbabwe	2019-2025	Educating to Change Lives (University of Zimbabwe, 2019a)	Full version seen by author but not in public domain; only extracts published on university website quoted in analysis

6.1 The analysis of strategic plans in academic enquiry

Strategic plans offer significant opportunities for analysis. They can be a 'way of knowing' what should be done, who should do it, why it should be done, and how, across complex organisations (Bryson, Crosby and Bryson, 2009, p. 201). They present insight into the priorities, plans, and values of an institution, and can reflect and in turn reproduce wider societal or international discourses. However, the limitations of strategic plans necessitate a critical approach when we handle them, and their often idealised and politicised nature requires us to be careful of accepting statements at face value. An institution-wide plan may reflect the views of a single department or a few individuals, or a compromise reached by omission and obfuscation. A strategy may have been crafted independently by the university, or shaped by the spoken or unspoken wishes of government or funding bodies. Marginalised groups may be excluded, and the process of forming plans can be top-down and non-participatory – even when the planning process is ostensibly open to all staff and students; different stakeholders will have varying degrees of influence (Falqueto et al., 2020). Plans may bear little resemblance to the lived reality of those people whom the plan is intended to serve. They are sometimes hard-to-access or simply unavailable, and can quickly become dated. On-the-ground reality can quickly diverge from carefully laid plans as opportunities arise and crises hit. As Addie (2019b, p. 1618) notes, although strategic plans can form the basis of rigorous comparison, 'universities act through the negotiation of policies and the mobilisation of multiple (not necessarily coherent) channels, not through plans themselves'. Strategies are rarely followed by a comprehensive and objective evaluation. Nevertheless, strategic plans can still tell us something about how an institution works, its plans, and – in particular for this study – how flagship universities view and approach external engagement activity. Figure 4 shows some

questions asked of flagship plans in this chapter, mapped onto the process of producing ('upstream'), publishing, and then using ('downstream') a strategic plan.

Figure 4: Interrogating a university strategic plan

Upstream

Who are the decision makers?
How participative is the process?
Who approves the plan?

Plan published

What is the purpose?
Who is the audience?
What are the aims?

Downstream

How is the plan disseminated?
How is it understood, translated, implemented?
Is the plan monitored or evaluated?
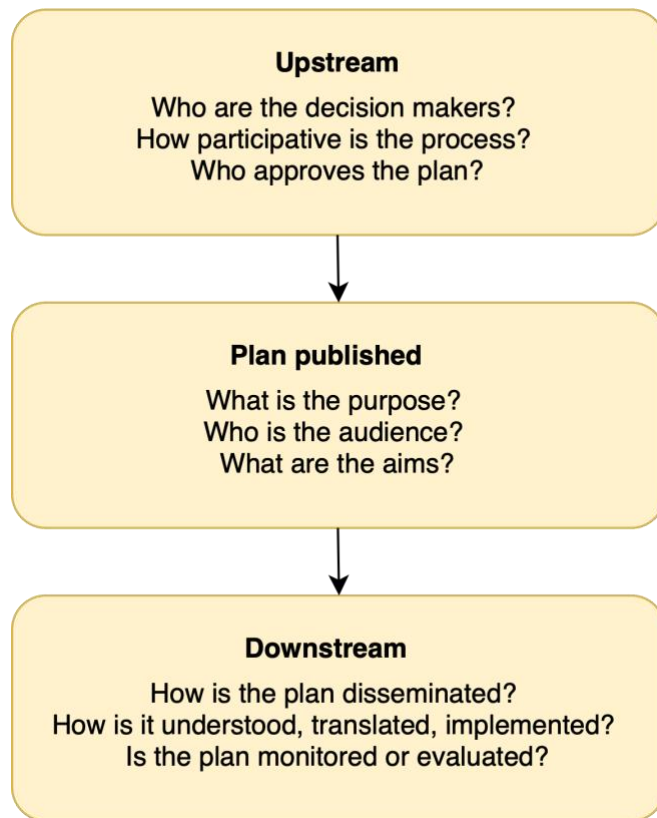
In line with the broader literature on local university engagement, previous studies of university strategic plans mostly focus on North American and European institutions. Gaffikin and Perry (2009, p. 130) examined how the strategic plans of a sample of large US research universities have been shaped by discourses of globalisation, including whether planning documents illustrate a shift towards social engagement, entrepreneurial research, and a 'strategic turn' to managerial forms of administration. Ehlenz (2018) assessed the anchor role of 22 urban universities in the US. Addie (2019b) examined the institutional and spatial strategies of universities in London and New York, comparing the organisational structures, spatial orientations, and ways of operating in each city. There are a couple of studies that look beyond the Global North. Ngwana (2003) looked at the formation of the 1998-2003 University of Buea strategic plan, and welcomed the role of the Cameroonian Ministry of Higher Education as a referee rather than a player in the process. More recently, Stensaker et al. (2019) examined the strategies of 78 universities in 33 countries, including eight in sub-Saharan Africa, and found

similar strategic positioning within status groupings: high-ranked, medium-low-ranked, and unranked universities. As such, globalisation and internationalisation have not led to a single form of homogenised strategy, but a 'snakelike procession' of unranked universities aspiring towards medium-low ranked institutions, and medium-low ranked universities towards high-ranked ones.

Strategic plans as 'key sites of institutional discourse'

A strategic plan has a specific purpose, audience, and aims. It also has a history, both in terms of the process of authoring that may have involved multiple, competing authors with diverging or overlapping interests, and antecedents – other documents, conversations, and events that knowingly or unknowingly, explicitly or implicitly, shaped the plan. Strategic plans are a rich source of information on policies and practices that can tell a story of institutional interests and, especially when considered collectively, the broader, structural forces that shape these. As Bowen (2009, p. 29) points out, documents such as strategies provide data on the context within which research participants operate, as well as bearing witness to past events. Strategies are a static compromise emerging from an active process of development, or, according to Gaffikin and Perry (2009, p. 138), 'key sites of institutional discourse'. The lenses of purpose, audience, and aims help us to see why strategic plans are – in the words of Krippendorff (2010, p. 234) – valuable 'vehicles of communication', offering us a window into flagship universities and their local engagement activity.

The *purpose* of a strategic plan, taken at surface value, is to provide an indication of priorities, or at least a signal of what is considered important or necessary. Strategic plans are ways to balance institutional ambitions (to attract international students, for example) and external expectations (such as accountability for public money) (Drori and Honig, 2013, p. 345; Stensaker et al., 2019, p. 541). Beyond this, and with emphasis on the *strategic*, plans can be 'interactive, proactive, selective, and visionary' (Albrechts, Balducci and Hillier, 2016, p. 16). They may aim to establish new initiatives or to respond to external circumstances. The appointment of a new vice chancellor may result in an attempt to distance from the previous regime, to restructure, or to build on recent achievements. Most are mandatory: although the form and content will vary, national ministries or higher education bodies require planning documents from universities, usually along a five- to ten-year horizon, and any funding is usually predicated on an acceptable medium-term plan. International funders – a multilateral body such as the World Bank financing an Africa Higher Education Centre of Excellence (ACE), or a national donor such as Sida, Sweden's government agency for development,

funding a five-year programme at the University of Rwanda – also require strategic plans, sometimes bespoke, but usually referencing broader organisational frameworks or adapted from a core university planning document.

In many cases, the *audience* is ostensibly the university community: staff and students. For staff, in particular leaders charged with implementation, strategic plans are 'signposts' to shape subsequent decisions (Mastop and Faludi, 1997, p. 815). It would be naïve, however, to consider the academic community to be the only audience. The audience is rarely made explicit, but it can help to ask why the strategy was written, and how it might reflect power and decision-making structures. A university strategy may be aimed at the head of state, or the university council (sometimes these are effectively one and the same). A version of the university strategy written for Sida might be aimed at senior leaders at the agency, or it might be a reflection of an implicit understanding between the university and the agency that the real audience is the Swedish government, or even the Swedish electorate. A strategy with one eye on attracting World Bank funding may reflect the norms of the ACE programme – norms that are shaped by wider international discourses around higher education and economic development.

Aims are closely related to both purpose and audience. These are likely to be both internal and external: to measure and guide the activity of staff within the university (as above), and to inform and persuade external audiences that the university and its activity have merit (in order to increase funding, expand reach and remit, change direction, or simply to ensure survival). Universities are large, complex institutions: a plan may aim to bind an organisation together, and provide a degree of coherence, especially in the face of unforeseen challenges (Chance and Williams, 2009, p. 38). In principle, an internal audience can be judged on how they delivered according to the plan, and an external audience can hold the organisation to account. As such, although the document itself may be a form of static compromise, it can continue to be subject to interpretation and contestation. A further aim may be to inculcate trust in the organisation – evidenced, perhaps, by judicious use of positive imagery and professional design, and by the considered use of language. The extent to which a strategy is publicly available may also reveal information on the aims and audience.

Strategic plans in sub-Saharan Africa

Fredua-Kwarteng (2020) critiques the strategic planning document as an imported management technique from the North, imposed on sub-Saharan African universities in the 1990s. He identifies two reasons for this: first, a requirement by the World Bank, who wanted the plan to

be used as a basis for funding discussions between the university and the government and donors. Second, as part of a push for African universities to gain greater autonomy from the state. Fredua-Kwarteng suggests that the strategic plan, in its current form, is unsuited to African universities today because they do not have the distance from government and the freedom to design and enact their strategies. However, there is likely some wriggle room behind the scenes, as the actions and activities within strategic plans are wrangled into place as part of negotiations between university staff and government officials – a relationship explored in detail in chapters 7 and 8. The influence of the Global North is less contestable. This influence has been direct, for example as documented by Ngwana (2003, p. 10) with the University of Manchester running workshops to develop the University of Buea strategic plan at a formative time for the institution, six years after it had been awarded full university status. The influence is also indirect: the very existence of a university strategic plan is the norm amongst most large universities in many countries around the world. Plans tend to fit a fairly standard profile: there is more similarity between the format of the UCT strategic plan and the UCL strategic plan than the composition of their student bodies, for example. The values of the entrepreneurial university model, whilst contested and subject to considerable variation between universities, have shaped this standardised model of the strategic plan, and are rooted in European and North American higher education systems (Stensaker et al., 2019, p. 541).

Yet strategic plans have taken on an outsized importance in many African flagship universities. Their launches are often glitzy affairs covered by the national press. A formal planning document has perhaps a higher status and broader significance within many African countries than in the UK or the US. For example, and as we will see in section 8.2, strategic plans carry great weight in Rwanda; a detailed strategic plan complements the top-down administrative structure and 'instinctive efficiency' in the country (Wrong, 2021, p. 387). Goodfellow and Smith (2013, p. 3193), who also conducted research in Kigali, express this nicely: 'the [city development] plan wields enormous influence: one interviewee even commented that "[we] are all impaled on the Master Plan"'. For African flagship universities, therefore, the contents of their strategic plans can help us understand their role in society, and the process that underpins their development sheds light on whose voice counts when planning the future.

6.2 'Inclusive and participatory': approaches to preparing strategic plans

On the surface, the process for constructing flagship university strategic plans (the 'upstream' component of diagram 4) appears remarkably similar. For the University of Rwanda plan, 'considerable inputs have been received from internal stakeholders ranging from senior

managers, staff, students, and other stakeholders' to reflect national and international aspirations (2018b, p. 3). The Addis Ababa University plan is the result of 'extensive participation' from the university community (2020, p. 9). The perspectives of students, faculty, the government, and national and international organisations were gathered through focus group discussions and informed the intent statements (2020, p. 7), and then the plan was 'consolidated' through workshops and events with the university community and 'high level experts' (2020, p. 11). The University of Ghana (2014, p. 8) strategic plan draws upon several months of consultation with the leadership of the university and 'a good cross-section of stakeholders'. The University of Zimbabwe strategy is the result of 'comprehensive consultation' with a range of university stakeholders including industry, civil society and students (University of Zimbabwe, 2019b). The University of Zambia (2018, i) strategy was informed by feedback from a mid-term review of the previous plan, and then shaped by 'the university community'. And a foreword by the chair of the university council in the University of Namibia (2019, p. 6) strategic plan simply says the plan was developed in an 'inclusive and participatory manner'.

Given the centrality of planning documents in determining the activities and strategic direction of flagship universities in sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to examine the process by which they are constructed to understand the role of flagships in their local areas and the possible scope of local engagement. Most notably, the voice of the (non-university) local community and the broader public seem to be absent in consultation processes. Subtle differences also emerge between flagships, with implications for any activity which follows. The University of Ibadan strategic plan is the personal 'manifesto' of the then-incoming Vice Chancellor, setting out in intricate detail the priorities of his five-year tenure. Although it still draws on 'extensive consultation' with the university community – staff members submitted 'memoranda on how to reposition our dear institution… their various views were synthesised in order to produce a coherent picture' (Olayinka, 2015, p. 14) – the influence of an individual is more pronounced than in the other flagships.

Strategies that appear to be open and participatory can still be shaped by power structures. The UCT (2021b) plan is a high-level vision statement that is more abstract than its continental counterparts. It describes itself as a living strategy – 'an idea that is constantly reshaped in different parts of the organisation and that elicits an emotional and intellectual commitment across all sectors of our community', instead of the 'typical approach' of a document that ends up 'lost at the bottom of a website or forgotten in a drawer' (2021b, p. 1). University leaders

emphasise consultation and participation through engagement events with academic, professional, administrative and support staff (Simon, 2020). However, questions should be asked about how truly representative these processes are. The process at UCT began in 2018 with the Vice Chancellor presenting the three pillars of the academic project at UCT – excellence, transformation and sustainability – to help shape discussions, as well as setting up the Futures Think Tank, led by the dean of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment, to examine how the university could best adapt to meet societal challenges (UCT, 2021b, p. 4). As a result, the tone, starting points and direction have all been set from the top of the institution. When the foundations have been set by a figure as powerful as the vice chancellor, it is perhaps unlikely these will be fundamentally challenged. Although the student protests are acknowledged as an impetus for change, students do not appear to be part of these discussions, let alone local communities. The supposedly 'open' and 'consultative' process for formulating a university strategic plan is undermined by a senior leader setting 'loose themes' to begin the conversation, potentially closing down new ideas.

Others have had marked government influence. The Makerere University strategy states that it was developed by the University Council with input from stakeholders (2020, p. 2). However, commentators have noted that Makerere's strategic plan 'draws heavily' on the report of a presidential visitation committee (titled "Bringing the Future to the Present") (Kigotho, 2020). The committee was appointed by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, after he closed the university in November 2016 following staff and student strikes. The relationship between Makerere and the government illustrates the often circular dependence of flagships on their national leaders: lecturers at Makerere University went on strike because the government failed to pay them; students went on strike because they were not being taught; the government closed the university because of strikes; the government instilled a commission to look at challenges facing the university; the commission recommended that Makerere 'strengthen initiatives to explore diverse sources of revenue' – away from government funding (African Centre for Media Excellence, 2016; Rwendeire, 2017, xii). The majority of flagship strategies have a foreword provided by a government minister; it is likely that most will have been approved by government officials before publication.

As such, much of the debate and consultation that feeds into strategic planning is likely to be over nuance and detail, rather than broad aims and objectives, as these will be influenced largely by government or the senior leadership team – with little or no participation by local communities or the broader public. Whilst these documents may be more transparent and

consultative than the previous model of strategic plan, which often emerged fully formed from the senior leadership team after extensive input from donor-funded consultants (Farrant and Afonso, 1997, p. 23), we cannot assume they are representative of the entire institution. However, there are differences between the plans, and table 4 presents a model of the forms university strategic planning can take. Most of the flagship strategies analysed sit somewhere towards the nexus of the boxes, a scattering of points in the centre with small degrees of difference between them. UCT, for example, would be situated towards the bottom right, whereas the University of Ibadan is likely to sit towards the top left.

Table 4: Forms of university strategic planning

	DIRECTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE	**OPEN-ENDED**
TOP-DOWN PROCESS	Tight, centralised control; inflexible	To be translated into implementation plans; cascade down through organisation
WIDE CONSULTATION	Highly-detailed plans; complex implementation structures	Vision statements; aspirational

The process for implementing flagship university strategic plans (the 'downstream' component of figure 4) also appears remarkably similar across institutions. For the University of Rwanda, the strategy is a framework to be translated into implementation plans at college, school, and departmental level (2018b, p. 4). Academic and business units within Addis Ababa University will be given 'maximum autonomy' to execute their strategic plans, but strong performance management systems will be in place (2020, p. 41). The University of Mauritius (2015, p. 1) plan is a 'guiding document' based on consultation with internal and external stakeholders. At the University of Namibia, corporate strategic objectives will be 'cascaded' into divisional business plans, which will in turn be 'cascaded' into annual management plans. Progress updates will be given to pro-vice chancellors monthly (2019, p. 9). Finally, personal scorecards will be developed for all staff members (2019, p. 37). At the University of Zambia, faculties and departments will construct their own plans to meet the objectives specified in the

institutional strategy (2018, vi). The implementation of the plan's targets will be reported on a monthly and quarterly basis (2018, p. 53).

Again, understanding processes of implementation is important, with the degree of autonomy afforded to departments and faculties acting as an enabler for, or constraint on, local engagement activity. Whilst it is easy to dismiss staff scoreboards and monthly indicator reporting as managerialism or bureaucratic micromanagement, their form and function shape incentives to conduct new activity and to form new partnerships, and directly determine promotion criteria and career pathways. They are also intended to influence donors: the University of Zambia (2018, p. 5) encourages development partners who wish to work with the university 'to support those [activities] that are in line with the strategic directions'.

6.3 Local manifestations and global implications: geographic scales of flagship activity

All flagship university strategies discuss activity at the local level, albeit to different extents, as shown in table 5. Similarly, all discuss their national and international activities and aspirations, with some crossover between the scales. Beyond this, however, the concept of place itself is not articulated in any detail. Occasionally, the definitions of scales changes between sections of the strategic plan – for example, when the University of Rwanda plan discusses regional development needs, these are presumed to mean the East African community on one page (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 13), and then the challenges facing Africa as a continent in another (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 11). Similarly, who constitutes the 'community' or 'communities' is rarely expanded upon, except to distinguish between the academic and non-academic community (for example Addis Ababa University, 2020, p. 7), or the local versus the global community (Addis Ababa University, 2020, p. 47). However, some do discuss their city. These scales are considered in turn from the global to the local, together with some examples of where scales are blurred or joined.

Table 5: The inclusion of local engagement activity within flagship university strategic plans

Flagship university	Local engagement activity in plan	
Addis Ababa University	12 strategic goals are identified: 'provide transformative and scholarly community engagement' is number four. Sections of the report detail community engagement and community service strategies.	◇

Flagship university	Local engagement activity in plan	
Makerere University	Goal four (of four) is to become 'an engaged university with enhanced partnerships with industry, the community and international institutions'.	
University of Cape Town (UCT)	The 2016-2020 framework lists 'social impact through engaged scholarship' (including the expansion of community and external partnerships) as goal five (of five). The draft 2030 Vision is much higher-level, with social engagement a 'cross cutting element'.	
University of Ghana	Little mention of local engagement except for developing a process for assessing and publishing the impact of community engagement and outreach programmes.	
University of Ibadan	16 priorities are elaborated in some detail: number 13 is 'Corporate Social Responsibility' to meet the needs of communities in the Ibadan region.	◇
University of Mauritius	Sustainable community engagement is the fifth 'strategic direction' (of six).	
University of Namibia	There are five overarching themes, including 'community engagement, environmental sustainability and social relevance' (number four).	◇
University of Rwanda	Strategic goal three (of eight) is 'responsible community engagement and networking'.	◇
University of Zambia	Seven 'strategic directions' include 'promote community outreach and beneficial partnerships' (number three).	◇
University of Zimbabwe	Each of seven strategic objectives has a set of outcomes driven from four areas: innovation, industrialisation, teaching and community outreach.	

◇ Includes indicators, targets and/or baseline figures for local/community engagement activity.

The quest for global recognition

Except for Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 29), none of the surveyed universities describe themselves as a 'flagship' institution. Many instead – in a reflection of the literature in section 2.2 – echo the University of Ibadan's aspiration to become a world-class university (Olayinka, 2015, p. 46). The University of Ghana (2014, p. 7) observes that 'it has become fairly standard for universities around the globe to claim a "world class" vision', before stating later in the same paragraph that the vision of the university is to become a 'World Class Research-Intensive University'. Even where flagship status is acknowledged, this is married to global

ambition. Following the 'sparkling success' of the previous Addis Ababa University plan, which had the vision of the university being 'among the top ten pre-eminent graduate and research universities in Africa', the 2020-2030 plan adopts a more global goal: to be 'among the world class universities and one of the leading regional research universities by 2030' (Addis Ababa University, 2020, pp. 5–6). It will 'work aggressively' towards the internationalisation of its programs (2020, p. 13).

The University of Rwanda aspires to be 'internationally recognised', and a 'globally engaged, competitive, and innovative research-driven university' (2018b, pp. 8–10). One way it proposes to achieve this is by prioritising 'research areas that advance the University as an internationally recognised University'. It is important to understand the decision-making process that will underpin this prioritisation: will areas already recognised in league table rankings be supported at the expense of emerging fields? Will neglected but potentially transformative subjects be dropped in favour of those championed by industry? What about research areas with strong local benefit but limited international appeal? The strategy does not make this clear.

Occasionally, the global visions of the university align with the goals of the national government. The University of Mauritius (2015, p. 1) refers to serving the global community alongside the developmental needs of the country. One proposed means is an Asia-Africa Knowledge Platform (2015, p. 14), complementing a national development aspiration to be a bridge between the two continents (see section 5.7). Strong regional links with East African states are also seen as particularly important for the small island state.

Demonstrating national relevance

In keeping with their origins and historic role, Africa's flagship universities have a strong emphasis on their national relevance in their strategic plans. For the University of Ghana (2014, p. 5), the priority is to 'step up its research profile extensively, and in the process meet the growing research needs of the country and region'. The plan notes that a new Office of Research Innovation and Development has led to significant increases in both external and internal funding for research. New partnerships with industry will help promote research in national priority areas (2014, p. 12). The University of Rwanda's vision and mission, research centres, and curricula will be aligned with Rwanda's development needs, determined by the national Vision 2020 plan and EDPRS2 (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy); the university is 'inextricably linked with the nation's development' (2018b, pp. 9–13). Addis Ababa University considers the contribution of staff to significant national

economic, social and political affairs as a strength, citing an example of negotiations over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. However, research outputs currently have 'limited impact' for national development (Addis Ababa University, 2020, p. 24). In the new plan, research priority areas will be updated to match the national development agenda (2020, p. 37). The mission and vision of Makerere University (2020, p. 5) focuses on being responsive to national and global needs, addressing the complex issues of the 'nation, region and Africa'. The plan is aligned with Vision 2040, Uganda's aspiration to achieve middle income status within the next two decades (2020, p. 9). 'Knowledge and Technology Transfer Partnerships' are the vehicle for translating university research into national development (2020, p. 11), but greater involvement of university researchers in formulating government policy and setting up joint think tanks with government agencies are also mentioned (2020, p. 19).

In contrast with some of the other flagships profiled here, the University of Zimbabwe strategy is predominantly national in focus, with references to international status framed within national development aspirations and the goal of becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030. The plan commits the university to the ambitious goal of contributing to at least 30 percent of the advanced knowledge products, processes, goods and services in national industry and commerce (the current contribution is not specified) (University of Zimbabwe, 2019c). Across the border, the University of Namibia (2019, p. 8) has an early and explicit commitment in the opening line of its executive summary to 'redouble efforts to support government'. As with the University of Zimbabwe, international ambitions (in this case to be 'internationally robust and resilient') are a means of supporting national development (2019, p. 9). The university's mission statement focuses on achieving national and international development goals (2019, p. 14).

In countries that are relatively geographically small, such as Mauritius, a case can be made for conflating the local and national community outside the university. The University of Mauritius has plans to provide students with community service opportunities (University of Mauritius, 2015, p. 10), to act as a think tank for the country (2015, p. 16), and to respond to societal needs (2015, p. 8), sitting alongside 'sustainable community engagement' as a strategic direction (2015, p. 3). Objectives to 'provide services to communities living around the campus' (the types of service are not specified), to support the local community to develop sustainable solutions to problems they face, to include the voice of local communities in the university research agenda, and to measure the number of activities carried out benefiting the local community (2015, pp. 16–17), suggests that there is also a sub-national focus. However, this

is framed as charitable activity directed at beneficiaries, rather a product of equal partnership. In addition, activities such as formal and informal courses, and the development of 'turn-key solutions for the communities', appear to mostly take place on campus rather than being embedded within the community (2015, p. 17).

Local and community engagement in strategic plans

There is evidence within strategic plans of a turn towards local and community engagement, but this remains an emergent focus. The University of Namibia (2019, p. 12) views 'insufficient engagement of communities in social projects' as an institutional weakness. Strategic objectives to help rectify this include strengthening sustainable community engagement, improving social relevance and increasing strategic social projects, and strengthening mechanisms for climate change mitigation and adaptation (2019, p. 17). The strategy states that there is an increasing international awareness 'that community engagement is an essential social responsibility of tertiary institutions', suggesting the influence of global narratives in shaping university planning in this area. As a result, the university 'will strive for social relevance in the community, by deploying scholarly expertise and resources to engage with communities within the context of reciprocal engagement and collaborative partnerships' (2019, p. 21). Weaknesses are also noted in other strategies. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 9) aims for 'state of the art research and community engagement accomplishments', and observes that there is increasing societal demand for community services and partnership (2020, p. 15). However, staff currently make a 'low contribution' compared to the expectations of the community (2020, p. 25).

Other flagships approach the local from a different angle. For Makerere University (2020, p. 19), relations with industry are prioritised in discussions on engagement, and take a technology-first approach: the 'education and research agenda will be driven by the potential of the university to harness and diffuse emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as robotics and artificial intelligence, big data, quantum computing and the Internet of Things, as well as Nano and biotechnology'. Following this, the employability of graduates depends upon being able to 'effectively harness new local and global opportunities as they emerge'. This importance ascribed to technology is reminiscent of the inclusive innovation strategies of some cities in the Global North, and similar critiques might be levelled here: that a focus on the 'new and exciting' instead of the 'effective and boring', and the search for technological fixes for complex social problems, is misplaced (Lee, 2020, p. 3). However, a sub-theme calls upon Makerere to prioritise the needs of the community near the university and to enhance

community outreach programmes. Elsewhere, the University of Zimbabwe strategy 'adopts a radical departure' from the three traditional pillars of teaching, research and community service. Although these pillars remain, the Chairman of Council explains that two new pillars – innovation and industrialisation – will combine to form 'Education 5.0' to help transform the national economy (University of Zimbabwe, 2019b). However, community outreach is an outcome that cuts across each of the seven strategic objectives (University of Zimbabwe, 2019a).

Three strategies discuss their city or city region. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 16) makes several references to the capital city in a section on opportunities. The convenient geographic location, and the international organisations hosted in the city, are an asset (the city is the 'third diplomatic centre in the world' (2020, p. 29)). The 'massive infrastructural investment' in Addis Ababa means demand for expertise in architecture, construction, project management, public realm improvements, ICT, power, and financial management.[26] The City Administration of Addis Ababa is listed as a stakeholder with two main goals: serving as a link between the university and the local community, and working to solve staff housing issues (2020, p. 51). Second, the University of Zambia (2018, p. 6) emphasises its location in the heart of Lusaka, which 'presents opportunities for multi-sectoral cooperation and linkages'. The university needs to 'leverage' this location, together with the 'competitive advantage' of being the country's oldest university. Third, the University of Ibadan compares its host region unfavourably to Lagos ('the commercial capital of the country'), citing this as a weakness. The 'inability to secure consistent and sustainable support and engagement with Oyo and other state governments' is another weakness, but the possibility of strengthening these local relationships is seen as an opportunity (Olayinka, 2015, p. 54). In conclusion, while flagships recognise the importance of local and community engagement, the extent of focus and the approach taken varies, with some emphasising technology, others prioritising community needs, and a few highlighting the relative merits of their geographic locations.

Blurring and bridging of geographic scales

We have seen how for the University of Mauritius, in part due to its home on a small island state, distinctions between the local, national, and international are blurred. A similar blurring

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[26] More broadly, the burgeoning Ethiopian middle class has meant an expansion in higher education, accompanied by vast building projects. The government has linked this agenda to attempts to modernise the construction industry and bring it up to international standards, overseen by foreign experts. See GIZ (2016) for an example.

takes place in Rwanda, another relatively (geographically) small state and where the University of Rwanda has a national footprint. The university wants to become 'more accessible to non-academic communities' (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 15). It will create opportunities for staff and students and the wider community to contribute to capacity development aligned to Rwanda's development agenda – a statement made in the community engagement section, making no distinction between the local and the national. Occasionally, a more deliberate bridging between scales takes place, and sometimes within the same document: the University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 16) strategy makes clear the link between local and global. For example, the university 'will promote international perspectives by implementing teaching strategies that make explicit and ongoing connections between local experience and global discourses'. Others also connect the two scales. The University of Zambia (2018, vi) will develop curricula that are 'local in nature but with a global orientation'; Olayinka (2015, p. 24) discusses how strategic research at the University of Ibadan must contribute to local, national and global development, and become a university that is – in phrasing reminiscent of any UK Russell Group institution – 'locally relevant, nationally pre-eminent and globally competitive' (2015, p. 36).

Students are also a conduit for bridging the local and global. Both the vision and the mission of the University of Rwanda are channelled through graduates (in the vision to build 'a more just and sustainable society locally, nationally and globally') and students (in the mission to, amongst other things, transform 'communities through finding solutions') (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 7). Students will, the university promises, be prepared to serve communities and country (2018b, p. 9). More generally, Makerere University (2020, p. 13) calls on its students to be local, national and global citizens.

For the UCT (2021b, p. 5), there is no explicit focus on the local, but 'transformation' and 'social engagement' are cross-cutting themes. The university will put in place policies to 'enable, support and recognise civic engagement by staff and students' (2021b, p. 10), but 'civic engagement' is not defined. UCT will 'embrace local knowledge' and 'forge strong social partnerships with local communities' (2021b, p. 14). The previous 2016-2020 UCT strategy had objectives to expand community partnerships and the number of staff who engage with community-based organisations, to support the aspirations and development challenges of community-based organisations, and to offer practical projects with 'external constituencies' as part of the curriculum (UCT, 2016, p. 15). In a shift in focus, the current UCT (2021b) strategy recognises that the institution has 'struggled with its own identity', its colonial history,

and its contradictory history during apartheid (2021b, p. 6). It chooses to spell Africa in its pre-colonial form ('Afrika') to 'validate the global character of the local in the 21st century', and orients itself as a global university in Africa. In doing so, it seeks to engage with societal challenges 'in their local manifestations and global implications' (2021b, p. 7). The impression is an institution uncomfortably aware of both its relative global prestige and its history, and seeking to root itself within the region. Thus the region becomes the focal point, rather than the local or global, and the university acts as a lens to promote African insights for a global audience, and make global knowledge relevant to Africa (2021b, p. 14). The intersection of different, 'glonacal', scales of place in African flagship strategies supports the assertion of Marginson (2022, p. 1390) that a single-scale view of higher education is insufficient to capture the totality of activity.

6.4 'To impart growth and development': implementation plans for local engagement activity

Four institutional strategies – Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 72), the University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 24), the University of Zambia (2018, p. 60), and the University of Namibia (2019, p. 32) – have numerical targets and, in some cases, baseline figures for local and community engagement activity. The University of Ibadan proposes performance indicators, but with no target figures attached (Olayinka, 2015, p. 266) (table 5 shows those strategies with indicators for local or community engagement activity). The detail of these institutions is explored below. However, it is worth noting that the existence of implementation plans for five of the ten surveyed universities suggests a level of institutional capacity and commitment within those universities to local engagement activity (whilst recognising the possibility that flagships without such plans may have developed them separately, and those with targets and indicators may later change or ignore them). Others, such as the University of Ghana (2014, p. 28), want to develop a process for assessing the impact of community engagement programmes, and this may feature in a future strategy.

More broadly, a university – especially one as complex as a flagship – needs to have a mature administrative infrastructure in place to support an effective implementation plan for local engagement activity. Some do not yet have the capacity or capability, in much the same way as some flagship universities outside of this study do not have a strategic plan. A couple of flagships with implementation plans for local engagement activity touch on this issue more broadly. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 18) bemoans the inability to fully utilise its alumni to attract resources and new partnerships, an ability predicated on an effective system for

tracking graduates (a theme revisited in section 7.5). The University of Zambia (2018, p. 11) strategic plan states that whilst the university conducts a lot of research, 'most of it is not documented/captured/attributed'. As we will see in the next section, this has implications for the University of Zambia: it has a public image problem, to which it is responding by borrowing from the business playbook and developing a Corporate Social Responsibility policy to try to address.

Goals, indicators, targets, and baseline data

At the University of Rwanda, interventions target the 'primary occupation' in Rwandan communities with the intention of maximising the benefit of university activity. For example, goals include establishing a veterinary clinic at the Nyagatare Campus, opening model farms in the Eastern Province to showcase irrigation and agricultural mechanisation, and launching an animal feed manufacturing firm (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 24). Table 6 shows an extract from the 'Responsible Community Engagement and Networking' section of the implementation plan; in common with other flagships, the minimal baseline data for this suggests these are new areas of focus.

Table 6: Excerpt showing targets for the 'Promote community outreach activities' strategic priority area from the University of Rwanda strategic plan

Key performance indicator	Baseline (2017-18)	Target 2018/19 year 1	Target 2019/20 year 2	Target 2020/21 year 3	Target 2021/22 year 4	Target 2022/23 year 5	Target 2023/24 year 6	Target 2024/25 year 7
Number of community outreach programs and activities	12	22	32	42	52	62	72	82
Number of identified community needs and addressed	0	22	32	42	52	62	72	82
Number of seminars organised to share research findings with the community	0	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
Number of beneficiaries	0	22 groups of people	32 groups of people	42 groups of people	52 groups of people	62 groups of people	72 groups of people	82 groups of people

Taken from the Responsible Community Engagement and Networking Strategic Goal 3 in the implementation plan (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 34).

In the Addis Ababa University (2020) plan, community engagement is distinct from *scholarly* community engagement. Engagement activities are reciprocal and 'designed to impart growth and development both for AAU and community partners' (2020, p. 47). The university plays the role of facilitator, promising to ensure appropriate governance structures for continued community engagement, encouraging academic units to assess community needs and respond accordingly, and ensure the 'efficient utilisation' of resources for community engagement. In other words, activity itself and the detail of engagement is devolved within the institution. Elsewhere in the plan, the 'incomplete devolution of power to lower level units as a result of insufficient accountability and enforcement mechanisms, and poor chain of command in decision making' is identified as a weakness: addressing this is therefore an important precondition for scaling up local engagement activity (2020, p. 18). A quality audit framework for community engagement activities will also be developed (2020, p. 101). For scholarly community engagement, Addis Ababa University will support female leaders to help achieve

gender balance in public office, increase consultancy (covered in section 6.6) and commissioned research activity, and maintain a store of critical national data (2020, pp. 47–48).

The Addis Ababa University plan has a rich set of targets within the goal of providing transformative and scholarly community engagement, although these are high-level (2020, pp. 72–74). Some have an explicit place focus: to start satellite community projects (baseline: one; target number of satellite projects in operation in five years' time: 30). Within five years, the university aims to have 20 active community engagement centres, from a baseline of zero. Importantly, the university has targets for capacity building: 1,000 external and 5,000 AAU staff community engagement providers to be trained over the next five years. All staff should report being engaged in professional community services in five years' time – a proportion increasing by 20 percent each year (from a baseline of zero). There will be 100 research outputs 'deliverable to the community' in the same timeframe, up from a baseline of ten. There are also metrics around identifying sources of finance and the number of funding applications prepared – it is unclear the extent to which community engagement activity is conditional on additional external funding.

The University of Ibadan lists some specific local projects that will be supported: a Women's Law Clinic established by the Faculty of Law in 2007 (where staff and students help disadvantaged women in Ibadan for free – 'the only specialised law clinic in Nigeria and perhaps in Africa' (Olayinka, 2015, p. 246)), and supporting students to teach in local deprived secondary schools in the summer holidays (Olayinka, 2015, p. 242). The university will measure the number of active partnerships and projects with local communities (Olayinka, 2015, p. 266).

The University of Zambia (2018) plan includes targets for developing a community-based capacity building programme, and a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy. The university will, for example, have 13 tailor-made and community-based programmes rolled out per year by December 2020 (one assumes these are likely to have been impacted by COVID-19); there is a baseline of 13 programmes. The Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, and Deans are responsible for delivering this target, and there is a budget of one million kwacha (around £39,000 in September 2023). Example activities include 'Consultants with possible participants; Development of modules; Training' (University of Zambia, 2018, p. 60) – it is assumed these are activities which lead to the formation of programmes, rather than the content of the programmes themselves, again suggesting a devolution of the detail within the

institution. There will also be 15 CSR programmes by December 2020, also with a budget of one million kwacha; the baseline is undefined (2018, p. 59). An underpinning assumption for the plan as a whole is that local communities will be willing to work with the university (2018, p. 49); given the negative public perception reported in the strategy this willingness is not necessarily to be taken for granted.

Under a strategic objective to strengthen sustainable community engagements, the University of Namibia (2019, p. 32) will measure the number of 'successful community engagements'. Although the baseline figure is blank, formulae for targets for 2019-2021 and 2022-2024 appear to draw on a forthcoming baseline figure: '(3B+50)' and '2(3B+50)+50' respectively. Strategic initiatives to drive this forward include to 'encourage outreach activities to strengthen relations with the community', and 'ensure service learning activities are undertaken within communities'. Other strategic initiatives have baseline data: under 'Improve Social Relevance and Increase Strategic Social Projects', the number of beneficiaries has a 2018 baseline of 561, a target of 870 beneficiaries between 2019 and 2021, and a target of 1,270 beneficiaries between 2022 and 2024.

In strategic plans with numerical goals, targets are linear, increasing by a similar number or percentage each year – for example in table 6, above. They are not exponential or logarithmic, either of which could – in theory – be the case for a university starting local activity from a low base. It takes time to build a foundation for community engagement, but then a critical mass is reached and activity rapidly increases (exponential growth). Alternatively, when starting activity, the university finds there is pent-up demand, and the number of activities and people reached rapidly increases, until demand begins to be met, and growth slows (logarithmic growth). Patterns of growth will change from place to place, and if the universities with targets publish their progress it may be possible to gain a crude understanding of these patterns. Or, as is perhaps more likely, the reality of engagement will be somewhat messy and fail to conform to a pattern. Above all, however, we need caution over the limitations of targets and – in the words of Söderström, Paasche and Klauser (2014, p. 308) – the 'technocratic fiction' that any quantitative measure can replace knowledge, interpretation and specific thematic expertise.

6.5 Liabilities and daunting tasks: factors determining engagement activity

Africa's flagship universities are subject to considerable resource constraints, and are shaped by national and international policies and politics. These factors shape the extent to which they are willing and able to conduct local engagement and community work, the geographic scales

within which flagships position themselves and their activities, and the traits of the flagships themselves (covered later in this chapter). Some of these factors are detailed in the universities' strategic plans, in particular financial constraints and the need to diversify sources of income away from government funding.

The University of Ghana (2014, p. 5) strategy discusses expected changes in how the university is funded, given shifts in the relationship between the university and the government and growth in services beyond teaching, in particular research. Government funding has fallen from more than 90 percent of the budget to 55 percent in a decade (2014, p. 6). Reliance on government funding is 'a liability'; dependence on fees will grow (but to no more than 60 percent of the budget (2014, p. 22)). At the same time, the university takes a long-term view and recognises the need to maintain its land and physical assets 'for centuries to come' (2014, p. 6). The university owns a 'significant amount of land and property beyond the traditional physical boundaries of the university', and a database will be created to manage these assets (2014, p. 24).

Makerere University (2020, p. 21) discusses the need to grow and diversify income streams, and to reduce dependence on government funding by at least 30 percent. For the University of Mauritius (2015, p. 19), more 'entrepreneurial activity' and consultancy contracts are a path to diversified income. At the University of Zambia (2018, viii), more revenue is needed 'for the survival of the institution' – competitive fees, consultancy work, investments, and partnerships are identified. This is a 'daunting' task (2018, p. 6). At the time of publication, a third of income was from government grants (2018, x). To break even, student numbers would need to increase from 25,000 to 45,000, but the strategy acknowledges this increase is unrealistic given the infrastructure of the university (2018, p. 15). As with the University of Ghana, the plan notes the 'prime land' owned by the university and available for development through public-private partnerships (2018, p. 10).

State funding for education at the University of Namibia has also decreased, and the university is keen to diversify funding to reduce reliance on government grants and tuition fees (University of Namibia, 2019, p. 18). The university plans to commercialise intellectual property and assets through a commercial entity called Inceptus. The University of Ibadan also seeks to reduce dependence on government funding. In addition to more consultancy, the Vice Chancellor seeks to generate more internal revenue though commercial ventures, led by a wholly owned umbrella company, UI Ventures Limited (Olayinka, 2015, p. 84). Subsidiary companies include a petrol station, a bakery, hotels, security services, paper recycling,

advertising, water, and honey. Some of these businesses provide training in entrepreneurship for students.

Non-financial factors also constrain possibilities for local engagement, notably the employability agenda. The pressure for flagships to be seen as producing graduates with the technical and social skills needed by employers in nationally important industries trumps community engagement and local development activity, and – as we will also see in section 7.3 – is often treated as a higher priority by university leaders.[27] This is likely a global phenomenon and mirrors the UK, where newspaper coverage and the views of national politicians tend to focus on 'low value degrees' and the suitability of graduates for work rather than concerns over the relationship between universities and their local area (Phoenix, 2021). In response, Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 13) will admit a 'manageable' number of students, and prioritise the employability of its graduates, given the weakness of graduate employability in the past (2020, p. 20). For Makerere University (2020, p. 19), greater collaboration with industry and stronger curricula is the route to better employability outcomes, with graduates able to 'harness technology breakthroughs' to meet labour market needs (2020, p. 13). The University of Mauritius (2015, p. 5) will consult regularly with industry to increase the employability of its graduates. The University of Zambia (2018, p. 20) recognises that industry sees the university's graduates as 'not fully equipped'. The University of Namibia (2019, p. 8) draws on international narratives such as the fourth (and fifth) industrial revolutions to inform academic programmes, referencing the World Economic Forum's 2016 report on the topic. And the University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 13) emphasises meeting the needs of the 'national and global workforce'; the University of Rwanda's work on employability is covered in more detail in section 7.3.

Three final factors are worth mentioning. First, feedback received by the University of Zambia (2018, p. 14) revealed a negative public perception of the university. The strategy therefore calls for 'a need to deliberately develop a programme for changing the corporate image of the University'. Public perceptions are likely influenced by the discourse on graduate employability, but will extend beyond this to considerations of societal relevance more generally. Second, and again drawn from the University of Zambia's (rather frank) strategy,

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[27] The engagement and employability agendas intersect when universities work with industry to refresh the curriculum and provide learning opportunities for students, or students are supported to set up, for example, a social enterprise in the community. That the two agendas could reinforce each other is missing from the strategies.

the extent of independence and autonomy of institutions will determine local engagement activity, a theme revisited in section 9.1. The University of Zambia (2018, p. 16) is 'influenced politically by all kinds of political players', with members of the university council viewed as representing interest groups rather than the best interests of the university. The strategy calls for building a 'politically neutral and academically focused and liberal institution'. Third, a few strategies mention, albeit briefly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with implications for university activity (see section 2.3). For example, the University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 8) will engage with the SDGs, and Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 30) views the SDGs as an institutional opportunity and will align activity to the goals, alongside national and African Union agendas.

6.6 Traits of flagship universities: what strategic plans tell us

Flagship universities have characteristics in common, influenced in part by the forces and constraints that define their role. These traits in turn shape, facilitate, and limit local development activity. Some of these traits are visible in strategic plans and are described below. Two rough groupings emerge: one that suggests the influence of the marketisation and corporatisation of higher education, and another that pulls away from this, asserting the unique public role of the flagship as embodied in its founding role. These traits are explored in further detail at the University of Rwanda in the coming chapters, and are analysed in section 9.3.

Pressures to marketise and corporatise

The need to diversify sources of funding compels flagship universities to seek new opportunities and new means of framing existing activity. In relation to local engagement activity, there are four ways this manifests itself within strategic planning. First, the reframing of some or all local and community development activity as Corporate Social Responsibility, borrowing the terminology of the private sector. The University of Ibadan lists Corporate Social Responsibility as a priority, particularly in the Ibadan region (Olayinka, 2015, p. 20). Engagement activities will be university-wide and 'supported with necessary logistics and rewarded'. The Vice Chancellor recognises that the university has 'been particularly lucky in maintaining very cordial relationship with its host community since its establishment', but 'there is an urgent need to contribute more to the immediate environment as part of our societal relevance' (Olayinka, 2015, p. 242). The University of Zambia (2018, p. 13) acknowledges that it has not had a deliberate programme for community outreach to date. However, the strategy (2018, viii) lists community outreach and beneficial partnerships as a strategic

direction, with goals including the development and implementation of community-based capacity building programmes and a 'corporate social responsibility policy'.

Second is the permeation of the language of *customers* and *stakeholders* from the world of business. The local community is listed as one of six external stakeholders of Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 31). In their stakeholder matrix the local community have a *low* revenue impact, a *medium* frequency of contact, but a *high* degree of influence, *high* extent of direct benefit from the service of the university, and a *high* degree of importance according to the university mandate. Other external stakeholders – students (who are also listed separately as customers), the public, other higher education institutions, the international community, and donors and alumni – have a lower designated degree of influence compared to the local community, although most have a bigger impact on revenue. For the University of Namibia (2019, p. 11), students are the 'primary customer', and employees, central government, regional and local authorities, and the community in general are 'secondary customers'. The government is identified as wanting 'research output and consultancy assistance' from the university, and communities want a positive impact on society. It is necessary to disentangle the terminology of the market and the marketisation of local engagement, such as prioritising income generating activities ahead of public service – a point we return to in the concluding section.

Third is the importance placed on consultancy. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 47) recognises that foreign companies win large consultancy contracts in areas of university expertise – management, engineering, law, environment, health – due to the 'lack of [a] competent local workforce'. It wants to build capacity in 'high-end/high-tech' tasks to reduce this dependence on foreign firms. The university also wants to increase the share of big surveys and research projects it conducts, without crowding out smaller consultants. The University of Zambia (2018, p. 9) views 'abundant opportunities' from consultancy services, in higher demand after the liberalisation of the economy. The University of Ibadan already has a consultancy service unit which partners with private companies to bid for contracts – it 'competes favourably' with the likes of PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG (Olayinka, 2015, p. 84). University departments will be encouraged to engage in consultancy and collaboration with industry (Olayinka, 2015, p. 18).

Fourth, flagships are keen to cultivate new partnerships with industry. A major goal of the University of Zimbabwe is the creation of new companies and industries. The Vice Chancellor describes the university's role as 'the "Rails" upon which the "Wheels" of Socio-Economic

Development (i.e. industry and commerce) move' (University of Zimbabwe, 2019d). The University of Zambia (2018, p. 8) acknowledges that it has 'not adequately attracted knowledge and experience from industry'. As such, there is a 'very weak link' between the university and industry (2018, p. 17).[28] Other universities talk of partnerships more broadly, and with less of a market-driven imperative. The University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 11) wants to build relationships with government, industry, communities, and other research groups. Partnerships with 'stakeholders' are planned to help implement 'sustainable community based inclusive initiatives' (2018b, p. 15). UCT (2021b, p. 9) describes how it will 'work collaboratively with local and international social actors'.

Asserting a unique public role

Flagship universities are pulled in multiple directions to both adapt to and transform their position in society, but also to maintain their public- and nation-serving roots. Although their capacity and resources are limited, and in some cases have been eroded over the decades, and although they are no longer the sole provider of knowledge and higher education in their countries, they have a unique weight, a clout they still yield in society, a product of their history, their size, and their geographic reach, and which manifests in four ways in terms of local engagement activity. First, flagships are brokers of, and contributors to, public debate. The University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 15) will 'deliver public knowledge programs to the community and ensure contribution to public debate on issues of public importance'. A key performance indicator for the University of Mauritius (2015, pp. 16–17) is the number of public lectures and talks on national issues hosted by the university. As such, 'contributing to public discourse in relevant domains' is identified as means of community engagement. Sometimes, however, universities feel the need to reign in some of their more enthusiastic employees. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 48) wants to reduce incidences of staff appearing on television and radio and speaking on topics outside their expertise, which raises 'credibility issues to the university'.

Second, flagship universities have a role as institutional mentors and leaders of the national education system, extending their influence into towns, rural areas and communities far from their primary campuses. Despite the prominence and near-unanimity of this role (see chapter

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[28] In a further example of the influence of the private sector on higher education institutions, the University of Zambia (2018, p. 14) provides an excellent example of the jargon that businesses are sometimes lampooned for: 'In the global village, synergising based on establishing mutually beneficial partnerships has been embedded as a key strategy especially in multinational entities'.

5), only two flagships discuss this role in their strategic plan, perhaps because of the considerable burden it entails in terms of staff time. However, the University of Ibadan discusses this as a priority area, drawing on its 'historical role to provide leadership to the Nigerian University System' (Olayinka, 2015, p. 24). Aims include building more collaboration between universities, lobbying the government, and avoiding the national strikes that have debilitated Nigerian universities. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 14) views the commitment of the Ethiopian government to support AAU as a 'university of universities so that AAU trains teachers for other new universities' as an opportunity.

Third, flagships have an extensive physical presence in their country. In some cases, this is a result of the university extending its footprint by establishing multiple campuses, and in other cases through a process of decentralisation from a single major hub. The University of Zambia (2018, p. 6) has undertaken an 'ambitious programme' of scaling up its presence in all provinces outside the capital 'in order to take its services to the people'. For the University of Namibia (2019, p. 12), a 'wide physical presence' across the country is a strength of the institution. Twelve university campuses and regional centres 'physically [transform] the surrounding environments, neighbourhoods, cities and regions through modern, state-of-the-art investments, construction, landscaping upgrades and social networking capacity which create employment opportunities, support the service industry and sustain local economic development' (2019, p. 21). Reflecting on the outcomes of its previous strategic plan, Makerere University (2020, p. 23) notes that the objective to decentralise programme delivery was partially successful: two campuses were established at Jinja and Fort Portal, but the latter was closed due to low enrolment. The University of Ghana (2014, p. 6) notes some progress has been made with the decentralisation of the university into four colleges, and the majority of operations will be further decentralised through the college system (2014, p. 20).

Fourth, flagships recognise the importance of Indigenous knowledge. Addis Ababa University (2020, p. 36) will 'explore indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and integrate it with conventional knowledge for solving societal problems'; Makerere University (2020, p. 11) plans to increase the profile of Indigenous research. This topic is revisited in section 10.2.

6.7 Discussion: tensions between historic roles and new demands

We can see shifts in position over time in university strategic plans, as approaches evolve between planning cycles and individuals join and leave the senior leadership team. For example, the Makerere University plan, covering the 2020-2030 cycle, promises 'a distinct

shift to increased graduate enrolment and knowledge production' (Makerere University, 2020, p. 11). The previous ten-year plan discussed a shift from outreach (with its 'patronage connotation') to knowledge transfer, partnership, and networking, recognising the knowledge that resides within communities, local businesses, and non-governmental organisations (Makerere University, 2008, p. 4). The current plan, however, reverts to using the terminology of community outreach (2020, p. 19). On the other side of the continent, Ibadan's Vice Chancellor reflects on changes in the Nigerian university system and notes the:

> lack of synergy between the historical role of the university (teaching, research, service) and the new paradigm (economic development); this is reflected in the weak impact on the immediate community in particular and the nation in general; low quality skills of graduates; and huge skills gap in the economy. (Olayinka, 2015, p. 250)

Tensions between the new and the old, the historical role of the flagship and the demands made today of higher education systems, of a publicly funded university and one seeking to diversify its income, are in part exemplified by the advent of terminology such as corporate social responsibility to describe local engagement activity. Whilst the marketisation of higher education has been vilified by academics in both the Global North (for example Collini, 2003) and South (for example Mamdani, 2007), this shift in language is perhaps not as insidious as it first appears. The definition of CSR itself has evolved (Latapí Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir and Davídsdóttir, 2019). This has happened alongside changes in expectations for the broader role of businesses in society – rather than quick-fix, public relations-friendly measures to repair a tarnished image, CSR today is defined by Porter and Kramer (2011) as the generation of *shared value*: 'policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company *while simultaneously* advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates' (my emphasis). The important takeaway is not that universities are looking to industry to learn how to do local development – little in their plans suggests this is the case beyond adopting some business-jargon and focusing on KPIs. Instead, flagships increasingly need to align their local development activity and historic public mission with efforts to diversify income and to ensure employable graduates (this might, of course, also have the helpful effect of improving their public image). These tensions lead to universities sitting somewhere between two contrasts: treating the community as a stakeholder in the university or as a passive beneficiary; a grey area between flagships seeking self-interested partnerships or altruistic but paternalistic relationships.

The 'entrepreneurial university' (introduced in section 2.2) provides a ready model for flagships seeking financial autonomy. It also prompts difficult decisions over resource

allocation and prioritisation – even if income streams other than student fees are relatively small at present. For example, should a university work with a relatively prosperous local community to provide enterprise training, perhaps involving students and generating a small sum of money, or should it instead donate staff time to improve food security for an impoverished community on the university's doorstep? Is it possible to somehow balance both without compromising teaching quality or staff wellbeing? A widely adopted definition of the entrepreneurial university closely resembles that of CSR: to 'maximise the potential of commercialising [university] knowledge while also creating value for society, without considering this as a threat to [the university's] academic values and traditional functions' (Cerver Romero, Ferreira and Fernandes, 2020, p. 3). This balancing act of looking for common ground and areas of alignment between the core mandate and generating money will inevitably lead to compromises: new partnerships may involve local actors, but will marginalise others who do not bring immediate value to the table.

Some universities are compartmentalising their activity, for example with an explicit commitment to consultancy. We have seen how Addis Ababa University treats community *engagement* as distinct from community *service*, with the former framed as a reciprocal activity also benefitting the university. The University of Zambia (2018, p. 4) strategy splits its community service activities into three categories: consultancy, outreach, and extension activities. Consultancy services are usually provided for government, civil society or the private sector. Outreach is 'on a partnership basis' with communities around particular needs. Extension services are offered to communities 'which require introduction to, or upgrading of, particular new knowledge and skills that enhance the development endeavours in their environment'. Others steer in one direction: as seen earlier, the University of Mauritius views the community more as a beneficiary than an equal partner; the University of Namibia (a newer institution) focuses on partnership.

There are additional tensions between goals, partly due to opaque conceptualisations of place and scales of activity within strategic plans. Given the purpose and nature of planning documents these tensions and the trade-offs and difficult decisions they imply are, unsurprisingly, not acknowledged or explored by universities, with the limited exception of some linkages made between the local and the global. Two examples demonstrate these tensions. Makerere's Vice Chancellor wants to transform the university into a 'research-led institution', and 'elevate our reputation in the international arena' (Makerere University, 2020, p. 7). Accordingly, 'world class research metrics will be used to evaluate scholarly activities',

but this could be at odds with a statement on the same page to 'address emerging society needs' (2020, p. 11). Second, local engagement activity is largely absent from the University of Ghana (2014) strategic plan, with the nation and region taking centre stage alongside an emphasis on building capacity. The main reference to local activity is a commitment to developing a process for assessing and publishing the impact of all community engagement and outreach programmes at the university (2014, p. 28). The connection between local engagement and building capacity, diversifying funding, producing nationally relevant research, partnering with industry, and responding to the demand from African societies to 'do more' beyond teaching – all sentiments reflected in the University of Ghana plan – is not made.

Reflections on a plan

As noted at the outset of this chapter, most strategic plans do not receive a formal evaluation, even though they are often a critical document for steering the direction of an institution and the thousands of staff and students it houses. Some, such as UCT's 'living strategy', are designed (at least in theory) to be constantly reshaped, but the act of adapting to changing circumstances can simply mean original targets are removed or changed, leaving little visible public record of what worked and what did not.

In contrast, the University of Ibadan's strategic plan is markedly different and is presented as a personal agenda. It is also unique in that the Vice Chancellor published a reflection on his tenure, *My Stewardship as Vice-Chancellor (2015-2020): Partial Listing of Fundamental Achievements* (Olayinka, 2020). It does not match neatly onto the original plan and does not form an evaluation *per se*, but it is a valuable example of how circumstances and crises – both large and small – mean the reality of running an institution is consumed by reactive damage control rather than executing detailed plans, pushing supposedly priority areas such as community engagement from the fore. One example is a protracted struggle over maintaining payroll for teachers of Staff Schools (presumably a campus-based school for children of university staff) after the federal government pulled its funding (an 'obnoxious policy') (Olayinka, 2020, p. 102). Another, shared by organisations around the world, was COVID-19. The university's response demonstrates another trait of the flagship university: the circulation of staff. A professor from the University College Hospital was appointed as Deputy Chairman of the Oyo State COVID-19 Task Force. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships) was appointed as Team Lead for Oyo State COVID-19 Decontamination and Containment; her team published post-lockdown guidelines on the containment of COVID-19 in the state (Olayinka, 2020, p. 107). Community service activity

did, however, continue, and examples are given (Olayinka, 2020, p. 95). Notably, the university signed a memorandum of understanding with the Federal and Oyo State Governments on the Ibarapa programme. This rural health programme has its origins in the early 1960s, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and technical support from both the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Asojo, Asuzu and Adebiyi, 2014). The involvement of the state government thus represents the localisation of the project half a century later, an institutional turn towards local engagement.

Strategic plans offer an incomplete, but nonetheless valuable, insight into how universities conceptualise their role in society. This analysis adds to our understanding of how a plan can uncover the tensions and complexities that organisations such as flagships are subject to. Whilst it is easy to overstate their importance or impact, strategies can – at least whilst they are current – have a live and ongoing role in steering decisions, however minor, in the face of changing circumstances. They can signify shifts and evolutions, acting as a 'probe into the future' (Albrechts, Balducci and Hillier, 2016, p. 15). The implications of the findings are explored further in section 9.1, but first we swap strategies for interviews and take a closer look at engagement at the University of Rwanda.

7. The University of Rwanda as a new flagship: an internal view of engagement

The extent of local engagement activity at the University of Rwanda is determined in large part by three components: the history and institutional setup of the university, the demands made of the university by external stakeholders, and the actions of individual staff. This chapter begins with a high-level view of the role of the university in Kigali. The three components are then examined in turn, and a discussion section offers thoughts on consultancy and on mapping the engagement that does occur – two areas developed further in chapter 8. As such, the locus of this chapter is *inside* the university: how structures and forces shape internal decision-making and the capacity to engage. The next chapter builds on this and looks at external interactions, in particular the processes and pathways for the University of Rwanda to engage with partners. Both chapters draw on 16 interviews; see section 4.2 for a breakdown of interviewees and methodological details.

Figure 5: Stages of engagement
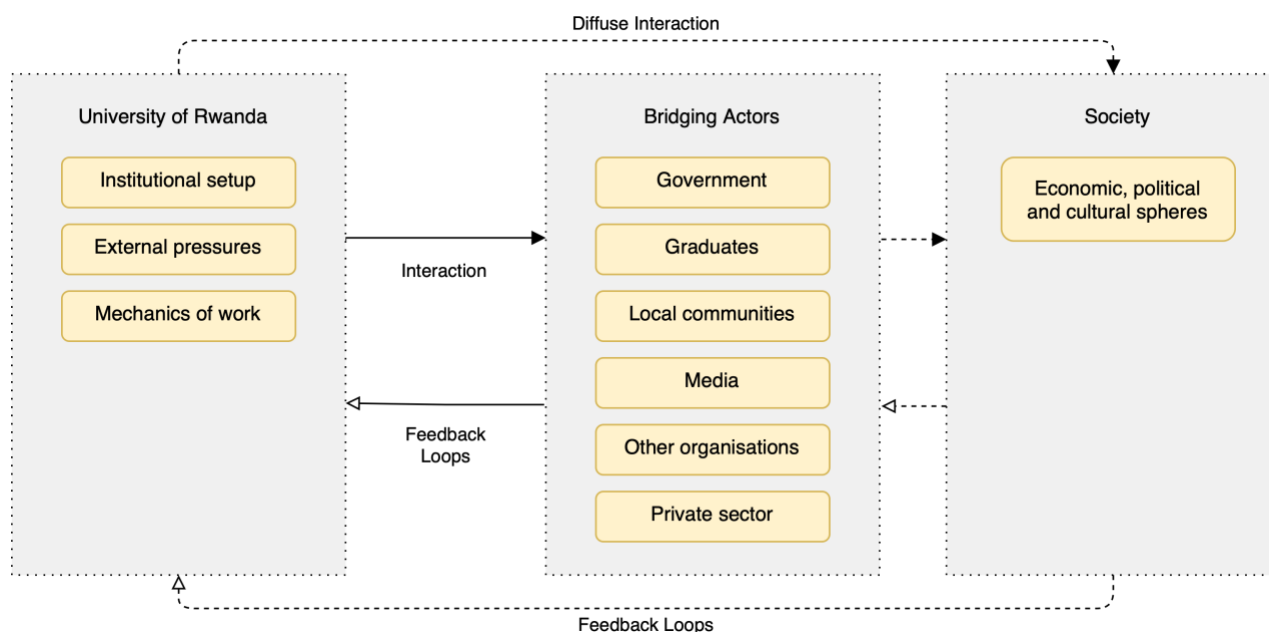
An overarching framework captures the engagement process set out across the two chapters, and shows the stages of interaction. It is based on a model of the stages of university impact on climate change developed by McCowan (2020, p. 9). Figure 5 shows interactions from the university on the left to society on the right (the original model included the ecosphere on the far right). The University of Rwanda stage is the actions of members of the university

community, primarily staff and students, but also its organisational structures. Instead of the modalities used by McCowan (which include education, public debate and service delivery), the focus here is on the three components which shape engagement at the university and the activities of the university community. 'Bridging actors' are groups outside the university that interact directly with it, and who in turn shape wider society. An example is City Hall commissioning a study from the university which is used to inform policy on informal housing. Graduates, organisations and communities are included as bridging actors in McCowan's model; in this framework government has been separated from organisations: the former includes parastatals and institutions such as City Hall, and the latter includes aid agencies, multilateral bodies, and NGOs. The private sector is included due to the importance of graduate employability, explored in section 7.3, and so too is the media, covered in section 8.3. It is worth noting that some of these bridging actors have emerged from the university (notably graduates, some of whom will work for the other actors) whereas others are from outside and make connections in to the university; this circulation is developed in section 8.3. The final stage is society as a whole, also used here as shorthand for the general public in Rwanda.

In this framework engagement usually extends from the university to society via bridging actors as a knock-on effect. It can also flow direct from the university to society. As McCowan (2020, p. 10) explains, the 'diffuse interaction of ideas, products and influences' can be less easy to directly trace to the university, citing the development of a vaccine or a breakthrough in mathematics. Diffuse interaction may also include the impact of the university on the broader economy (whether positive, for example investments boosting GDP, or negative, for example pushing up land values), any environmental effects on society (emissions or planting trees), or – even more intangible – the impact of any prestige associated with the university. Such engagement bypasses the bridging actors – although they likely still play a legislative, funding, or promotional role – and is less of a focus for this study. The more diffuse forms of interaction are marked with a dotted line and stronger forms with a solid line; we may assume that in most cases the more diffuse interactions take place over a longer timeframe and – much like a tanker changing course – there may be lag before impact is felt or feedback received.

Engagement flows in stages from left to right, but there are also feedback loops from right to left. These are pressures on, and expectations of, the university, demonstrated most explicitly in directives from government to the university. These external pressures, covered in section 7.3, form one of the components within the University of Rwanda stage, and this could be visualised as an arrow from government as a bridging actor to this component. Other bridging

actors will have strong feedback loops to particular components, as covered in the sections that follow; to avoid overcomplicating the diagram these are not shown. However, there are feedback channels from all actors, and even from society itself – albeit in an abstract form open to interpretation by university staff.[29]

The focus of this chapter is on the University of Rwanda stage and the feedback loops from the bridging actors. Chapter 8 looks in detail at the pathways of engagement between the university and bridging actors and develops the framework further; in section 9.2 the model is reframed from the university perspective to show how a programme of local engagement activity might begin. However, before the intricacies of the framework are explored, it is helpful to take a step back for a high-level view of the University of Rwanda's role in Kigali, and the role of the university in national development.

7.1 A dual local and national role

The University of Rwanda contributes to local and national development. Government officials recognise the economic impact of the University of Rwanda in Kigali, in particular the highly-concentrated presence of students and staff in the capital, and the economic and cultural contributions they make. On the surface, the role is an instrumental one.

> I see the role of the university in the city as being on one hand a producer of human resource which goes beyond the city, for the nation and for the other parts of the country. Number two, I see the University of Rwanda as one of the contributors to the revenues for the city. [Government official C]

University staff often adopted a somewhat different – and more strategic – perspective.

> In Kigali, the presence was not so much about driving the economy, but more about being close to government, but also making use of infrastructure that had been developed and invested in over a period of time, particularly in the former College of Education campus [now the College of Medicine and Health Sciences] and the College of Science and Technology campus. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

For staff member C at the University of Rwanda, the role of the university in Kigali "is to provide higher education to the people who need it", and produce the future workforce. This role is shared by the many private universities within Kigali. For most interviewees, training or education was the number one role of the university in the city. Many also identified that

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[29] The University of Rwanda strategic plan, for example, includes numerous references to meeting the needs of society (for instance University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 13). These 'needs' will be channeled in part through bridging actors, but will also likely be the subjective interpretation of university staff based on their personal experience. As a result, views on what society demands will differ between staff members, and colleges and departments as a result.

the university has additional roles that private institutions do not have: in particular to participate in community outreach activities, but also to inform policy, and to act as consultants.

The relationship between the University of Rwanda and the City of Kigali is complex. It is simultaneously intangible – "the university is the main thinker for the country, and the main thinker for the city", said government official C – and tangible, as seen in a thick network of formal appointments and interpersonal relationships. It also varies between colleges and campuses, reflecting the diversity of expertise at the university, and more pragmatic concerns – such as the proximity between a campus and City Hall. Students from certain disciplines – environmental management or urban studies, for example – do two-month internships with the City of Kigali. Staff from the city give guest lectures, and university staff speak at City Hall. Graduates work in government ministries or for the city, and are consulted when designing courses.

> We have three main tasks [in Kigali]: teaching, conducting research, and providing outreach services to the community. We will [also] meet Kigali city when – at least in my department – we are designing new programmes or revising existing programmes, every time we call people from the City of Kigali to give their input… our role is to provide skilled staff who can help the City of Kigali to attain its development objectives. It is not a formally written as an MOU, unless I'm not aware, but we work closely together… we have a good collaboration with the city. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

Interviewees within the same school or college often mentioned different projects, suggesting a wide range of activities that are not necessarily centrally recorded or coordinated. What counts as 'outreach' (which interviewees used interchangeably with local engagement) varied between individuals and schools, but most fit the traditional model: staff conducting citywide soil studies to determine load bearing capacities for geotechnical databases used by the city; students analysing informal housing or flood-prone areas and advising communities; contributing to masterplans for secondary cities; setting up a legal clinic to give advice to the local population. Outreach and engagement largely take place outside the campus, within communities or at 'town hall' events in other public spaces; it is easier to walk into a government building than a university campus in Rwanda.[30] When I mentioned this to an academic, they acknowledged that "we need to have open days of the university where people can come and visit and see what is happening; we don't have such days".

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[30] I am not the first to be slightly bemused by this. 'I am still amazed how easy it is to walk into a Ministry in Rwanda: very little security, nobody asks who I am, or what I want', recalled one researcher (Schräpel, 2015, p. 33). In contrast, campuses of the University of Rwanda have significantly more security than visitors to universities in Europe or North America will be familiar with.

Speaking at public events or on panels or commenting to the press was frequently mentioned – what might be considered public engagement in the UK rather than 'local development'. These contributions were often at the behest of the city or a government ministry, and intended to help 'sensitise' the public on particular issues within development priorities such as health, urbanisation, or the environment. However, staff member D from the University of Rwanda noted that it is important to distinguish the outreach activities above, in which staff invest their time with the aim of helping the community benefit from their expertise, from 'citizenry'. An example of citizenry is *Umuganda*, the monthly community cleaning morning, an activity that the entire country participates in and which is a local driver of Rwanda's socio-economic development (Turok, 2019, p. 221). This distinction reflects a dual personal and professional contribution to development. Several interviewees noted that all Rwandans are expected to contribute to the development of their area: the push for national development is deeply embedded, transcending individuals and institutions in favour of a collective, joined effort.

An institution for national development

Although there is extensive local activity, the role of the University of Rwanda is broadly seen as supporting the nation at a countrywide level. There is widespread sub-national activity, but ultimately this is for the benefit of Rwanda as a whole. Working more closely with communities and businesses in Huye and expanding the campus there, for example, is part of strengthening the role of secondary cities, to ensure development activity is more evenly distributed. Improving facilities in Kigali is seen as part of training more skilled graduates that can work across the nation, and to produce leaders that can effectively deliver national development. Similarly, international activities, partnerships or engagement undertaken by the university are to strengthen the development mission of Rwanda; internationalisation is not an end in itself, but a means of bringing in expertise or funding for national development by increasing the connections and credibility of the university. "The main thrust of the university, I think it's fair to say, was about building the country, building a nation, driving the economy", said staff member B at the University of Rwanda.

Local engagement activity is subsumed within the government-led focus on high-level development strategies for the nation as a whole, spearheaded by *Vision 2050*. There is a determined, almost frantic, push for development, a sense that raising the quality of life of Rwandans can help the country move on from the 1994 genocide (the implications of this mindset are explored in section 8.1). The university is viewed as part of this effort, operating as an institution within the umbrella of this national focus, rather than in parallel or outside it.

This does not mean that tensions are avoided – graduate employability and research relevance are recurring themes, as will be seen in this chapter and the next, respectively. Other characteristics of the university role mentioned here will also be revisited over the next two chapters: the mapping and coordination of engagement activities, the circulation of staff between the university and other parts of the national development apparatus, the function of public engagement, and the capacity for critical, independent challenge. These are also the defining characteristics of, and challenges facing, the modern flagship university – institutions that serve individual students but also the public, that are entwined with government but compete in private markets, have relationships with local communities whilst being monitored in global league tables, and that are inescapable products of their history.

Understanding the internal configuration of the University of Rwanda helps to explain the role it plays. The next three sections explore this configuration in the form of three components, based on themes generated from my interviews. Crudely speaking these represent a narrowing of focus: from the broad historic foundations of the university, to pressures exerted on it today, to the actions of individual staff. But they criss-cross, continually reshaping each other. The evolution from separate institutions to a multi-campus university, for example, continues to inform the policies of government and the engagement activity of university staff today.

7.2 The institutional foundations of a multi-campus flagship university

Within the planning circles of Rwanda's leadership, the first five years or so following the genocide were about recovery, explained government official A. The focus then shifted to development, including higher education – and the entire Vision 2020 national development strategy was underpinned by science and technology. A thread through the history of the nation and the university since has been a keen interest in bringing in expertise from high-income countries to inform policymaking. This is illustrated by, for example, the formation in 1997 of the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST), today the College of Science and Technology at the University of Rwanda.

> There was this idea in government that the development of capacity in science and technology was needed. And hence they started looking at how did other countries in the world do it: how did India achieve where it is now in terms of science and technology? How did Singapore achieve it? How did Korea achieve it? And so one of the models was chosen at the time was the IITs [Indian Institutes of Technology] in India. And to try set up one in Rwanda, which was KIST. [Government official A]

KIST was one of seven higher education institutions merged into the University of Rwanda in 2013 (see section 5.10). Before the genocide, the higher education sector in Rwanda was small

– and even smaller immediately afterwards. Today, the University of Rwanda has over 28,000 students across nine campuses. Although the merger and growth in student numbers represents both a consolidation and evolution since 1994, the path to becoming a flagship with a presence in cities, towns and rural areas across the country was marked by challenges that continue to shape the local role of the university.

The 2013 merger and the impact on place

There were several practical incentives for the merger, according to interviews with government officials who were involved. First, to realise cost savings by combining the existing 'fragmented' institutions into one. Second, to achieve better bargaining power with government to secure adequate resources, rather than many separate discussions taking place with different government departments. Third, to attract a single, exceptional leadership team at the helm to drive higher education in Rwanda. Fourth, for more effective procurement of computers, books and equipment – a significant portion of the budgets of higher education institutions. In all, a single large university could have greater impact, thought officials. Leaders and policymakers looked to the flagship universities in the region – Makerere in Uganda, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Nairobi in Kenya – which were seen as managing with 40,000 or 50,000 students, whereas the constituent institutions of University of Rwanda combined had less than half this.

In an example of bringing in external expertise, Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Officer of the UK Government, chaired the group on forming the University of Rwanda. This echoes the formation processes of other flagship universities – from the University of Cape Town to the University of Zambia (see chapter 5) – where experts from the North were brought in. However, whereas older flagships drew expertise largely based on colonial ties, the selection process in Rwanda more closely resembled a meritocracy, with the Government of Rwanda inviting the most prestigious names from the US and UK, a reflection of the striking ambition of the country's development aspirations and willingness to draw on 'best practice' from the Global North.[31]

The merger had varied impacts on the places surrounding the campuses. In the southern city of Huye, home to the former National University of Rwanda, the country's oldest and most

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[31] The Indian Institutes of Technology were a model for KIST in 1997. But by the twenty-first century, the focus had shifted to the US and the top of global league tables: Carnegie Mellon University Africa was established in Kigali in 2011, and the University of Global Health Equity, affiliated with Harvard University, opened in 2015.

prestigious institution, the sudden reduction in the number of faculty and students "immediately caused a devastating impact on the economy of the city", government official C noted – "in the absence of students and faculty the city of Huye was just dying". Restaurant owners and managers of student accommodation, known as hostels, lost their custom and their representations were heard directly by the President's Office. As a result, campuses in Rwanda's secondary cities were then strengthened to try to reverse this damage, and the School of Medicine, for example, relocated to Huye to increase the student population in the city. The move appears to have worked; a reporter noted that "the town is now coming to life" and 2,000 students have returned (Bahati, 2019). This recognition extends to other sites. Both the College of Business and Economics and the College of Agriculture, Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine have a presence in the north-eastern city of Nyagatare, in part to improve the social and economic prosperity of the area.

There were also significant internal challenges, especially as seven public institutions with their own cultures and leadership structures and cultures merged into a single entity with one leadership team.

> People who were rectors and given a lot of respect [were now] three or four levels down in this new hierarchy, and they had built very committed, dedicated teams around them, so there was a lot of resentment from those teams if their bosses were now not afforded the dignity of sitting on the front row. So those dynamics were difficult. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

This was also understood within government.

> Naturally, each university had its own DNA. And when you bring them together, it means that we're bringing different DNAs all together. And sometimes it works, other times it doesn't. [Government official C]

As such, the new University of Rwanda was shaped by its predecessors in a way that a new institution, designed on a blank slate, would not be. The impact of this history had a regional dimension given the distributed nature of the new campuses. Colleges were split across several campuses; the College of Education was unusual in having its own campus. This caused, and continues to cause, difficulties for college leaders, who spend a lot of time travelling between campuses, and means senior leadership teams are scattered across the country. In turn, it became difficult to create a strong identity – "who do you feel you belong to – the campus that you're on, the university, the College, or your department?", asked one staff member. "I think all of the colleges, if they had a choice, would want to be in Kigali", they added. Ensuring coherence was also a challenge.

> You had some campuses that had the principal as the head, so the head of college was the head, and other campuses where a dean from a school was the head and people might say, well, that doesn't matter, but actually it does matter quite a lot because the university is quite a hierarchical bureaucratic system, like it or not. And so you have a campus that's headed by a dean, and even the local authorities would be saying, "what's happening here, are you not serious about your commitment to the town?" [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Moves to strengthen secondary cities, decentralise the university and encourage the relocation of government offices outside of the capital have not dampened the convening power of Kigali, which remains the centre of power for the government, the head office of the University of Rwanda, and the meeting point for international partners. Senior staff on campuses outside of Kigali spent a lot of time travelling to the capital for meetings.

> Then you get people saying, "well, the principal's never on the campus, so what kind of university is this?", because students and the local community wanted to see the senior person moving around. And that was another cultural shift, that no longer was the head of the campus in Huye the most powerful Vice Chancellor in the country. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Interviewees observed signs, however, that the merger and creation of a unified institution has led to more cross-sector, multidisciplinary work between colleges, as seen with the Regional Centre of Excellence in Biomedical Engineering and eHealth, bringing together the College of Medicine and Health Sciences and the College of Science and Technology.

Implications of a multi-campus university

Kigali is the economic and social heart of the country. In 2013, the Government selected six secondary cities to promote urban development beyond the capital; each has a masterplan and ambitious growth targets (Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Infrastructure, 2018, p. 36). Since then, the categorisation has expanded to eight secondary cities, three satellite cities surrounding Kigali, and 16 district towns (Tabaro, 2022). Bodies such as the Higher Education Council (HEC) have been instructed to relocate outside Kigali; the HEC will join the Rwanda Agriculture Development Board (RAB), and the Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR) in moving to Huye (Bahati, 2019). The university reflects and reinforces these policies with its presence throughout the country, and the distribution of resources (including staff and students) at each of the nine campuses – several of which are in satellite and secondary cities.[32]

> There was very much a move when we reduced from 16 to nine campuses that we wanted to be part of building secondary cities. I think that's a difficult one to pull off because you can't build a city on a transient student population, you get intense activity during term time, during semester time, and everybody, including many of the academics, go away

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[32] The role of universities in secondary cities in Africa has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. See, for example, Fongwa et al. (2022), which has South Africa as a primary focus.

and, on occasion, academics are only in that city when they've got teaching intensive weeks. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Local engagement appears to persist in spite of these rises and falls in the number of staff and students on campus.

> The campus community, town-gown interactions are pretty much the same in all of the campuses. In fact, in some of the further away campuses, the interaction might be greater. The College of Agriculture up in the north of the country had a very good interaction with the local community, providing a veterinary outreach clinic, and doing a lot of outreach with local farmers on a fairly regular basis, as well as having a dairy unit. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

However, three campuses, including the head office at Gikondo, remain in Kigali. Some saw a clear power dynamic, with those based in the city having access to senior officials in the Ministry of Education and elsewhere. Yet it is more challenging for the university to assert itself in a bustling capital than a small town. A member of staff at a private university observed that the distributed nature of the University of Rwanda's campuses in the city means it lacks a dominant footprint, adding that "the Marriott Hotel may have as much influence on city planners as the University of Rwanda's Nyaragenge campus nearby".

The comparison to one of several five-star hotels in Kigali is not accidental. These hotels are "nexuses of power", said the staff member, bringing a constant stream of international visitors and influential Rwandans together in a long line of conferences and meetings, "a well-oiled machine planting the seeds of future investments in Rwanda" and changing the perceptions of outsiders of what an African country looks like. It is a reminder that the University of Rwanda, with its modest auditoriums, "does not play that role… it's not in their mindset". The university is part of the institutional make-up of the country, rather than a strong influence on it; a contributor to national goals, rather than a body helping to set the direction. Yet its role is complex and challenging, forcing the university to balance ambitious demands to try to meet societal needs both now and into the future.

7.3 A hierarchy of pressures for a flagship university

The University of Rwanda is accountable to the national government (and government agencies), the Board of Governors, external funders, students and their families, and the public, of which some will be local communities. Each stakeholder (all of whom are de facto bridging actors) has political, economic, social or policy-related levers of varying strengths, acting as feedback loops to the university. Most powerful, the government sets budgets and national development goals, the Higher Education Council monitors standards, and the Cabinet appoints senior university officials. Local community members, on the other hand, may be involved in

specific outreach projects or use university facilities, and they may choose to send their children to the university. If they have an idea or a complaint, they can offer feedback in a university town hall event or – if they are lucky – to the President directly at a government town hall event. Each stakeholder has its own expectations of the university.

The University of Rwanda strategic plan is an attempt to distill these complex and sometimes competing expectations into a public document, and to translate published directives and public sentiment into priorities and targets, as explored in chapter 6. The strategic plan offers a guiding framework for university leaders, and the goals and indicators provide a measure of progress for administrators. The aims and objectives also give a useful snapshot of the role and direction of a flagship university for researchers. However, the careful compromise of the strategic plan can struggle to hold in reality. The levers of accountability can change; a meeting with a senior government official can nudge decision-making in a new direction; a local opportunity, national scandal or international crisis can upend a carefully-balanced set of goals. The outcome is a large and complex institution that needs to both respond (or be seen to respond) to events, whilst simultaneously pushing forwards its core mission. The flagship university moves around resources and people to try new things and exploit opportunities, and then – to ensure it remains accountable – enters survival mode to keep students getting degrees and lecturers getting paid.

The result is a hierarchy of pressures for a flagship university. Maslow's hierarchy of needs for the individual has a foundation of food and shelter, intermediate layers for job security and friendship, and achieving one's full potential at the top of the pyramid. Each layer needs to be satisfied before the next can be met (Maslow, 1943). To ensure survival and remain accountable to its stakeholders, a flagship university has its own hierarchy, with the production of employable graduates at the base. Employability has become central to the mission of universities; although questions have been asked about the desirability and downsides of this trend (McCowan, 2015), in East Africa the 'skills gap' of graduates is seen as a major challenge (Guardia et al., 2021). Atop the base of this hierarchy sit several layers that may change depending on institutional priorities: for the University of Rwanda, these will include (in rough ascending order) research in national priority areas, local community engagement and partnerships with business, and international partnerships. At the apex sits the somewhat-fuzzy conclusion to the university vision statement: to produce 'appropriate innovations that advance quality of life' (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 7), a feat likely to draw on most of the preceding layers. Various inputs are also required throughout: satisfied and skilled staff,

students with sufficient capability to embark on a degree course, adequate physical infrastructure, and sufficient budgets for maintenance. As we will see, this hierarchy – and in particular the importance of building a foundation of employable graduates – explains the incentives for, and scope of, local engagement activity.

The pressure to create employable graduates

The definition of employability is contested in academic literature (Palmer, Young and Campbell, 2018, p. 371), and understandings of what an employable graduate looks like vary amongst stakeholders. Despite its perceived importance, there is often overlap in discussion between *employability* (where, for example, an employer considers an applicant unfit for the role), *employment* (a graduate may be employable but unable to find work) and *underemployment* (a graduate is employed, but in a role that does not utilise their knowledge and skills). Often omitted in discussions of employability are the role of broader social inequalities and structural problems with labour markets. These deeper challenges are replaced instead with an onus on individuals to boost their skills and experience, and for universities to facilitate this effort (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006, p. 305).

One interviewee said that many of the *moto* (motorbike taxi) drivers in Kigali have a degree. Another said that some of the youth selling mobile phone airtime vouchers near their house have degrees from the University of Rwanda. Graduate employability was mentioned by most interviewees, and is perhaps seen as the major issue facing the University of Rwanda. As such, it has implications for local engagement activity if all resources and attention are focused on employability, but also raises a question: could local engagement activity improve employability if the two issues were more closely aligned? The debate will be familiar to anyone who has followed discussions about employability in the UK or elsewhere, with similar themes recurring about the relevance of courses and links with employers.

> There's always a tension in that narrative around workforce readiness: what does it mean? We pass the responsibility for a young person's development on to the employer. We don't, we can never provide a workforce-ready person, somebody who can turn up first day and run, and most companies would provide an induction for example. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

The university does, however, take the employability of its graduates seriously, especially given the sizeable investment from the government to put students through education. Staff member D from the University of Rwanda said that although the debate over employability "will always be there", there are now rigorous employability policies in place. Every programme has a scorecard and self-assessment spreadsheet asking questions deemed

important to increasing the relevance of courses: how many times are business representatives invited to speak to students? How many modules taught in the department involve field-based activities? To what extent are private sector partners involved in evaluating the programme? The result is a sliding scale, with clear metrics provided for increasing activity the following year. A review of all 158 academic programmes offered by the university, conducted with a view to phasing out those that do not meet labour market needs, attracted national and international press coverage (Mbonyinshuti, 2020; Nkurunziza, 2021).

There are challenges to improving employability, and which explain the gap between expectations and reality. These include pressures on staff, and the capability of students to embark on degree programmes.

> We feel like we have been doing our best but when I speak to people out here, when I speak to companies that have hired our graduates, when I speak to ministries, or NGOs, or the private sector, people that have to work with our graduates, something is always missing: "you need to do this, you need to do that". We are confident that what is going out is good enough… our first year students, our feeling here is always that they are a year below where they should be. So our first year of instruction tends to be just updating them to become admissible. If we look for other excuses, they are there: we are still understaffed, [there are] very few staff members. The numbers of students: we used to take only 25 per year. Now, since last year, we have been asked to take 50. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

Another constraint is the availability of jobs, with questions asked about employer demand: "I had a very strong feeling that the employers didn't really have the capacity to employ and yet felt obliged to go through a process of recruiting people", said staff member B at the University of Rwanda, with companies sometimes rejecting students on superficial grounds at the end of the process. A staff member for a multilateral organisation observed that "the market is so tight, there's a very fine line between training in the skills that are needed and actually countries having the employment and resources to hire those people". This is even more pronounced at higher levels of education: "are the jobs available, or can they effectively create jobs that add value to the region and the country?". For example, Rwanda has strong ICT programmes (both at the University of Rwanda and CMU Africa), and a commitment to develop the sector through, for example, Kigali Innovation City, but interviewees were concerned whether there are enough jobs being created.

Lastly, and speaking about African higher education in general, a staff member for a multilateral organisation noted that careers centres, and the associated work on careers and employability, is not as developed as in some parts of the North.

> They're not bringing people in from the companies and they're not tracking where the students are getting interviews and then getting jobs afterwards. But they're also not bringing in the companies to help drive the academic programmes… companies [in Africa] say that "my graduates are not trained in the right area", they may well be accurate in that, but there's a lack of dialogue between the potential employers and the institutions and the programmes as to what that training needs to be. And that's a real issue. [Staff member, multilateral organisation]

Challenges of employability are put into sharper focus when comparisons are made to TVET providers such as Rwanda Polytechnic (for example Ntirenganya (2018)), an institution with an explicit focus on meeting labour market needs, formed in 2017 through a merger of eight colleges spread across the country. The polytechnic faces similar resource constraints and large class sizes as the University of Rwanda. However, as a staff member from Rwanda Polytechnic put it, "our graduates are more needed… this means we don't really have unemployed people from the polytechnic because of the nature of the work". Yet despite its traditional 'academic' focus, the University of Rwanda exemplifies a trait of the flagship university: the training of key workers. The university is the primary provider of teachers, nurses and doctors in the country. Government official B explained that the University of Rwanda, as an implementing agency of the Ministry of Education, is focusing on training secondary school teachers – an essential part of the pipeline of talent needed to become a knowledge-based economy ("we need more secondary teachers every single year"). The university is also a place where government turns to meet future needs. For most requests it is likely to be (in the absence of a specialist institution) the only body with the breadth of academic expertise, and the depth of student numbers, to respond.

> The government would always look to us to say, "we need this new cadre", or "we're now looking at occupational therapists within hospital teams – can you develop occupational therapy for us?". [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Long-term approaches to graduate employability

There are several tensions inherent in the focus on graduate employability. These play out as a challenging balancing act between the short- and long-term, where the university bears the brunt of the struggle in the short term to build long-term capacity.

> If you produce these graduates, and they struggle for jobs in Rwanda, are you going to lose those graduates, or are you going to lose the popularity of the programmes? You've got to build that bridge, and it's the same sort of thing as any innovation-type activity, you have the valley of death period where you have to make sure you get those graduates engaged in-country. [Staff member, multilateral organisation]

It will take time for companies in ICT and other new industries, and within physical sites such as Kigali Innovation City, to grow, and for new jobs to be created. The need for diversification of jobs was flagged by government official C as a major concern facing Rwanda's economy.

The University of Rwanda plays an important role in supporting long-term diversification, in coordination with broader government policy. The university works with the President's Office, the Rwanda Development Board and the National Council for Science and Technology, amongst others, to anticipate skills needs, and prepare for future workforce demand and a changing economy. These often sometimes took the form of workshops with Rwanda Polytechnic.

> It was very much about looking at [areas such as] manufacturing, maybe pharmaceutical manufacturing, in the future and how we might build that. Maybe building a new international airport, making sure that we have the right skills going out… A knowledge-based economy is driven by knowledge, and driven by skills as well, so therefore what kinds of skills do we need… there are some very tangible examples of trying to produce people who, by the end of their time at university, had skills beyond their diploma. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

The impact of changes to teaching methods to enhance employability will also take time to show. Some employers are unhappy with the mindset of students.

> There is a need to invest in capacity building, especially the graduates… you get a student to do an internship. It is a six-week internship, and then they do it as just one of the requirements [of their degree]. We get some, and we say, "there is an opportunity and you can extend". Maybe we've seen [their] potential. And [they] say, "no, I'm supposed to do only six weeks". [Staff member, non-governmental organisation]

But again the university is preparing to make changes for long-term improvements, and there is recognition that changing teaching methods can affect how students work to solve societal problems in their careers.

> Oftentimes people hold back because they have this respect for authority, if they were taught in a classroom where they were not given an opportunity to constantly express themselves, simply because the teacher is [seen as] the master… All programmes in general need to rethink the way we teach. Because it influences whether somebody goes into practice and applies themselves by the textbook, or goes into practice and is exploring ways of leading and pioneering problem-solving. [Staff member D, University of Rwanda]

Moving up the hierarchy

A theme infusing all levels of the hierarchy of pressures for the University of Rwanda is *relevance*. For students to be employable in so-called knowledge society jobs, they need to be trained in relevant disciplines and have relevant skills for the workplace. For research and engagement to be effective, activities should be relevant to societal needs. The foundation of graduate employability, however, is unique in that it is a top priority for all of the bridging actors and stakeholders (although their understandings of what employability means in practice will likely differ). The government wants a capable future workforce, and parents want children with jobs. The World Bank wants a pipeline of employable graduates to emerge from the university's Centres of Excellence, and the public want a return on taxpayer-funded investment

in students. Getting this foundation right also greatly facilitates local engagement, in a demonstration that the two areas are closely linked: employable (and enterprising) graduates can help facilitate greater local engagement, and vice versa. A first step is getting students into the community.

> I really enjoy… getting out of the classroom, taking the students out of the building, and putting them in the community. I tell students about [informal settlements and] they are always too judgmental: "those people, they live in a very bad way". Just like the arial picture here [shows a photo taken from overhead of an informal settlement]. "They look really bad and horrible and terrible", and, "why do they live like this?". So everybody complains. I always tell them to forget about the bird's-eye view… But the moment I bring the students on the ground, for all week just visiting every day, their faces completely change. "Now we understand why it was like this because the topography, so the road could not go like this, the roofs are like this because it was constructed in the 1970s or '80s… we didn't see a lot of this green [before]". So they start connecting with the on-the-ground realities, and that is what I like. And if students are able to do that, to be on the ground, then the solutions that they come with are more fitting. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

Once more, there are potential payoffs in the future from enhancing student engagement, not least a deeper understanding of community needs that should – at least in theory – be reflected in more effective and appropriate decisions taken throughout the course of a career. These transcend discussions on employability and focus instead on values of citizenship and civic responsibility. Staff member A at the University of Rwanda explained that staff leading on outreach and engagement activities "may change their interest", but many of the students involved in projects will be in "top positions" in a few years, and the history of flagship universities tells us that their alumni often have an outsized influence on national development (see chapter 5).

Closer to the top of the hierarchy of pressures looms the spectre of league tables and comparisons. Despite an overriding focus on national development, the University of Rwanda is nonetheless affected by the forces of international higher education policies. Partly this is a condition of funded projects: the World Bank required the university to adopt measures of 'best practice' such as the accreditation of degrees to international standards, necessitating the university to hire a commercial agency to assist. The push for international credibility is more pervasive than just a string attached to funding, however. There is "very much an explicit push around international benchmarking – are you as good as other places? – which got us stuck and caught up and wrapped up in ratings and rankings", said staff member B at the University of Rwanda. Some of this pressure comes from other university leaders around the world, and manifests in unequal research partnerships: many African vice chancellors "feel rather

oppressed by the narratives from higher education leaders in other parts of the world", they added.

University staff acknowledged that the various pressures on the institution constrain local engagement activity, and some concluded that it is the duty of individuals to think of ways to work beyond these.

> I'm not sure the university can accuse communities for not looking into the university, I think they're doing a lot to bring us their children here to educate them and train them. But it's more of us reaching out more widely: community engagement and mentorship. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

These individuals – the lecturers, the cadre of leaders at all levels – operate within and sometimes beyond institutional structures. The pressures that shape their decisions and activities form the third component for understanding local engagement.

7.4 The mechanics of work for university staff

Institutional goals and priorities mould the incentives and obstacles that face university staff. Policies and targets determine a path of least resistance for staff to fulfil their core responsibilities and get promoted. Altogether these form the 'mechanics' of work: how time is spent, processes and paperwork that need to be completed, and the items that end up top of the *to-do* list of university staff. This section explores how the mechanics of work affect local engagement activity. National priorities filter through to institutional priorities, which in turn filter through to personal priorities, configured to the college, school, department and ultimately to the individual role. As a result, it is possible to trace a national directive issued by the Government of Rwanda to reduce carbon emissions, for example, to a lecturer at the University of Rwanda teaching a new master's course on sustainable construction techniques. Yet there are exceptions to this generalised idea that individuals are 'constrained' by the priorities of the university and the structures and process that follow; the implications of these exceptions are then briefly considered.

How to get promoted: incentives for local engagement

The adage 'what gets measured gets managed' holds true in university departments.

> It seems to be the monitoring is always around contact hours, teaching and research. Did you publish? Did you write book chapters? Did you teach? Are you in class? But there is never a question of monitoring mentorship schemes, how are we building capacities of students or peer staff members? Community engagement – have I taken the knowledge, and tested it out there? So these questions tend not to be answered or asked in the university setup. During the [previous Vice Chancellor's tenure] there were things I know we used to fill in, weekly reports [on] teaching, research, mentorship, and community engagement. And I know that those reports were always looking heavily at teaching and research… so

> we have these four legs, but two of them are still very strong, and others are weak, the lines were more dotted, not as bold as the other ones, but I really appreciated that kind of thinking. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

There is wide acceptance amongst University of Rwanda staff that the traditional triad of university activity – teaching, research, and outreach – can be mutually reinforcing, and an effective lecturer will be able to find and develop areas of overlap between them. Outreach activity is included within the criteria for promotion, "but I think a lot of people haven't benefited from it, because they don't document it", said staff member D from the University of Rwanda. If staff have published and have a strong teaching record, they do not need to have engaged in outreach activity, but the staff member added that some activities combine research and outreach, or teaching and outreach, or even all three, so "some people do it without thinking about it". However, there are numerous challenges in incorporating local engagement into teaching and research. For teaching, rigid schedules can inhibit community engagement.

> The community is a very natural, organically flowing space. So I get calls from local people saying, "you said you will come back, where are you?". Because for them, life is not supposed to be very structured. You can come any day, we can talk, we can have a conversation. For the university, we are completely structured. I have to teach 11 weeks, then let the students do revision for one week, students do exams for two weeks, start I teaching again, 11 weeks… Academic means structured, and this is where the problem is. I'm sure it's a problem for almost everyone that's trying to do things with the communities… where do I even find the time to write the grant? [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

The clearest path for most university staff members to increase local engagement is a research project that involves work with communities. Given heavy teaching and supervision workloads, it can be challenging to find time for research. And where research depends on fieldwork, this has been disrupted by COVID-19, and in some cases has shifted to review studies or online data collection, with clear implications for face-to-face work in the community. At least some departments are looking to catch up on teaching time lost during COVID-related lockdowns, so are doubling their teaching efforts, at the expense of other activity.

Even given more time for research, there are limited budgets. Staff member C at the University of Rwanda noted that the small research budget is partly because some of the decision-makers in government are unfamiliar with academia (despite extensive staff circulation, covered in section 8.3), and prefer to prioritise infrastructure and other tangible investments – the research budget might be smaller than the budget to repair roads, they added. Where lecturers have a performance contract that demands publications, limited time and budgets will push individuals towards desk-based, small-scale research projects rather than initiatives involving extensive

community engagement, especially where there is no peer group of active researchers. Beyond performance contracts, there are few incentives.

> You're a civil servant – you're not going to get any pay raise for being published in *Science*. There's no research funding available nationally so you're reliant in many cases upon donors for it, and you're not getting released from teaching because you're a research active faculty member [in] a university that has a student-to-teacher ratio of 50 or 70 to 1. [Staff member, multilateral organisation]

There are also few incentives to engage in speculative or long-term research, and there can be limited willingness to put in bids for work with no upfront funding.

> For example, when we are developing a proposal, and we want to work with the university lecturers, they wanted me to pay for developing the purpose. And I said, "I can't pay you for developing a proposal, we're looking for money, let's look for money". But they will not do it, because they feel it's their time. Not looking at the long term, the big picture… When you can develop a big project for five years… they would rather if a ministry has some workshop, on maybe urbanisation, they go there, they give a talk… I think it's [the] mindset on research… I don't know if it is the structure of the university that encourages this. Because I think the research funding at the university, maybe the accessibility of funds is not enough. So I think it's both structure and mindset. [Staff member, non-governmental organisation]

Those that do build up a research portfolio or pioneer community engagement initiatives are often exceptional individuals.

University staff pushing boundaries

The University of Rwanda is home to some key individuals who pioneer work outside of the remit of the strategic plan and formal processes whilst still meeting institutional goals, who push boundaries whilst bringing the university closer to the community, and who understand how to get things done and respect tradition whilst iterating and improving.

> The people who are the leading academics in the university were kind of renaissance people, because they were the people who worked until two o'clock in the morning, and operated in a bit of a world of their own a lot of the time, writing papers and collaborating and putting in funding proposals. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Leading academics often become leaders, and leaders – as we will see in section 8.3 – often move between sectors and organisations.

> It's a very difficult environment to build up a research enterprise, which is why, when you have them, these people are very, very strong, and centre leaders often become vice chancellors as well, or take leadership roles in universities, because they are those who have a global vision of a university. [Staff member, multilateral organisation]

This was understood, and appreciated, outside of the university.

> The City of Kigali [has] got to be led by people who have brilliant minds who understand the national vision, who understand the developmental path of the country, who understand the context in which the country is governed. And those people [you] won't find them

155

elsewhere, you find them at the university. Knowledgeable people, trusted people, the most trusted people – you will find them at the university. [Government official C]

This pathway is driven by *individual excellence*, not an institutional norm of *cross-sector collaboration*, and it is therefore much harder to plan and implement. Encouraging greater local engagement activity across the university requires new incentives and a closer alignment of the hierarchy of pressures explored in section 7.3. However, there are steps that can be taken to better understand the activity that does take place, as well as other forms of engagement which rely less on university processes and structures.

7.5 Discussion: the history and future of engagement

For a flagship to thrive, minimum requirements must be met. For the University of Rwanda, this means producing graduates who are perceived to be employable. Beyond this, *relevance* is the guiding precept – ensuring research and outreach activities are relevant to the needs of industry, the public, the government, and ultimately the development of Rwanda. For local engagement to thrive, employability is also key. This is not only because a long-term failure to produce graduates who are seen as employable will likely lead to government intervention and falling student numbers – meaning there will likely be no time or resources for effective engagement – but because the two issues both benefit from alignment. Students can get experience working with communities and local businesses during their degrees, and can better understand the development needs of the nation. Enterprising graduates may establish businesses and hire within the community. When graduate employability efforts support engagement activity the two can form a virtuous circle, with outreach and engagement providing opportunities for the university, for research, for teaching, and for students.

This pragmatic approach may allow the University of Rwanda to fulfil the hierarchy of pressures of a flagship, to meet the indicators and goals within its strategic plan, and to drive development – and my interviews suggest that the university is performing strongly in all three areas. This approach does, however, raise questions which shed light on the fundamental purpose of the university: does the conceptualisation of development, as articulated within the national *Vision 2050* strategy (and influenced by frameworks such as the SDGs), have limitations? Can the university – and academics within it – effectively challenge national priorities and policies, or provide a space for discussion on what is working? Goodfellow and Smith (2013, p. 3197) suggested a decade ago that there could be 'dubious implications for future stability' in Rwanda if civic engagement is constrained. Are there any costs of this instrumentalist orientation, for example neglected areas of study, or a lack of exploratory

research? So-called 'blue skies' research can lead to both unforeseen advances in knowledge and artistic and cultural vibrancy (McCowan, 2016, p. 520). "90 percent of all scholarships [from the Government of Rwanda] would go to STEM subjects… you won't find a lot of liberal arts degrees in Rwanda", said staff member B at the University of Rwanda.[33] Some of these questions are addressed in the next chapter; the answers to others may only be clear in decades to come.

The evolution of engagement

The University of Rwanda is a multi-campus flagship university, playing an important role in local and national development. This role is shaped by its institutional foundations, which have a strong place-based history. Most interviewees who worked for the university joined after 1994, although a couple had a longer service, joining a constituent part of today's University of Rwanda in the 1980s, and are thus afforded an inside view of how engagement activity has evolved – partly due to an expansion in subjects and disciplines that involve communities, but also changes in how the university positioned itself in society.

> It has changed tremendously, and positively… the university used to stand like an island, isolated within our area, doing our business. There were no such events as I see now, no research conferences where you see people from outside, and it was really insulated. Even at the Faculty of Agriculture at that time, which was working on farming, and livestock, there was no link between the university and the outside, the community…
>
> The change comes after '94. The university gets really involved in activities aiming at developing the community, but also working hand-in-hand with cities where they are based. And this was a very positive attitude. And the involvement has been very, very beneficial for the country, I think, because there are some policies that have been initiated thanks to the collaboration between the university and the administration.
>
> The mindset of students and staff have changed… now we have realised that we are part of the community. The same for students. The behaviour of students has changed considerably. And they are also involved in development activities in their respective area. For instance, medical students participate in sensitisation of a population about disease, about fighting malnutrition. People from economics advise the population how they can create small businesses and become entrepreneurs. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

In looking for reasons for this shift in mindset, it is difficult to disentangle the need for a new kind of university as part of Rwanda's post-genocide recovery, and a more general movement towards community engagement as seen in section 3.3. Most likely it is a combination of the two. Nonetheless, the transformation of the university is striking, especially for those from overseas. Officials working with the University of Rwanda report significant changes over the

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[33] There is some awareness of the limitations of relying solely on STEM-subjects, with an article in Rwanda's *The New Times* newspaper quoting the executive director of the Higher Education Council on the important role private institutions play in providing education in arts subjects (Byishimo, 2020).

past decade, marked by achievements such as hosting four World Bank ACE centres in the face of regional competition.

> There's been growing confidence in terms of the University of Rwanda and its capacity. [In the past] we had very few researchers that were Rwandan researchers, the majority of the people who were here then were internationals. Today, what you have is a growing number of Rwandan researchers, some of them trained, of course, in Europe… some of them in North America, but coming back, the majority of them actually diaspora coming back, or doing research without having left the country. So a lot of capacity is now coming back. [Official, aid agency]

The mindset of working with communities and the increased capacity of the university, together with the ever-present push for relevance, means a growing volume of engagement activity. This presents the university with several issues, of which two in particular directly affect the mechanics of work of university staff. The first is an alternate channel of activity whereby academics undertake consultancy projects with external partners outside of university structures, sometimes known as 'moonlighting'. The pitfalls of consultancy are documented in the literature (see section 2.2), for example academics undertaking projects at the expense of their core duties, and not through official channels.

> Because the salaries of staff are so low, they end up doing more consultancy instead of research. And now consultancy mostly enriches the individual who is doing consultancy, rather than the institution. [Government official D]

The university responded with a policy on consultancy that recognises the important role it plays in building partnerships, and includes an 11-stage flowchart, day rates based on seniority, and evaluation processes (University of Rwanda, 2016). There are many advantages of the University of Rwanda increasing its consultancy activity, both for partners and the university itself, and these are detailed in section 8.2. However – and the second issue facing the university – there is a need to better map, understand and harness activity that takes place: both course-based engagement and consultancy, informal collaborations and formal partnerships, big university projects and those which sit outside of university processes and structures. We saw in section 7.3 an example of where tracking – in this case of graduates – could be beneficial, but where no structured system exists, in common with much of sub-Saharan Africa. Rectifying this is a complex undertaking, but one perhaps well-suited to the effective governance models in Rwanda.

> You don't have a university email address: everyone's using yahoo.fr or gmail.com. Graduate students, people in the Ministry, people in the university… it's very difficult to track people, and the universities tend not to do it, [whereas] G20- and OECD-type countries are tracking their graduates and it's not just for the institution, but also for the labour market observatory-type work that goes on at the national level. [Staff member, multilateral organisation]

Mapping local engagement could offer similar benefits for both the university and at national level, and systems to capture this sort of information are also explored in the following chapter. Measuring, understanding, improving and expanding engagement activity all rely on capturing the necessary information: who is working with whom, which organisations are partnering on what projects, which communities (or community leaders) are involved in university activity or have been consulted, who is sitting on which panel or committee, and – ideally – what informal connections exist between university staff and other partners. There is, however, a balancing act involved in this professionalisation of engagement: between using the information to support staff, strengthen the university offer, and learn from what works on one hand, and avoiding stifling new projects through excessive regulation and bureaucracy on the other. The view from inside the University of Rwanda is a flagship that is well-positioned to increase its engagement activity; to fully understand the role of the university in society we now need to take a broader view.

8. The University of Rwanda as a new flagship: pathways for external engagement

This chapter sets out two paths for university engagement and builds these into the framework of engagement introduced in chapter 7. *Direct* paths are formal agreements such a memorandum of understanding or consultancy contract, and *indirect* paths include contributing to public debate and the circulation of staff. The following sections argue that, whilst there is considerable interplay between the two paths, the University of Rwanda exercises considerable (and likely under-appreciated) influence via the indirect path, and there are opportunities to strengthen and extend direct engagement, in particular by building the long-term capacity of the university.

Figure 6: Pathways of engagement
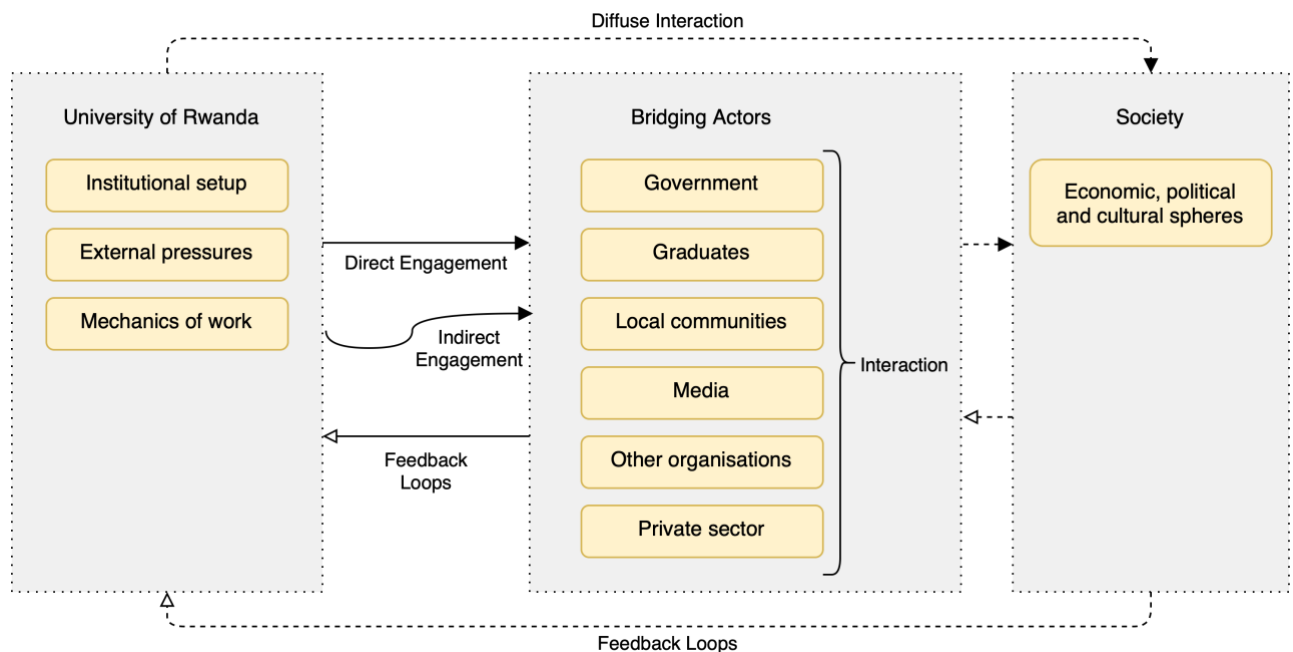
Figure 6 integrates the direct and indirect paths as well as interaction between the bridging actors into the framework of engagement. This chapter will show how these pathways serve as conduits for engagement between the University of Rwanda and the bridging actors, and how there is interaction amongst the bridging actors: the government minister who reads an opinion piece in the newspaper, for example. Staff circulation is incorporated into the final iteration of the framework in section 8.3. In the next chapter, diagram 9 expands on direct pathways by

shifting the perspective to that of the flagship university embarking on a local engagement programme and focusing on incentives and barriers.

The first section sets out three characteristics of the Rwandan development model which, combined with the three components in chapter 7, provide the context for much of the University of Rwanda's activity. The following two sections explore direct and indirect paths to engagement, and the fourth section looks at how engagement works in practice by assessing the university's influence on policy development. The final section ties together two of the overarching themes from this chapter and chapter 7 – relevance and alignment – and discusses these in relation to community-focused research.

8.1 The context: Rwanda's development model

Rwanda has a distinctive development model. In some respects this pre-dates the genocide: the country is, and has always been, a centralised and hierarchical state where 'all citizens are considered agents of development who march together under the stewardship of forward-looking and enlightened leaders' (Reyntjens, 2018, p. 524). Other elements are inescapably bound with the aftermath of the genocide, in particular strong relations forged by astute Rwandan politicians with some Western governments – especially the UK and US – following the failure of the international community to stop the violence, and the resulting emergence of Rwanda as a 'donor darling' (Takeuchi, 2019, p. 129). Today Rwanda has been described as a 'neo-developmental state' – an African variation of the East Asian 'tiger' economies, a mantle also shared with Ethiopia in the region (Goodfellow, 2017).

Rwanda's development model has three interrelated characteristics especially relevant for discussions of the local role of a flagship university, although they permeate the entire engagement framework. First is the relentless and centrally driven push towards development, and achieving middle-income status, and the channeling of all activity towards this objective. "What makes [Rwanda] one of the unique countries in the region is the commitment to development – they are really, really serious about their development in the country", said an official from an aid agency. Within this, the focus on becoming a knowledge-based economy pervades Rwandan policymaking. Government official B explained how this filters down to what children are taught in schools, encouraging the production and not just the acquisition of knowledge. It extends also to Kigali Innovation City, an ambitious plan to attract investment and develop the knowledge economy in the country, and mentioned by several interviewees ("it'd be *the* address for high-tech companies in Rwanda", said one). The site is currently

anchored by two higher education campuses: Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) Africa, with a new campus opened by Kagame in 2019, and the African Leadership University.

Second, the concept of 'high modernism' helps to explain the approach taken by the Rwandan government.

> High modernism is saying, "we need to look like a modern society and modern societies have don't have outages of electricity", and so on. So development was driven by this vision that investing in science and technology to show that you invest in science and technology is a goal in and of itself, regardless of whether it's the most cost-effective thing or the thing that your nation needs the most at this moment. [Staff member, private university]

With its focus on technological progress to overcome poverty, often with reliance on experts (who tend to be from the West), high modernism has its roots in postwar development in the 1950s and 1960s, but still manifests itself in projects such as dam construction, as explored by Dye (2016) with the Nyabarongo Dam in Rwanda. A risk of such approaches is the sidelining of Indigenous knowledge and expertise. However, as Dye explains, whilst well-meaning planners put great emphasis on overseas expertise and technology-led infrastructure as the solution to complex problems, Rwandan officials worked to resolve grievances and keep local communities on side, and the President clamped down on allegations of corruption. Dye concludes that in Rwanda the dam is not seen as a symbol of development and progress in itself, but as part of a wider modernist development agenda. Other phenomena can be seen as relatives of high modernism: the proliferation of five-star hotels in Kigali; the 'Visit Rwanda' sponsorship deals with Arsenal and Paris Saint-Germain football clubs; the regional hub role played by the national carrier, RwandAir; and the influence of external experts and world-famous institutions in Rwandan higher education, as seen in section 7.2.

The third characteristic is also closely related to high modernism, and concerns the adoption of strategies and practices from abroad. The Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC), a group that offers strategic advice to the President and the Rwandan government, has included Tony Blair and prominent academics such as Michael Porter and Paul Collier (Kagire, 2019). A similar international advisory group has supported the City of Kigali (Nshimiyimana, 2017). In the early years following the genocide and the rebuilding of Rwanda, government ministers were often spotted carrying *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* on flights to business meetings abroad (Wrong, 2021). The Republic of Korea has been another influence, and Rwanda's development model has traits in common with the push for development in South Korea from the 1950s following the devastation of the Korean War (Kalinowski and

Park, 2016). Rwanda has also benefitted from a knowledge-sharing programme run by the Government of the Republic of Korea.

> They're working with countries such as Rwanda. And you choose a particular area, like human capital development – how did Korea develop their human capital satisfactorily? And so they look at the policies in place in Rwanda, the policies in Korea, they look at where Rwanda is in terms of its current development, how did Korea overcome certain bottlenecks, and how they can be adapted to the Rwanda context. [Government official A]

These partnerships influence the education system. An example is Meister software high schools, a model imported from Korea for providing intensive coding skills to promising students, and the establishment of the Rwanda Coding Academy. Within higher education, institutions with international lineage such as CMU Africa are regarded by government officials as a potentially positive influence on the way academic business is run at the University of Rwanda, in addition to producing technologists and engineers. Private institutions often market themselves as being more agile and more responsive to the job market, and as such sometimes win the favour of government in the process. Yet they are fundamentally different types of institution: the gulf in resources and student numbers between exclusive private institutions and the largest public university render direct comparisons fairly redundant.[34]

Within the University of Rwanda, involvement in international consortia is seen as a pathway to, and a facilitator of, national development.

> There was a push to involve, and get involved in, as many international consortia, or networks, of research, perhaps even getting international academics to come and work at the University of Rwanda. Some of our highest profile research papers were done in collaboration with international researchers. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

The University of Rwanda is a product of Rwanda's development model. It is a publicly-owned institution, and comes under the purview of the Government of Rwanda, sits within the broader governance structures of the country, and is expected to be embedded within the national development agenda. Rwanda's development model also provides the context for the university's engagement activity, and, crucially, it shapes the direct and indirect paths this activity takes.

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[34] Whilst CMU Africa and the University of Rwanda may, for example, forge productive research partnerships, they are unlikely to be direct competitors for students. Tuition fees at CMU Africa are subsidised for African nationals by the Government of Rwanda, but even with financial aid and a further 50% scholarship package from the government tuition fees are ten times the GDP per capita.

8.2 Direct engagement: from MOUs to consultancy contracts

A *direct path* for the University of Rwanda to engage with society (usually via the bridging actors: government, communities, other organisations) is an agreement or a piece of work agreed between the university and another party. These operate openly within Rwanda's development model. This section will explore a couple of these: memoranda of understanding (or MOUs), which could be considered an example of an *early stage* direct path as they can lay the groundwork for further work, and consultancy projects, which are an example of a *later stage* direct path given it involves a concrete exchange of knowledge or services.

The next section (8.3) will consider *indirect paths*. These are less formal, less tangible connections between the university and bridging actors, and are both a product of everyday interactions between people within and outside the university setting, and the deliberate boundary-pushing by a few individuals we saw in section 7.4. The relationship between direct and indirect paths is complex. An MOU can facilitate work, and open up new (indirect) avenues for discussions in adjacent areas, leading to (direct) work. But an MOU likely arises in the first place from indirect engagement, perhaps personal interaction between colleagues meeting at a conference. As such, one can precede the other, and they can run in parallel. An example of the transition from an indirect to direct path of engagement is an interviewee from the University of Rwanda who penned an op-ed in the *New Times*, and was later invited to join an influential advisory group in City Hall on the topic. This demonstrates how indirect engagement with one bridging actor – the press – can lead to direct engagement with another – the government. Interactions are therefore also vertical amongst the bridging actors, and better understanding these relationships may be a useful mechanism for amplifying university engagement and impact.

Legitimising and facilitating: MOUs and strategic plans

MOUs often have a poor reputation. The conclusion of a 1990 article on the global spread of their use declares that MOUs are often more memorandum than understanding (Murthy, 1990, p. 66), a view still likely widely held today. Yet they remain a common tool for higher education institutions and other organisations seeking to establish new institutional relationships, including in Rwanda. By itself the value of an MOU is limited, acting as an invitation to work together rather than a guarantee of cooperation, and subject to the headwinds of power imbalances between individuals and institutions. Effectively employed, however, an agreement can overcome bureaucratic hurdles, provide a gateway for new personal relationships, and act as a legitimising force for new activity.

An agreement signed in 2020 between Rwanda Polytechnic and the Mayor of the City of Kigali provides an example of the positive impact an MOU can have. The document identifies areas of broad cooperation for mutual benefit, and has facilitated training services and internships (Rwanda Polytechnic, 2020). Students need to complete two to three month placements as part of their degree programmes, and the City of Kigali has many large tourism and ICT projects; the city also benefits from these skilled students. The MOU has also led to an increase in a more symbiotic form of engagement.

> [The MOU] has really helped. For instance, we have the construction of this highway [indicates unpaved road that runs alongside the campus]. They are now renovating it. And because of the MOU, we got some support from the City of Kigali. So they will now do soundproofing against our wall [when they] build the highway. And also all the leftover [materials] from the roads they will give us because of the MOU. So we will pave the smaller roads in [the campus] next year… So I think we have started benefiting. It's not much because it's a new MOU, but we find our contribution is really immense in helping the city of Kigali to grow. [Staff member, Rwanda Polytechnic]

There is no similar MOU between the University of Rwanda and the City of Kigali, although some interviewees recalled seeing an agreement between the one of the colleges and City Hall, and this alone was sufficient to legitimise activity.[35]

> I've seen a copy of it somewhere; it was just never so detailed. It always needs very active, motivated people inside to create addendums to that MOU… So I take a lot of refuge in just that conceptualisation, that the MOU must be there, whether it's formal or informal [to facilitate trips into the community]. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

The idea of a further-reaching MOU covering the entire university and the City of Kigali was cautiously welcomed.

> A formal framework or collaboration would be interesting. Otherwise we go there as individuals. Unless we are participating in those technical committees, we don't have a clear framework. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

Although MOUs are precarious and can, as elsewhere, fall by the wayside, the importance of formal agreements is elevated in Rwanda's development model, as epitomised by the status of strategic plans. The role and function of the strategic plan of the University of Rwanda was analysed in chapter 6, but the importance of such plans is worth briefly revisiting because they carve a direct path for engagement.[36] Plans and strategic visions play an outsized role in

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[35] Other official forms of collaboration exist: the University of Rwanda is an implementing agency of the Ministry of Education for the purpose of training teachers, for example.

[36] Including, incidentally, for the formation of further MOUs. At least three strategic priorities in the University of Rwanda's strategic plan have the number of new MOUs signed as a key performance indicator (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 32).

Rwanda, both at institutional level and national level, where *Vision 2050* has recently superseded *Vision 2020.*

> The strategic plan is not some sort of policy wonk's assessment [that says] "I think this is what the country should do". They are literally marching orders, and if you have any doubt about what you should do as the Vice Minister of Infrastructure for Roads, you just open up the Vision 2050 plan and see "OK, where can I contribute to that?". And so it's really quite effective as it's treated seriously by everybody. And it's public and it's transparent and creates the environment that attracts continued international investment. [Staff member, private university]

Plans can be considered loosely 'nested', in that the plans of individual government departments and economic sectors are aligned with the overarching ambitions of Vision 2050. The same applies to the University of Rwanda, and then for the constituent colleges – each with a role as part of the hierarchy of national development. Although individual lecturers were less familiar with the detail of strategic plans, staff with administrative responsibilities at college level noted that they interact regularly with the strategic plan, and that it is aligned "quite nicely" to the annual action plans.

> There's a very deliberative effort to align with government, the vision of the government, especially the Ministry of Education. This idea of becoming a knowledge based economy and responding to the National Strategic Plan for Transformation. So all these things feed in, and it's intentional… it's a credit to governance and how they are trying to make things happen… But at times of course, the targets are a bit too ambitious. And with COVID it was just crazy. [Staff member D, University of Rwanda]

As such, the broad aims but also the philosophy of strict adherence filters down from government to individual departments and colleges. This is a double-edged sword: a high probability of success for activities included in strategies, including engagement between the university and its local area, but a risk of burnout.[37]

> In Rwanda, everything that we've written, we must do. So we work very, very hard… even if I promise that I will teach ten hours a day, I would struggle, but do it. So when you take a society that is so honest, and so loyal to what they plan to do, and you [introduce] an ambitious or an impossible dream, then it causes problems. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

MOUs and strategic plans act as early stage direct paths for engagement. They ease the passage of – but are not necessarily a precondition for – later stage direct paths such as the signing of consultancy contracts. For staff at the University of Rwanda, consultancy work is managed through a consultancy policy, covering approval processes and the division of funds between staff and university (University of Rwanda, 2016). This work is encouraged in the strategic

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[37] The important status of strategic plans may also serve to inhibit additional activity, and – perhaps especially for institutions with a defined, technically-focused remit – restrict the direct engagement path. A City Hall staff member said that no projects or programmes outside of the Kigali City Masterplan 2050 will be undertaken.

plan, which features diversification of income as a strategic priority, and an ambitious target of a quarter of university funds generated through the UR Business Company by 2025 (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 51)). Looking more closely at consultancy as engagement helpfully illustrates the complexity of achieving such a target, but also the potential for the university to play a greater role in Rwanda's economic and social development.

The potential of the University of Rwanda to increase indigenous consultancy

The embeddedness of the University of Rwanda in national development structures does not translate automatically into practical projects, such as the provision of evidence and policy advice, conducting research studies, or testing and evaluating new initiatives (typically described as consultancy). Interviewees saw this as a missed opportunity.

> There is a gap of electrification in Kigali. So the City of Kigali could just contract the University of Rwanda to study that problem and propose solutions in one way or another, because you have expertise both in electrical engineering, energy, and sustainable development… You find on one hand we have the leaders of the University of Rwanda at the top level of leadership of the City of Kigali [as members of the City of Kigali Council], on the other hand when it comes to understanding or conducting studies to inform policy for Kigali city, they hire or contract independent or private companies or think tanks mostly from abroad. [Government official C]

There are several possible reasons for this tendency to hire from abroad. The influence of high modernism and the preference for international experts plays a role. There may also be concerns about the capacity of the university to respond quickly. However, interviewees saw a shift taking place and a growing depth of engagement with the university.[38]

> The government recognised several years ago that, rather than putting up consultancy for international consulting firms to come and do a piece of work and go away again, that they would target the University of Rwanda as a place of consultancy and we could reinvest [money] back into the country and the university. And so more consulting is now done for the government by the university. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Another interviewee agreed that this transition to more 'in house' research has been underway for some time, but there is still a long way to go.

> There are many, many collaborations [between the University of Rwanda, the Government of Rwanda, and City Hall]… one time I remember we wrote to government [and said] look, we have capacities in the university which you guys can use. For example, we're struggling to raise resources for institutions. But if you know the amount of consultancy funds which are being used in Rwanda to do one study or another, most of these are consultancies from outside who actually use our own staff to work with them and do it. So

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[38] Interestingly, this shift can also be seen in the university leadership. The first two vice chancellors of the University of Rwanda were UK citizens. The two most recent appointments have been Rwandan citizens: Professor Alexandre Lyambabaje was appointed in 2021, and was succeeded by Dr. Didas Kayihura in 2022 following his retirement. The Chancellor, Patricia Campbell, and chair of the board of governors, Paul Davenport, are US citizens.

> why can't we be one of them, where they could call on at any time to assist in studies, to assist in some research areas, to assist in consultancies. I think that would not only be a win-win situation, but also would build the capacities of our own staff so much better in the future. [Higher education official]

A greater reliance on the university for consultancy will depend upon the capacity and capability for policy research being in place. Achieving this maturity is a product of experience built over time, and developing and investing in university expertise is in the interest of the government. Apart from strengthening the university itself and investing money in the Rwandan economy, a greater role for the University of Rwanda would allow a broader range of expertise to be applied to complex challenges, and this expertise will have been gained closer to the point of delivery than if an international organisation was brought in. Interviewees gave examples.

> There are some places in Kigali which are planned neighbourhoods. And other places which are informal. So the complexity of the neighbourhoods is a problem which [has existed] for the past 10 years… They need a developed study, with a broader perspective, with more options, and from a different perspective – technical, social, environmental and so forth. [Government official C]

This could then allow more holistic solutions.

> The City of Kigali would not just rely on a programme by Rwanda Energy Group, for instance. The University of Rwanda could increase their capabilities, and then propose solutions at household level. And then the City of Kigali can use that evidence to source different support from government and from other people. [Government official C]

And, as one interviewee from the University of Rwanda noted, it should result in better quality reports, as international consultancies were seen as charging high fees for reports that are largely copied and pasted efforts. Instead, academics and university staff would be accountable for the research and evidence produced. A couple of interviewees noted that university staff could work alongside these external consultancy bodies to build up expertise, rather than abruptly shifting all business in-house. Faculty members and students could work with international organisations in this process, helping to build capacity. The university needs self-awareness of gaps in expertise and managing such projects, and then to actively learn from others to build capacity.

> If they [the University of Rwanda] are really serious about learning, acquiring these capabilities, after a few years they will be able to do the job themselves, because problems are always there… The issue is who should start that discussion? Having someone from the University of Rwanda at the Board or at the Council of the City, I think would help. [Government official C]

Another suggested starting with a hybrid approach.

> Unfortunately in Rwanda civil servants sometimes lack capacities. Why can't they use the institutions which are available? Even if you combine them with expertise from outside, but work with our people. [Government official D]

The University of Rwanda is seen as an especially strong long-term partner. Government official B said that if it is a five- or ten-year project, for example a new teacher training model, "we always work with the University of Rwanda". But smaller projects may go to smaller consultants, and multilateral bodies like UN agencies who fund work may have their own experts who lead on work before it is brought under government control. Open competition can also thwart university involvement.

> They [the University of Rwanda] are challenged by the international organisations… they need to work as quickly as possible, provide us the information, [and are judged on] the quality of their work. It's a competition. [Government official B]

There are internal hurdles for a member of university staff to overcome when taking on consultancy work. These help explain why the university might be outmanoeuvred by a private organisation.

> When you are conducting research or implementing a project, you should be released from teaching activities for – I don't remember the number of hours – but it doesn't work. Because they have to find someone else to replace you. And this is not easy in the short term. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

Whilst the consultancy policy has such limitations (perhaps understandably, given its need to also protect the teaching functions and reputation of the university), it has opened up the opportunity for more – and more varied – work. Staff member D from the University of Rwanda said that tenders for consultancy are now treated in much the same way as the application process for research grants, although the contracting might not be exactly the same. Staff member A at the University of Rwanda said that in the past, processes were too slow, and money was not disbursed in time to conduct the study or other activity within the timeframe of the project.

> But now things are changing with the setup of University of Rwanda Holding Company [which manages consultancy services], maybe two years [ago]… Now when you apply through this it is smooth. But when you go through the Single Project Implementation Unit it is too bureaucratic. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda][39]

However, staff may choose to undertake small-scale projects privately and outside the auspices of the university, perhaps via a private company who will pay them directly. Nor are all consultancy projects paid, or paid in cash through formal contracting processes. For these, and

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[39] The Single Project Implementation Unit manages projects at the University of Rwanda. All ministries and public sector agencies in Rwanda are required to have such a unit.

other forms of partnership and knowledge exchange, maintaining oversight of engagement across the university is a key challenge.

Centralised knowledge of partnerships and engagement

The University of Rwanda strategic plan calls for 'aggressive advertisement' of consultancy opportunities (University of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 24). However, rather than the university proactively offering its services, the examples of consultancy given by interviewees tended to be responses to tenders (as seen above), or Government authorities contacting the university.

> I think [the national and city government are] heavily invested in the strengths and capabilities of the University of Rwanda, and they look to the University of Rwanda all the time. So they will come to the university and say, have you got people who can do this? How quickly can you do a soil analysis? On this construction site, how quickly can you get a team of engineers out? Or can we have this professor [for] a technical working group on transport and logistics. Can you send some people, we're going to convene a day to celebrate the International Day of Forests, or whatever, can you put together a panel of people for us? [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Although the hierarchy of authority in Rwanda may prevent a truly 'aggressive' advertising campaign to increase consultancy (the priority will likely remain the effective implementation of government programmes), several interviewees called for a more pragmatic role for the university, to move beyond formal representation on boards and committees and to expand beyond pockets of engagement from some academics and programmes. The presence of academic staff on local government committees or graduates within ministries may have helped to raise awareness of the capabilities of the University of Rwanda, which translated into government departments and parastatals then making overtures to the university. Nonetheless, a stronger outward-facing offer of the university's services and expertise may yield further engagement, and this was a priority of the former vice chancellor during his tenure, according to press interviews.

> We can look at how to build our capacity and, whenever our country seeks to conduct any study or research, we can be right there to do the job. I am very sure we can do it in a professional way. I don't see any reason [why] the country should lose money to foreign researchers. (Professor Alexandre Lyambabaje in Mbonyinshuti, 2021b)

Building capacity, strengthening the university offer, and increasing engagement relies upon some form of centralised knowledge of the partnerships and engagement taking place. Not only does this help staff to understand the breadth of activity taking place, mapping engagements across the university can uncover gaps in expertise (and possibly in communities benefitting from engagement), provide a platform for joining up projects across disciplines and departments, and facilitate the evaluation of impact. A staff member in the College of Education, Rukara campus will list different engagement activities that the university is

involved with to a staff member based at the headquarters at the Gikondo campus. To some extent this is inevitable: differing views of the extent of university engagement, of the degree of involvement of the University of Rwanda in national or local consultancy projects, can be partly explained by who has oversight of these partnerships and projects across a large, highly complex, multi-campus, multi-faculty university. Whilst it is evident that engagement does take place, and that there is a shift underway from relying on private consultancies to the 'indigenous' capacity of the university, the exact number of partnerships and engagements that take place is unclear. Metrics on community engagement, for example, will be collated to measure progress against strategic plan objectives. But this is only one component of local engagement activity: capturing, even periodically, participation on boards and panels, the provision of policy advice, research programmes with external partners, student projects with communities, and so on, would be helpful. Developing such an overview is a serious undertaking, and needs to be considered alongside other calls for better information, such as tracking graduates (see section 7.5).

The consultancy office will have an understanding of the number of commercial contracts signed, but this offers only an incomplete picture. Requests for high-level support from ministers or other senior government officials go through the vice-chancellor's office as well as direct to the staff involved. This means the senior leadership team and central administration have a unique overview of significant engagement projects across the entire institution, and an opportunity to capture, and perhaps systematise, these links. Few others would have a complete picture of all the high-level engagement taking place – not the education minister, nor academic staff studying higher education, nor heads of colleges and schools.

Any mapping would need to be replicated at college level, where a similar process takes place.

> Sometimes the city of Kigali writes to the Deputy Vice Chancellor, or the principal of a college, requesting staff to participate in activity A, B, C, etc. And then the principal or DVC contacts his collaborators and asks them to find the right candidate. And then he nominates you to represent the university or the college within this committee. But on a data site, the city of Kigali can also ask the college or the university to let Mr. X participate in a committee on X, Y, Z… [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

Ultimately, however, a great deal of collaboration takes place at a personal level, rather than through formal institutional structures – at least at first.

> I don't think there's a very active City of Kigali–University of Rwanda, or [college-level], collaboration. This is really a disappointment. It happens more at the individual level… I just feel it's a few individuals who knock on these doors and they get opened. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

As such, it is important to consider indirect paths to engagement alongside the likes of MOUs, strategic plans, and consultancy contracts.

8.3 Indirect engagement: from public debate to staff circulation

Indirect paths for engagement can allow work to take place outside the framework of Rwanda's development model, and beyond priority areas in strategic plans. Examples include opening up spaces for discussion and debate, and the critical examination of proposed policies. Views differed on the extent to which this took place.

> The government loved the engagement by academics, and some of the leading academics in the country were often on platforms with the government debating and discussing issues. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Others wanted more involvement in public debate.

> In other countries you see professors participating in debates on television, in debates on radio, in debates in media. Why are ours quiet?… I think there's something lacking, because I still don't see these professors, despite being researchers and teachers, they're on top of their game, [but] they don't go to debate on television, on radios, in other media to influence policy, to influence the thinking of the leaders, to influence the public, you don't see it… I think it's part of the culture. I think we can do much better than what we're doing at the moment. [Government official D][40]

However, indirect paths to engagement are sometimes a *feature* of the development model. The most notable is the circulation of staff, examined below. In the broadest sense, however, the university helps to shape the overall long-term trajectory of society by educating students, some of whom will be involved with drafting national development plans, working in local government, and residing in local communities. The influence of the University of Rwanda's alumni on society was mentioned by about half of interviewees, and echoes the broader experience of African flagships (see chapter 5). Many decision-makers and officials in Rwanda, including in the City of Kigali, have graduated from, or worked for, the University of Rwanda. The quality of teaching can therefore help shape the capability of officials.

> I've always invited the City Hall [to events and workshops]. Actually 50 percent of the employees there are our graduates… I can tell you more than 20 names of people that are working there. I like to see them there and they're doing important things, but I also feel

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[40] This reticence may be explained by some academics being wary of speaking their mind: the level of press freedom in Rwanda is one of the lowest in Africa (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). Notably, however, the university runs a radio station, *Radio Salus*, set up with UNESCO support (with the aim of creating a new, independent media outlet) at the former National University of Rwanda in 2005. The station encourages community debate and works closely with the university's journalism school; a student described it as 'kindergarten for aspiring journalists' (Tembasi, 2021). This acts as a form of direct engagement, especially when used to share public health messages, for example. Radio stations play an important role in community outreach at other African flagships too: see, for example, Acquah and Budu (2017, p. 197) and Udegbe and Ekhaguere (2017, p. 335) at the universities of Ghana and Ibadan respectively.

> they need more training because the bachelor degree is no longer enough [given the complexity of the work]. [Staff member E, University of Rwanda]

This role of the university is diffuse and the attribution of impact is difficult to disentangle from other factors. Setting the conditions for long-term development is less amenable to objectives within an MOU or targets within a strategic plan. Nonetheless, this contribution should not be downplayed, and efforts to trace graduates, for example, could help to illustrate the scale of this long term, indirect path of engagement. Nor should this role be viewed in isolation; for talented students, and especially those who are fortunate to win scholarships abroad, the training of individuals is part of a broader development apparatus that includes the University of Rwanda as a core component.

> There are fantastic ecosystems [in Rwanda] where you don't just finish [studying abroad] and then you know, disappear in the system somehow, which happens more so in the European environment… when students come back, they come back to of course their home college [at the University of Rwanda], but there is also a plan of action to make sure that that person continues becoming vibrant and active. Of course, here is the the interesting thing, some of these extremely brilliant minds and active people are being nominated now for government positions. So we see ministers, we see director generals of offices, and so they leave the university. [Official, aid agency]

This movement, or circulation, of staff is a phenomenon common to many African flagship universities (see chapter 5). It plays a vital role in Rwanda's development by sharing knowledge, skills and ideas, and forging links between institutions, and it is a key indirect path for university engagement.

Staff circulation and the triple helix

Section 3.3 introduced the triple helix model of interaction between universities, government and industry. Etzkowitz and Dzisah (2008, pp. 661–2) argue that improving this interaction is fundamental to creating a knowledge-based society, and their article extends the model to low-income countries. More specifically, it promotes the movement of people between these spheres, especially in places where government is the 'only game in town', or where universities are effectively an extension of government.

> Lateral social mobility, introduction of expertise from one social sphere to another, can stimulate hybridisation, invention and innovation… Horizontal circulation is thus more likely to have a radicalising effect than vertical circulation [the internal promotion of talent] with its inherent conservative bias. (Etzkowitz and Dzisah, 2008, p. 658)

Figure 7: Staff circulation in the triple helix
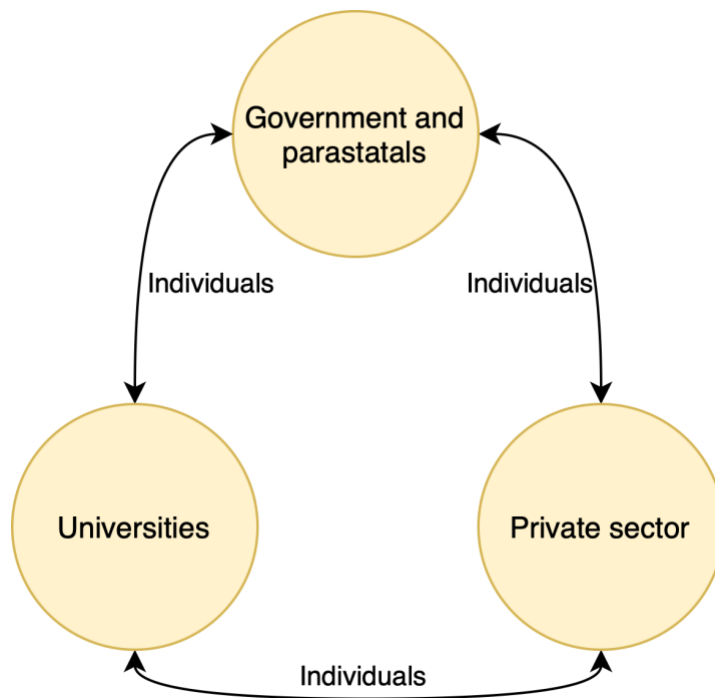
Adapted from Etzkowitz and Dzisah (2008, p. 662). In the original version, the three spheres are university, industry and government. Here, the government is the primary decision-maker and is placed at the top.

Etzkowitz and Dzisah's model – which is based on a geographically-broad sample of challenges faced in low-income countries, drawn from the academic literature, rather than an empirical study in which the model has been tested – illustrates the circulation of individuals between university, government and industry. It proposes macro-level circulation, whereby policies, projects, and networks are created between the spheres, and micro-level circulation within spheres, in which individual outputs relating to that helix are produced. Figure 7 is an updated version of this model. It provides a useful way of understanding the movement of staff in Rwanda, and the central role of universities, especially the University of Rwanda, in this. In practice, circulation does not take place on a purely horizontal plane, as Etzkowitz and Dzisah suggest. Instead, the government acts as conductor, and staff move at its behest. In this sense, the Mode 2 conceptualisation of knowledge transfer (also introduced in section 3.3), in which the government is a broker, is closer to the reality in Rwanda. However, circulation often begins with the university training future leaders, again echoing the experience of other African flagship universities.

> I think most of the senior managers [in government] at the moment have come from [the University of Rwanda and its predecessors] and they have made a lot of impact in terms of human capital, human resources. I think they've made a lot of difference. They're the

> ones who move in the government. Some of them are ministers. Some of them are permanent secretaries, some of them are heading parastatal and private institutions. The impact of producing human resources has been felt. [Government official D]

University staff will often take on leadership roles, sometimes in addition to their day job. Some academics are involved in local politics for either the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front party or opposition parties, forming links with local communities. Government official C observed that the university is seen as a "feeder of leaders for the city". Local government, including the City of Kigali and councils at the city and district level, have boards of governors. Administrative and academic staff are involved in these, but the numbers are unknown. However, translating this representation on boards into impact is important, and perhaps lacking: this is a "starting point", the same official noted, to aligning the strategic plans of the city and the university. Staff can end up "overwhelmed" by these leadership roles, when instead they should be supported to influence the way the university itself operates, to respond to the problems of the city – to, in other words, reflect this external experience back into the university setting.

> I see the role of the university being not only to sit in the city's councils just for the sake of advising them, but more broadly using the expertise and capability in terms of students, engineers, etc. [Government official C]

The highest-profile moves are usually those between public offices. These are usually appointments made by the Cabinet, with scrutiny and vetting by civil servants.[41] The mayor of Kigali, Pudence Rubingisa, was Deputy Vice Chancellor Finance and Administration at the University of Rwanda before his appointment ("he is really doing amazing things and transforming the city of Kigali", said one member of staff at the University of Rwanda). Following this, other senior appointments were made of university staff in the city administration. This is one of many examples of senior staff moving between public offices.

> You can look at almost every cabinet paper, at every cabinet meeting record, and it was always a case of "I wonder who else from the university has been appointed?". People get appointed to ambassadorial roles, to directors general roles, to ministerial roles, from the university. The Minister of Education was a dean of science in the university before she was made minister and you can tell the same story with countless other ministers and not just in education. And so there is that kind of movement, and the university is seen as a place that develops public service leaders. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

These relationships were viewed positively.

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[41] The Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellors of the University of Rwanda are political appointments, for example. For most high-profile appointments there is no formal application process. Individuals do not necessarily need to be members of the ruling party, and ministers do not necessarily need to be members of parliament.

> People didn't apply to leave the university, people were appointed from the university. There was no kind of disinvestment in the university in the lead up to looking and searching for another job and so people were very positive about the university. People continue to meet and have their friendship groups, and many of the people who've been appointed outside the university still keep up their research or their affiliation with the university. [Staff member B, University of Rwanda]

Rwanda has the second smallest landmass (after Mauritius) of the ten countries considered in this study, and this size makes circulation easier: moving institutions is more practical, and people in different organisations are in closer proximity to each other, making it easier to meet and share ideas. An interviewee from a multilateral organisation observed that the research, science and innovation community in Rwanda is a relatively small one, which means close working. Staff circulation occurs here too: "those involved in science and technology in Rwanda move around between higher education, the Research Council, the Ministry of ICT [& Innovation] and those sort of things". This has potential benefits: "they can be more targeted in… engaging with the private sector in terms of graduate needs, and the skills gap that exists, [and] thinking about long-term research funding".

Etzkowitz and Dzisah's model puts the university at the heart of a transformative process from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy. Yet there are costs to such extensive circulation in practice. A couple of interviewees commented on churn, citing as an example the high number of Ministers of Education over the past decade.[42] The upsides of fresh perspectives and broad experience need to be balanced against the delivery of long-term programmes and maintaining institutional memory. A higher education official was in discussions with a donor to fund an engagement programme for academic staff. This official moved posts, and "when they moved me, everything was forgotten". There is also a sacrificial element for the university: the loss of talented staff and the need for constant renewal of expertise and leadership. This is perhaps offset when the university is the beneficiary of people moving to the institution from government departments and elsewhere. And, given Rwanda is home to only one major public research university, there is less of the mentoring role seen with other African flagship universities, who are often called upon to provide staff and resources to nurture new universities, often in distant regions.

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[42] High turnover of ministers is not confined to Rwanda. In the UK since 1997, secretaries of state have stayed in post for two years on average and junior ministers typically last little more than a year. This 'undermines good government', and means ministers 'lack the expertise they need to do their jobs effectively and are unable to see policies through to results' (Sasse et al., 2020, p. 2).

Figure 8: Pathways of engagement incorporating staff circulation
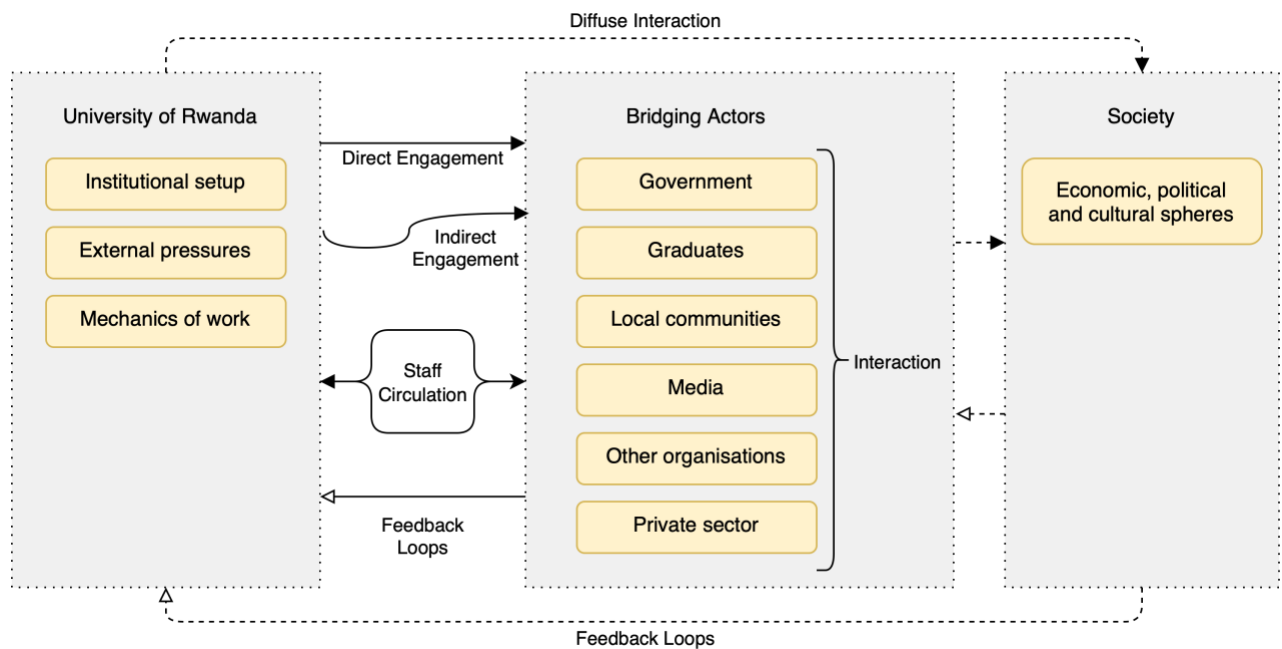
Nonetheless, the model of circulation in figure 7 can be usefully adapted and integrated into our framework, as in figure 8. Instead of the three helixes of university, government and industry, circulation takes place amongst the University of Rwanda and the bridging actors, in particular government (including parastatals, such as the National Council for Science and Technology) and other organisations. Together, these form a constellation of public offices and parastatals that senior personnel move around. The impression given is that the priority is not so much about crossing sectors and helping them to work better together, but *service* more broadly to the nation: how can this person best meet the development needs of Rwanda? This theme is revisited in section 9.3, but the question for now is: how well do the indirect and direct paths for university engagement work in practice?

8.4 Engagement in practice: assessing university influence on policy development

An open pathway for engagement – whether direct or indirect – provides no guarantee that collaboration will take place, even if favourable conditions are in place. The circulation of staff from the university to city hall does not necessarily lead to the alignment of city and university strategies, and an MOU does not compel staff to involve industry or the community in curriculum design. Nor, in the case of later stage direct engagement such as a piece of research consultancy, does it mean that findings will be adopted or further work commissioned. A full appraisal of the local impact of the University of Rwanda is beyond the scope of this chapter,

but we can examine views of the university's effectiveness in a subset of this: influence on policy development.

According to government and city officials, the University of Rwanda's role as a provider of technical expertise and skills is widely valued and appreciated. However, university staff observed that when input extends beyond this, and broader critiques of long-term impact or unintended consequences are shared, these are not always incorporated.

> When you give comments not only for the City of Kigali, but also for other departments, when studies have been conducted, especially by consultants, we provide comment, and some changes. They value this in workshops. But unfortunately, when you look at the final report, you have just validated what they already wrote. This is frustrating. This leads to some colleagues to say they won't participate in the validation workshop anymore. We wanted to be involved from the beginning, not necessarily to get paid… but you want to see our contribution as citizens who are keen to see the country developing in the right way, to give our ideas and those ideas to be considered. Because one of the roles of the university, when we provide those outreach services, should also be to contribute to the development of the country, to the transformation of the society. [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

A common assertion was that political leaders should work more closely with academics to source the evidence and data to develop their policies. Whilst this is likely a sentiment shared in many countries around the world, it is one tinged by Rwanda's preference for international expertise.

> You will find that most of the policies that will be developed, they are not informed by evidence. And it's a big issue. It comes from the political leaders most of the time not consulting academia… From the experience of Rwanda, and within this region, the Horn of Africa, you find there is this issue of not basing [policy] on sound evidence. You find the government is not investing in strengthening these research activities to develop policies in the local context… Sometimes you find people develop policies based on the policies from other countries, and if you bring the policy from Singapore, from the USA, it will not meet the local context. [Staff member C, University of Rwanda]

There are several reasons why the flow of advice and evidence from the university of decision-makers is hampered. The relentless push towards development encourages a focus on technical deliverables.

> I think this is the nature of leadership for local leaders in Rwanda, because they have fixed objectives that must be reached by year two, year three, year four and so forth. So, they are rushing, heading to that objective, attaining that objective, but not necessarily looking at the long-term consequences, the outcome of such decisions, because sometimes, you see what is done and you wonder, you ask yourself, "has this been conceived by people who are knowledgeable in that field?" Or if yes, "was it peer-reviewed by other people?" [Staff member A, University of Rwanda]

Others emphasised the need for a plurality of views. As government official A explained, "the idea is that science advice comes from different quarters, so if there's a challenge facing the

government, it will work with different players… to provide that evidence-based science advice".

This means the university, although an important actor, is just one of several voices and not the sole arbiter of knowledge. The sheer volume of publications can also drown out excellent work. Staff member D from the University of Rwanda noted that "the government is overwhelmed by development research". Universities across and beyond the continent produce research and scholarship on Africa. Aid agencies produce research briefs, multilateral organisations promote evidence papers, and different government departments commission their own studies. In a best-case scenario, the staff member speculated, a competent minister will evaluate the credibility of the methodology of each study, looking at the scope, sampling, relevance. They may evaluate based on who used primary and who used secondary data. And this may favour an international organisation with dedicated funding for research ahead of the university team with a minimal budget. Perhaps more likely still: fortune will favour the paper on the top of the pile, or the one where the recommendations or conclusions align with government thinking. Again, these are not issues confined to Rwanda, or to flagship universities. But they do suggest that a particular focus on local development could yield a comparative advantage for a flagship embedded in its community.

Power imbalances between institutions and bureaucracy are additional factors: without political expediency or the intervention of a senior member of staff from either side, collaboration can stagnate.

> Each entity is just working towards achieving their own goals, looking at themselves. If you are to strengthen that collaboration, there are always obstacles. For instance, if we say in Kigali city, we want to reach [a community to introduce a health project], it has to pass through a long process to first get permission to reach them, and then the people who should be the collaborators in some of the activities we might be doing that may develop the city, they become gatekeepers… If there is a political campaign that is only targeting a certain area, that's when the political leaders will need academia to be involved. But for the academy, when we have something that we need? The political leaders of Kigali city or any other province or any other district, for us we will have to go and beg, and it takes too much time. While for them, whenever they need us, we are always ready to participate. You see the difference? [Staff member C, University of Rwanda]

Yet the university itself can do more to increase its chances of successful engagement, and staff were quick to identify some self-sabotaging activities. Starting projects with lengthy literature reviews is not conducive to impact. Repositories of knowledge maintained by the university, such as the open-access Rwanda Journal, are difficult to navigate, requiring visitors to know

exactly what they are looking for.[43] Funded projects are often structured around university-university collaboration, and fail to invest enough time or resource at the start to bring on board stakeholders from the community, city hall or government ministries. (Staff also identified steps to address these issues, covered in section 10.2.)

This discussion reflects the widespread view that the University of Rwanda has the potential to engage more deeply, and should strive to have greater impact. It does not diminish the core role it plays as the national flagship university, with many examples given of the widespread links between the university and communities, and the substantial contribution it makes to Rwanda's development agenda. Realising a greater local development role, or a 'local turn', for the University of Rwanda means widening the direct and indirect paths to engagement, and increasing the incentives to make the most of these paths. These incentives are likely to be varied: through the funding programmes of major donors to higher education such as SIDA and the World Bank, a preference from government for local consultancy, changing the mechanisms of work and motivations of university staff and – above all – developing a common understanding that the University of Rwanda can play an important role in local development, and one that complements its teaching and research functions.

8.5 Discussion: relevance and alignment

Interviews revealed that the Rwandan government has long been aware of the potential contribution of universities to local development. In a recent example, an interviewee recalled discussions about universities and place within a meeting of university leaders at the Higher Education Council (HEC), with higher education institutions describing a direct, instrumental relationship – their community as a source of students.

> The head of the HEC was saying, "how many of you view your university as a place of learning and those people who are walking by outside are irrelevant to what you do? Why do they walk around the gates, why don't you invite them to walk through universities? Why don't you think about having your faculty and students engage with those people and talk to them about what issues they have and see if you can [do] something that the communities will find relevant?"… Some people raised their hand and said, "yeah we do this, and we do that… we have the community and that's where our students come from". [Staff member, private university]

Ultimately, the only means of connecting the university and bridging actors over the longer term is to maintain relevance and alignment: relevance to broader development agendas (explored in section 7.5), and alignment with the needs of individual actors or groups. (As we

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[43] https://www.ajol.info/index.php/rj.

saw at the start of the chapter, there are also more diffuse means by which the university can shape society, such as a Humboldtian model of higher education, and 'blue skies' research.) Given the resource constraints of the University of Rwanda, the only way to ensure this is sustainable is for engagement to complement, and ideally strengthen, teaching and research. This section briefly discusses the trade-offs and complexities inherent in this process with a particular focus on research, revealing a tension shared by flagship universities and whose collective traits will be considered in the whole in the next chapter.

Professor Alexandre Lyambabaje, former Vice Chancellor, said at a press event that "it is very important is to know how the research we carry out helps the communities around us and contributes to socio-economic development" (quoted in Mbonyinshuti, 2021b). His views were echoed by the Minister for Education. Concerns over research relevance are a perennial concern, and one that persists beyond Rwanda and Africa. These concerns have perhaps been cast into sharp focus only recently for the continent as Africa's share of world publication outputs begins to increase from a low base (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 33), and are unlikely to dissipate. Definitions of research relevance – and impact – will be contested, and will differ from the perspective of a community to that of government. Nonetheless, the university should maintain an awareness of what is deemed relevant, as well as seek to anticipate future challenges.

> I would like to see a more productive role of the university in the city of Kigali, which has so many problems [for] which you need robust evidence… We find their research is not tackling the problems on the market, partly because their research agenda is not aligned into the developmental agenda of the city. Of course it's a tricky issue from the academic perspective, but it is possible because the university is both developmental and entrepreneurial. There's a need to align their strategy towards practical problems, practical issues on the ground… to align their research agenda with the strategic development programmes of the city and therefore the university [would] have the capability of interacting with city governors or managers and then be able to sell their agenda. [Government official C]

Interviewees noted differences between schools: for example those in public health and medicine were viewed as conducting research closely aligned with local needs; the school of economics or law less so. When students study for their PhDs abroad, even in subjects aligned with Rwanda's development needs, some interviewees observed issues in making the most of this expertise.

> When we send our professors to study in universities in Sweden, universities in the US, they do a lot of research. Some of it is relevant research, but how they continue with it when they come back becomes a bit of a problem… when you keep sending people outside, yes, it's good, it's not bad, to send them to top universities. But at the same time, when they come back, they found that maybe the topics they worked on are not relevant. And

> sometimes they don't have the facilities to continue with the same research so that they can assist the country. [Higher education official]

Others take a different perspective: that the pursuit of relevance favours consultancy over long-term research projects. This raises several questions, some of which are beyond the scope of this study: are concerns from the 1970s about the neglect of university teaching and research in favour of consultancy (section 2.2) still applicable today? Do insufficient research budgets encourage short-termism? What degree of overlap is there between consultancy and research? How does the policy-driven nature of consultancy shape university research culture? Does the university have the ability to shape its research agenda, and examine long-term, 'big picture' issues facing the country?[44]

> Rwandese work very, very hard. Everybody's very, very busy. But the end product, what happens? If I'm a lecturer at the university, I'm completely busy. Not only lecturing. I think the consultancies they do is the problem. Quick money. Maybe they are underpaid? I don't know. They tend to look at quick money. We give a workshop, we give a lecture… We work with the university [of Rwanda], but in most cases, you find that we are working with individuals, assistant lecturers, lecturers, which to me is a big challenge, because if we are to develop in this area of research… how can we contribute towards developing the local capacities for sustainability? The lecturers are too busy, there is no structure really to organise students to work with you on research. [Staff member, non-governmental organisation]

Ultimately – and sensibly, pragmatically – university staff will usually follow the money. Funds for research are limited in Rwanda, with a significant proportion of work supported by SIDA, and through World Bank assistance. Government official D suggested a fund for supporting research with public relevance, and disseminating the results, but recognised the limitations of the very small research budget in Rwanda.[45] A staff member for a multilateral organisation acknowledged that at least Rwanda has a functioning, if small, research council; other countries such as Nigeria may have the likes of the TETfund, but this was viewed as having limited impact on research funding. Others were less convinced that further funding was the answer.

> I don't see [a greater local role] in the short term through increasing the financing of the university. I see it as a need for the university to increase its impact. Having it on the

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[44] It is clear that although some of these questions emerge from the particular historical context of the developmental university (and are framed within discussions of resource constrains), they nonetheless apply beyond Rwanda's borders. We saw in section 4.5, for example, that there is a broader trend in educational research to evaluative research, and research thus becomes less open-ended. In section 9.3 we will see how well-intentioned funding for research centres can also lead to a form of path dependency and misalignment with national development priorities. Both research and consultancy are bound together with politics.

[45] Higher education expenditure on research and development in Rwanda 2018/19 was 16,220,801,366 Rwandan francs, or about £10.75 million at September 2023 rates. This is, however, more than a fourfold increase since 2015/16 (NCST, 2021, p. 36).

> university agenda… being proactive and engaging and advocating their research agenda.
> Just not relying on government support. [Government official C]

Nonetheless, discussions over domestic funding of research will grow, and so too will debate over the relevance and alignment of university activity. The University of Rwanda will be at the heart of these discussions: over the last three years, about 90 percent of all publications from Rwandan authors came from the university (University of Rwanda, 2017, p. 7). Similar discussions will be taking place across Africa. Kraemer-Mbula et al. (2019, vi) observe that whilst governments in the Global South are increasingly looking to establish grant councils and fund domestic research, they are often 'poorly equipped' to balance the demands for high-quality research, growth in research capacity, and research that is relevant to local needs. Decisions made to resolve these issues will shape African flagships and their local role. Whilst far from being a homogenous group, the position of flagships in society has evolved in a similar manner over time, and they share a strikingly uniform set of traits. We now zoom out from Rwanda to explore these traits, and the implications of these for the role of flagship universities in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions.

9. Traits of the modern flagship university

The previous eight chapters have sought to analyse the role of flagship universities in the development of sub-Saharan African city regions, in particular the University of Rwanda in the Kigali city region. This chapter attempts to draw everything together – not as a comprehensive summary of all the data, but to identify the main findings and to answer the research questions. Each section addresses one of the three research sub-questions from section 1.2. The first section looks at how flagships view their role in society and in their local area, and the factors that shape their positioning. This study suggests that the role of flagships is predominantly a national one, but to categorise them solely as such risks obscuring their important local and international functions. The second section examines local engagement activity more closely, and introduces a framework in which to consider funding barriers and institutional hurdles that need to be overcome before this activity is expanded. The final section brings together the traits of the modern flagship university, and the implications of these for their future.

9.1 How flagships conceptualise their role in society

The paths of African flagships are often entwined with their nation. The fortunes of the University of Ibadan closely followed that of Nigeria, with several distinct phases emerging for both since the 1960s. The University of Zimbabwe has had a fractious and polarised relationship with the state, witnessing proxy battles between government and opposition within university staff and students – the campus as the nation in microcosm. The birth and growth of an independent Namibian government mirrored that of its namesake university, drawing upon the same pool of people to fill their ranks. The National University of Rwanda was implicated in the 1994 genocide, and the University of Rwanda was formed as part of a strong, state-led vision of national development.

One research sub-question asked how African flagship universities conceptualise their role in their local area through their strategic planning. It is first necessary to understand the extent of autonomy that these institutions are afforded, as this circumscribes and frames their role. Simultaneously influential yet vulnerable, most flagships are reliant on government funding, and are seeking to diversify their income (some, such as Makerere and the University of Ghana, are treating this as a top priority, recognising the risks of relying on government funding). Yet this transition is a slow process, and the path of marketisation is itself not without risks. Flagships are also often embedded within government-owned regulatory structures, staff are sometimes civil servants, and governments may have the power to appoint chancellors or vice

chancellors. Professor Walter Kamba, University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor in the 1980s, summarised the implications of this in a 1995 paper which holds true today.

> The development of the university is dependent on the support of those who work in it and on the availability of resources from the government. If the university accepts that university autonomy and academic freedom can only be perceived in the socio-economic context in which it operates, and that it depends on the goodwill of the nation and the sense of responsibility of the academic staff; if the government accepts that the university needs a certain amount of autonomy to carry out its mission effectively and efficiently, then there need not be a conflict between national aspirations and academic integrity. Any unbridled provincialism on the part of the university is as threatening to public and national interest, as is the desire of the state to police the university for the sake of control itself.
>
> Put differently, some state control is inescapable just as some substantial degree of institutional autonomy is indispensable. This is a balance which needs to be worked at, all the time. The task is to develop consultative relationships that bring the legitimate concerns of the university and the legitimate concerns of government into shared perspectives. (Kamba in Mohamedbhai, 2021)

Flagships engage in a constant balancing act – a recurring theme of the past four chapters. There are tensions between fulfilling historic roles and meeting modern demands, prioritising traditional university functions and economic development efforts, putting self-interest or altruism first, and in the seemingly mundane framing of everyday interactions – when the university works with the community, are these people stakeholders or beneficiaries? Section 6.7 argued that flagships seek, through necessity, to find areas of alignment between their core mandate and opportunities to make money. This inevitably leads to a diffusion of activity, and a constant stream of trade-offs and compromises – a pattern not dissimilar to that found in university systems around the world.

The parameters of flagship activity are defined by their financial and political autonomy, and emerge as a product of this complex balancing act. They are part of society, but also a reflection of it. They serve society, but also provide a space for society. This is well-expressed by the 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' pathways outlined in section 2.3 (Unterhalter and Howell, 2021, p. 13). The university is a contributor of ideas, but also a forum for discussion and public debate. Some flagships have targets to increase their public engagement (section 6.6). At the University of Rwanda, contribution to public debate was mentioned by several interviewees (section 8.3). Yet it was also suggested that nearby hotels may be performing this role as an arena for meeting and discussion instead (section 7.2), perhaps reflecting the neglect of public, collective spaces in many cities (Bekker, Croese and Pieterse, 2021, p. 2). Hotels are a very different form of anchor institution to a university, but they can play also a significant role in national and local development.

Conceptualising a local role

University strategic plans allow us insight into how flagships view their global, national and local roles – a manifestation of the interconnections and contradictions of the 'glonacal' (see section 3.2). Some strategies attempt to make links between the scales, and especially between the local and global (section 6.3). The phrasing of these 'think global, act local'-type mantras is often devoid of concrete detail and risks becoming, in the words of Markusen (1999), a 'fuzzy concept': one that is malleable and nebulous, meaning different things to different people. Yet in both the literature and in practice, there is recognition that territories overlap and intersect, and that there is often no clear divide between different scales. The international, national and local are often messy and difficult to disentangle; a configuration of personal relationships, institutional histories and projects and programmes unique for each university and each city region. At the University of Rwanda, internationalisation is a means of strengthening national development efforts (section 7.1), but the practice of bringing in international consultants can also undermine local capacity (section 8.3).

Nonetheless, the ten strategic plans – themselves a complex balancing act, and subject to government influence – presented a clear picture of how flagships view their position in society (section 6.3). A national role dominates, with well-developed plans to align activity to national frameworks reflecting the traditional role of the flagship university. The key to succeeding, according to the plans, will be to produce relevant research (the next few sections cover how feasible this is) and employable graduates. An international role features strongly too – although this is often framed in terms of loose aspirations to become a 'world-class university'; at the international level, the emphasis on contribution that defines the national role shifts to competition. A local role, including engagement with communities, is discussed in all plans, albeit to varying extents. Several recognise that the expectations of communities are not being met; local engagement is seen as an area that universities need to develop. Interviews at the University of Rwanda reflect this broader pattern: local and international roles are sufficiently elaborated to the extent that they would be alien to the developmental university of the 1970s, but they are nonetheless adjuncts to an unequivocal national focus.

These findings reinforce and build upon Marginson and Rhoades' (2002) glonacal agency heuristic, in particular by demonstrating that scales of place cannot be separated and need to be viewed as interrelated dimensions. To use the terminology of the heuristic, the University of Rwanda (in common with its nine flagship counterparts) is an agency working across local, national and global scales. It also *has* agency – although this is circumscribed by its close links

with government, perhaps limiting its ability to 'construct the region' as theorised by Addie (2019a) with reference to European and North American universities (see section 3.2). Other factors, again drawn from the heuristic, help describe the university's local role (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, pp. 291–293). 'Reciprocity', the two-way interactions of ideas and activity, is illustrated by staff circulation, as well as the formal and informal pathways to engagement. 'Strength', the force and size of activity, is illustrated by the influence of government, the limited resource for local engagement activity, but also the few key individuals within the university who pioneer this activity. 'Layers and conditions' are the historic structures on which this activity is based, and the national development apparatus, the history of the university and the history of higher education in Africa all help to determine the scope and nature of activity. Finally, 'spheres of agency', the geographical extent of activity, are closely related to the distribution of campuses and the interpersonal relationships of staff members – for example between a lecturer and an official at city hall (these are all analysed in chapters 7 and 8).

Marginson and Rhoades (2002, p. 286) also called for analysis of 'policy implementation at various levels, down to the professionals who enact and formulate policies in the ways that they ration their time and organise their activity… we need work that attends to local response and reality, explores local institutions, and considers local practices'. The mechanics of work of university staff (section 7.4) nicely illustrates how global influences (to build knowledge economies, produce employable graduates, and publish 'excellent' research), are reconstituted at national level (to become a middle income country) and local level (to produce research and graduates to support Rwanda's development ambitions), and how this in turn affect local engagement activity. Other examples, such as consultancy (section 8.2), show the interplay between institutional policies and the work habits of individual lecturers, whilst also highlighting strands between the scales – the national call for consultancy contracts to be awarded to the university rather than international firms.

This study also adds to our understanding of how strategic plans offer a window (albeit only ever a partial one) into institutional priorities. In section 6.1, several previous papers were summarised, including an analysis of 78 strategies by Stensaker et al. (2019) which found a 'snakelike procession' of unranked universities aspiring towards medium-low ranked institutions, and medium-low ranked universities towards high-ranked ones. The strategies of African flagship universities are unlikely to sit neatly within the relatively homogenous three categories identified by Stensaker et al. Although most fit within the medium-low or unranked

categories, and are resource-poor compared to most high-ranked universities, they have prominent national status. This means they simultaneously possess high prestige given their historic position at the centre of higher education in their country, and a set of pressures that compel them to look globally even though they may be unranked. Their aspirations to be world-class sit alongside both the pragmatism found in the unranked university strategies, and the focus on national development of the low-medium-ranked strategies. As both an actor in and a reflection of society, and with their complex and multifaceted roles, flagships escape easy categorisation.

9.2 How flagships conduct local engagement activity

The delicate balancing act of African flagships and the context these institutions operate within are shaped by the extent of autonomy they are afforded. These 'conditions of possibility' are historical and contemporary (Unterhalter and Howell, 2021, p. 13). As a result, flagships conceptualise their role primarily as an institution acting in service of the nation. This may suggest a highly curtailed local role, but chapters 7 and 8 showed how engagement can be formal or informal, giving rise to a creative range of direct and indirect activities at local level.

Another research sub-question asked to what extent and how do African flagship universities coordinate or participate in local engagement activity in their city region. The preceding chapters have provided examples of engagement across the ten universities. Some of this was viewed as local activity in plans or by interviewees; in other cases the examples were in pursuit of national objectives but largely took place within communities. This distinction between the location of work and the scale of objectives is further evidence of blurring, a two-way interaction, between the local and national scales. In section 6.4 we saw how framings differ between universities: for some local activity was discussed in terms of service or engagement or outreach, for others the focus was on industry links and knowledge exchange. Some used the term Corporate Social Responsibility, others preferred talk of building community capacity. The literature on engagement is predominantly Northern and suggests that we have witnessed a broadening from 'third mission' activity solely as commercially-driven engagement to a plethora of activities (section 3.3). More work is needed to understand the typologies of engagement in African universities, but this initial analysis suggests a similar breadth of activity amongst African flagships, although perhaps tracking more closely the priorities of the nation – whether that is the expansion of the private sector or meeting the needs of rural communities.

Community engagement has historic roots in African universities. For most flagships, local communities tend to be treated as a beneficiary rather than an equal partner in engagement activity. Bottom-up influence from the community is rare, and not encouraged or expected. Communities do not appear to be a stakeholder in university planning processes. In Rwanda, the prevalence of top-down governance and the primacy of economic development in government planning inhibits the role of the community in designing activity that may fall outside the accepted parameters of development. Section 7.3 analysed feedback loops from bridging actors, especially government, to the University of Rwanda. Examples of where local communities have influenced the university – 'counterextension', to use the terminology of de Sousa Santos (2010) – were, as expected, less evident. Within projects and initiatives, however, staff listen to the needs of dairy farmers, students change their minds after visiting communities living in informal housing, and leaders work to accommodate the feedback of employers. There also appeared to be an understanding that there could be a move towards two-way activity with the community in future, helping to inform activity at the University of Rwanda; a couple of interviewees wanted to see more of a balanced relationship.

The conditions of possibility that form the parameters of flagship activity directly inform local engagement activity. Financial constraints and the drive to diversify income pushes one form of engagement – consultancy – above others, such as working alongside communities. Consultancy has been a recurring theme, from tensions with service at the birth of the developmental university model in section 2.2, to being featured as a strategic objective in section 6.5, and the practical implications of this for staff, the university and development in Rwanda in section 8.2. Employability is another theme that can be traced throughout the chapters, and it is interwoven with engagement: as pressures to produce employable graduates continues to increase, close links with business are privileged as a form of engagement – and again likely at the expense of other forms such as community-based programmes. Both diversification of income and a focus on the employability agenda are hallmarks of the sweeping marketisation of global higher education (section 2.1), although both also have echoes in the traditional developmental university model, where 'moonlighting' gave lecturers experience with industry (stoking fears of absenteeism from campus), and where skilled graduates were expected to drive the development of the nation.

Section 7.3 explored the hierarchy of pressures for a flagship university, and the need for financial sustainability and employable graduates dominates. Areas deemed less critical nonetheless feature prominently in strategic plans: producing societally-relevant research is

unanimous, and all discuss local and community engagement, with half having targets and implementation plans for increasing this (section 6.4). Given the weight of other priorities, how might these goals be realised? Or, in the framing of van Schalkwyk and de Lange (2018), can a form of university-community engagement that values place-specific development (and simultaneously strengthens teaching and research) exist in the face of such strong market logics?

A path to local engagement

There is a limited literature on the obstacles to increasing research in African universities, and some of this has covered societally-relevant research with communities, including incentives for staff and institutional structures (section 3.1). Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati (2019) and Ssembatya (2020), for example, give valuable insight into the processes and complexities around securing research funding. We can build on the analysis of the previous chapters to extend this work to local engagement, and model the path to starting a programme of local engagement activity at a flagship university.

Figure 9 provides an example of the decisions and circumstances that stand before a university starting a programme of local engagement work.[46] It provides a framework in which to consider funding barriers and institutional hurdles that need to be overcome. The decision tree is necessarily generalised and individual universities may skip all or part of the tree, or begin the process from a different starting point – that is, somewhere other than at the very top. In addition, whilst following the 'no' boxes in particular may result in questions that do not appear to logically connect, they aim to capture the main circumstances in which engagement work could begin by addressing each of the major incentives and barriers in turn. Answers to the questions in the yellow boxes determine the path through the tree. The green box marks the start of a programme of local engagement activity; the red boxes mark a failure to begin local activity, or the start of activity but in a limited form. Expressed in terms of the engagement framework in diagram 8 (section 8.3), these outcomes – with the exception of failure – would be represented as a direct, formal line connecting the university and the bridging actors.

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[46] This decision tree has been influenced by the academic literature, especially in section 3.1 and the studies mentioned above, as well as the analysis in this study. It is also informed by my own professional experience of local engagement in UK higher education, and I have received helpful feedback from colleagues in both the UK and Rwanda. As before, local university engagement is defined here as projects, programmes, activities and relationships with external parties outside of the university, at a sub-national level. This may include research, innovation and community-focused projects, and social, cultural, environmental and economic programmes of work. Activities may be led by staff or students, or by an external partner with university support.

Outcomes represent structured programmes; further work is needed to map pathways to unstructured interactions, informal engagement, and the intrinsic capacity of the university.

Figure 9: A decision tree showing the path to starting a local engagement programme
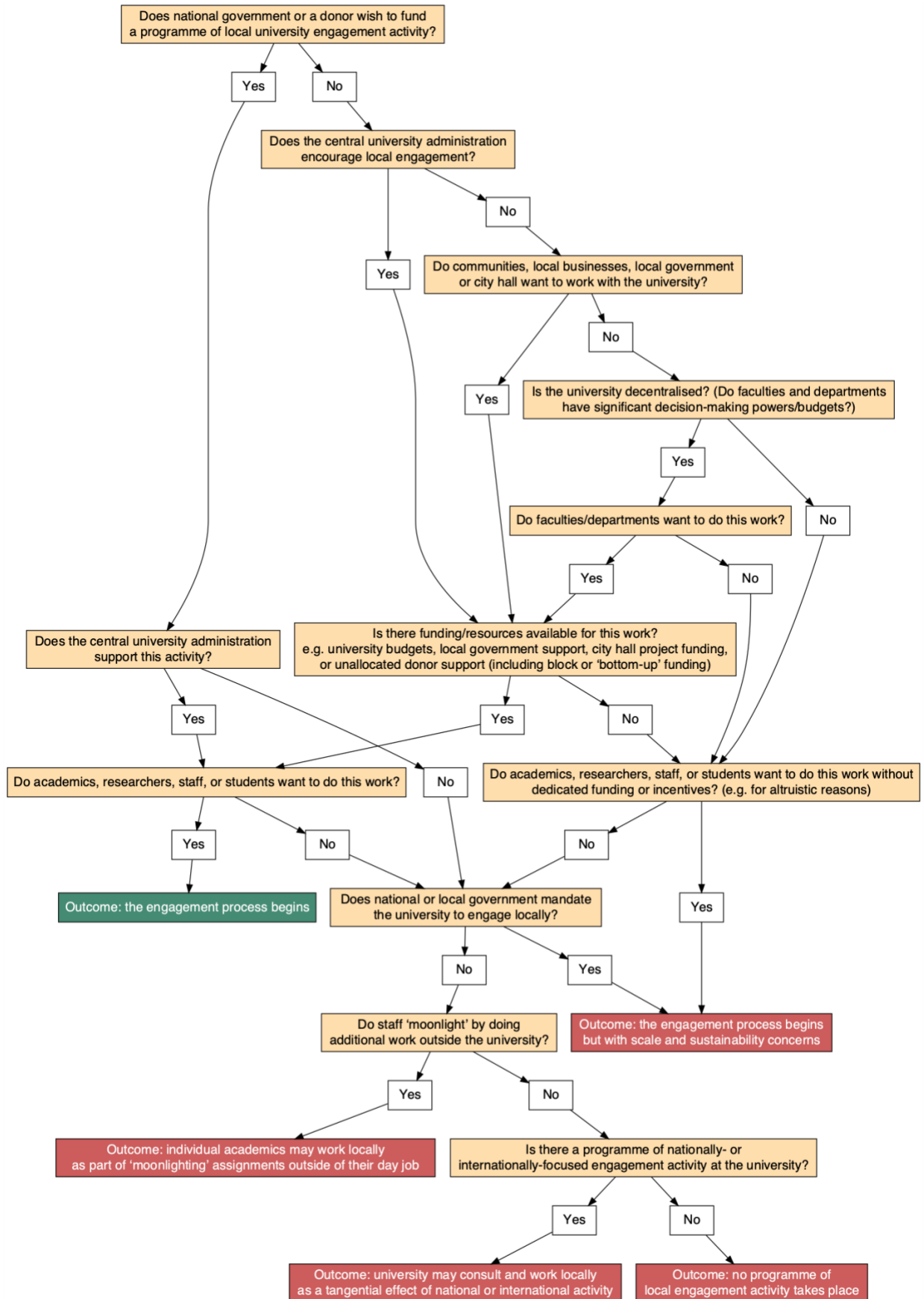
There are three key points. First, unless an institution can secure dedicated funding up front, the path to beginning a programme of work is both lengthy and complex, with numerous hurdles (this is also consistent with the literature on research funding in section 3.1). Second, paths through the tree may differ for a large university in Africa compared to a similarly-sized counterpart in, for example, the UK. The former will typically have to go through many more steps as dedicated funding for local engagement activity can be lacking; in the UK such funding is relatively plentiful – universities have accessed decades worth of European Structural and Investment Funding, UK government infrastructure and local growth funds in various guises, and small but flexible pots of money such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund – although barriers do exist.[47] The availability of skilled staff to administer and deliver local engagement programmes could be seen as a further differentiating factor, but this is likely a function of having had consistent funding for this purpose in the past. Third, an effective and sustainable programme requires institutional support, staff or student willingness, and appropriate resources. Eschewing any one of these three elements hinders local engagement. We have seen numerous examples of barriers in practice: vague policies, bureaucracy, and ad-hoc support mechanisms in chapter 5; misaligned promotion criteria, high workloads and limited budgets in chapter 7.

Of course, the story does not end once a programme of engagement begins. What makes for a successful local engagement programme – and who benefits – is another topic in need of substantial analysis within the African context. Although local engagement is subject to (somewhat rudimentary) key performance indicators in half of the ten flagships, and there are often strong monitoring frameworks that 'cascade' through the entire institution (section 6.2), the systems to track and evaluate engagement activity more broadly are lacking (as discussed in sections 6.4 and 8.2). There is also the need to reflect further upon what a successful outcome might look like. This could be the conceptualisation of the engaged civic university from section 3.3, as developed by Goddard (2009, p. 5) – one which 'engages as a whole with its surroundings, not piecemeal'. Or it could be the call of van Schalkwyk and de Lange (2018, p. 1) for a shift from a form of community engagement driven by financial incentives to one that emphasises place-specific development, recognising that the fortunes of a university are often closely intertwined with the health of its locality. The likelihood of these shifts taking place is

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[47] As with African universities, appropriate university structures and staff incentives are vitally important (Sánchez-Barrioluengo and Benneworth, 2019, p. 3). Even with these in place, the processes for accessing and spending, for example, European Structural and Investment Funds have sometimes been cumbersome, complex and somewhat trying for the staff involved (Giordano, 2020, p. 6).

wrapped up in notions of the 'ideal' university, and we have seen how these evolve (section 2.2). It will also depend upon, and be shaped by, the traits of the flagship university.

9.3 How the characteristics of flagships shape local engagement activity

If the University of Rwanda moved its Kigali campuses 380 kilometres to Kampala, or 1,500 kilometres to Lusaka, would it broadly function the same? Would a University of Ibadan in Accra, or a University of Namibia in Addis Ababa, face the same challenges and have the same impact? This study has maintained that the ten African flagships examined, whilst rooted in their individual places and histories, nonetheless share a set of traits and characteristics that define their role in society. Whether formed in 1918 or 2013, they carry the inheritance of the developmental university model, and they have been shaped by the same forces transforming higher education across the continent and the world. They have more in common than separates them. Whilst this does not mean that a policy prescription for one can be blindly applied to all, it does mean that discussions about the transformative potential of flagships, and debates over their future role, are broadly relevant. This section addresses the final research sub-question – what are the traits of African flagship universities, and how do these shape local engagement activity?

Some traits directly impact local engagement, and the form it takes. We have explored consultancy in considerable detail, how it is a product of the mechanics of work for university staff, and how it leads to a certain form of knowledge transfer driven by external demand. Staff at flagships are also often in demand as experts to serve on boards and committees, and to act as policy commentators. Flagship universities deliver public services, including public health outreach, support to farmers, and legal advice clinics.

Other traits indirectly impact local engagement. Flagships are often 'mother institutions' – mentors to other higher education institutions, a little-recognised hallmark of the flagship university but one with long-term implications for engagement. University models are often cloned when sibling institutions are born, and these can be hard to later change. Mentorship is a noble sacrifice: not only does setting up new universities demand the time of flagship university staff, but the fledgling institutions then compete for government funds, students, and staff (who may be paid better than at the flagship). Importantly, mentorship often also marks a geographic spread of higher education provision outside the capital, with implications for the centrality and connectivity of city regions. Flagships themselves have mirrored this process, with the universities of Ghana, Makerere, Namibia, Rwanda and Zambia in particular having

multiple campuses and extensive physical footprints, sometimes extending outside their capitals (for Ghana and Makerere especially this has been driven by the imperative of institutional decentralisation). A final trait worthy of mention here, significant for its pervasiveness in Africa, is the circulation of staff between universities, government and parastatals – there is often a constellation of offices that senior personnel move around. As seen with the University of Rwanda, the interface between the university and government is well-developed; the university is deeply intertwined in networks and is part of a broad government apparatus of institutions aimed at driving Rwanda's development. The impression given is not of cross-sector collaboration and helping institutions to work coherently together, but *service* more broadly to the nation: how can this person best meet the development needs of Rwanda? This seeping impact into government, city halls and the machinery of national development extends to that of alumni – exemplified by the two-thirds of senior Zambian officials and MPs who graduated from their national flagship. Flagships have an indelible influence on the decision makers who shape society.

In section 6.6 these traits were split into two groups: one that speaks to the influence of the marketisation and corporatisation of higher education, and another that pulls away from this, asserting the unique public role of the flagship as embodied in its founding role. The signature trait of the flagship university is to manage the tension between these two groups, to reconcile them in the name of national relevance and to ensure institutional survival. In the day-to-day turmoil of budget crises, leadership changes and political upheaval, this tension can appear to be slipping, with the university on the verge of collapse (for example the insolvency of the University of Zambia). Yet there has been talk of flagships fighting for survival since at least the 1980s (both Coleman (1986) and Court (1980) touch on this), and flagships have proved resilient: battered, no doubt, by resource constraints, government interference, the imposition of market reforms, restructures and decentralisation and strikes and protests, but continuing nonetheless to survive and evolve.[48] As such, a major benefit of the Comparative Case Study approach has been to put the traits of flagships into historical perspective. The Scottish roots of the University of Cape Town, the role of the University of London in the formation of the universities of Ibadan, Zimbabwe and others, and the eclectic influences on Addis Ababa

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[48] This tendency to foresee the demise of the university may be universal. Frank and Meyer (2007, p. 291) observe that there is a long history of observers predicting the collapse of higher education institutions as we know them: 'the university over the last several decades has enjoyed stunning success… but the literature is curiously wary in tone'. Universities have thrived, the authors contend, because they help drive integration into global society. This institutional isomorphism is revisited in chapter 10.

University all had lasting impact. Problems that are pressing today have often been pressing for decades – funding for research at the University of Ghana has been an issue since at least the 1970s (Dickson, 1973, p. 113), and the readiness of graduates for work was a concern in the 1960s (section 5.3).

This is not to suggest that change is impossible, but that meaningful change will require more than simple policy prescriptions. Path dependency is a real phenomenon at African flagships. When an academic centre is founded and funded by a donor, it can set in motion decades of research in a particular field, setting generations of researchers and students on a particular path. If this path is misaligned with national or local priorities, the opportunity cost for the university, for communities and the nation can be huge (Ssembatya, 2020, p. 13). Brain drain and staff shortages mean pipelines of academic talent cannot develop, the effects of which compound over time; there is good reason why philanthropic organisations such as the Carnegie Foundation focus on academic workforce development (Acquah and Budu, 2017, p. 150).

It is striking that, with one exception, the ten universities in this study do not describe themselves as flagships, but prefer to describe themselves in terms of aspirations: to be a research university, or a world-class university (see section 6.3). Does this render Teferra's definition of a flagship (from section 2.2) obsolete? From the analysis in this study, the definition still holds strong, as it recognises the unique influence and history of these institutions. Teferra (2016, p. 82) also acknowledges the isomorphism that is perhaps driving this push for a greater research role. Governments have also encouraged this push, with authorities in Ghana (Cloete, Bunting and van Schalkwyk, 2018, p. 241) and Ethiopia (Tamrat, 2020) establishing tiered university systems in recent years, and their respective flagships working hard to meet the (top) classification of a research university in response.

Research is not the only path to increasing local engagement activity in the future, but it is a significant one. Section 8.5 explored how aligning research and local engagement can meet the demand for relevance. Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati (2019, p. 14) interviewed academics at Makerere and found the majority viewed socially relevant research as the 'ultimate measure of a research-led flagship university'. Although most flagships lead in measurements of research output and publications in their country, they struggle to fund and maintain this activity, especially in the face of high numbers of undergraduates. As a result, donors who fund research have an outsized influence (see, for example, section 5.8); the recommendations in chapter 10 present some initial ideas on channelling this support to meet local needs. Before then, some

final thoughts on the role of African flagship universities in the development of city regions are offered.

Is there evidence of a local turn?

Community engagement was exhorted as a priority at the founding of the University of Rwanda in 2013, it is a pillar of the strategic plan today, and it is a common theme in the speeches of vice chancellors and ministers of education. This research sought to ask: is local engagement happening in practice? More broadly, are flagship universities in African city regions developing a local focus alongside their historic national mission?

There is a local dimension to the activity of flagship universities, demonstrated by the ten cases in this study. However, academics have distinguished between the university that sees itself as simply *in* the city versus the university as *part of* or *for* the city (Goddard, Kempton and Vallance, 2013, p. 43), or between universities in urban areas versus urban universities (Addie, 2016, p. 4). The former happen to be located in a place, whereas the latter see their place as central to their identity and mission. African flagships may be *in* city regions, but they are not *for* those city regions. They are unmistakably for their nation; they are usually *the* public university. However, city regions are places where the international coexists with the local, and the centre is entangled with the periphery (section 3.2). Local engagement is a viable and visible means of contributing to national development, and it offers the potential to enhance student teaching and complement staff research. As we saw with the multiversity model in section 2.3, the local is a further 'accretion' in the ever-expanding remit of the flagship university, a multipurpose institution at arms length from government (although the length of the arm differs) that can be tasked with solving ever more issues.

There is also a simpler framing: like the oft-quoted phrase about politics, ultimately the implementation of all development projects is local. And so, as the focus on the development role of flagship universities has increased – through the accretion of roles and responsibilities, but also through agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals – so too has implementation activity, and a local turn has taken place.

There are, of course, exceptions to the notion that all development projects are local. Although much outreach, consultancy and research activity is rooted in a physical location, some forms of engagement are not directly delivered in a place. Providing evidence for government policymaking, for example, can remain resolutely national in focus. Yet even here universities can play a role in terms of introducing a place lens: how do proposed policies play out across

different places? Are the benefits and risks evenly spread? Should decisions be devolved to city or regional level, and what role can evidence play in strengthening this process?

Despite growing attention on the role of higher education in development, there has been limited analysis of how universities engage with and contribute to the development of their local surroundings, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This study has sought to address this gap. In doing so, it has revealed that there is much in common between flagship universities in Africa, and the challenges and opportunities they face, despite their individual histories. However, the role of universities in society and in their local area has a resonance beyond the continent. Kamola (2014) captures the duality between the personal path of an institution, and its inescapable participation in global higher education systems.

> African universities remind us that all universities are primarily political institutions with their own complicated and particular histories. Today, African universities cannot be understood independent of their colonial legacy, their struggles for national liberation, or the decades of economic crises that followed. In short, African universities – like all universities – are not singular and isolated institutions but rather multiple, complex, and contradictory sites of world politics. (Kamola, 2014, p. 604)

The concluding chapter briefly considers this bigger picture.

10. Conclusion

This study has told the story of the roles that ten flagship universities play in their societies. Although the details are rooted in African city regions, the question this research sought to answer is a much broader one: what role does a university play in its local area? Along the way, this study makes several contributions to the literature. Some of these are theoretical. It uses a multi-scalar approach to understand the local role of universities, drawing on the glonacal agency heuristic and the methodological framework of the Comparative Case Study in particular. In doing so it expands the heuristic by examining multiple sites and how phenomena unfold in more than one location – the horizontal dimension of the Comparative Case Study. It also introduces several intersecting frameworks for understanding local engagement: the three components that determine the extent of engagement (history and institutional setup, demands made by external stakeholders, and the actions of individual staff); a process to show the stages of interaction (building on a theory of impact related to climate change, and adding in direct and indirect pathways to engagement and staff circulation); and a decision tree to consider institutional hurdles. Finally, it adds to our understanding of how strategic plans can offer a window into institutional priorities and values.

Empirically, the study provides insight into the traits of the modern flagship university, and how these are similar to and differ from the developmental university model. It helps us to better understand practices of local engagement and how these intersect with broader institutional priorities and national development agendas. It also bridges several academic disciplines where interaction has been limited but the potential for mutual learning is significant: higher education and development studies on one hand, and regional and urban studies on the other. More broadly, it contributes to the literature on African higher education, on the role of universities in development, and the relationship between universities and place.

This final section takes a step back, and looks at the significance of the topic for universities and governments, first by briefly examining the trend towards isomorphism in higher education, and then suggesting some areas for future work.

10.1 Institutional isomorphism and broader relevance

A reader familiar with university systems in the Global North may be struck by the similarities to issues faced by the African flagship universities in this study. Vice chancellors in Addis Ababa and Aberdeen both need to contend with how best to demonstrate a commitment to

employability and to 'relevance', to weigh up the merits of institutional decentralisation or whether to expand or shrink the courses on offer, and how the next five- or ten-year strategic plan can bind the university together and keep stakeholders happy. In this study, isomorphism manifests as African flagships seeking to become world class universities, and attempting to emulate research universities within the upper echelons of global league tables. This represents a divergence from peers in their countries (who, in general, seek regional or national prestige), yet they are unavoidably and irrevocably rooted, through history and through their developmental role, in their nations. As a result, the African flagship, by definition, is quite dissimilar to both a research intensive university in, say, the UK and a private, vocational institution in, for example, Uganda. In their country, flagships stand apart but also deeply linked; collectively across the continent they share a rich set of traits and challenges. Flagships are expected to be both a vehicle for national (and increasingly local) transformation, and globally competitive; they are an embodiment of the inseparable scales of place, but also the tensions between them.

Academic debates on institutional isomorphism and the internationalisation of higher education intersect neatly onto the contours of this study of African flagships. Over thirty years ago, Levinson (1989, p. 23) lamented a shift taking place in US universities towards homogenous bureaucracies and a 'growing abundance of managers and officials on campus'. Over the following decades the functions of the university have continued to increase, with 'a wave of managerialism' washing over universities globally, representing a 'rapid proliferation of linkages between the university and the wider society' (Frank and Meyer, 2007, p. 290). This pattern has been mirrored in higher education systems across the world, and there have been numerous attempts to capture this interplay between the international and the local. We have explored the glonacal framework of Marginson and Rhoades (2002), which emphasised the importance of looking beyond national policy and attempting to understand global forces and local patterns. Vaira (2004, p. 485) introduced the concept of 'organisational allomorphism' to explain how globalisation leads to homogenisation and convergence in institutional structures, but that these have local variations shaped by local contexts. Frank and Meyer (2007, p. 289) conclude that 'in the university, in short, the local particularities both of that which is known and those who know are increasingly reconstituted in global and universal terms'. As the creation of a globally competitive knowledge society has become the ideal of national policymakers, the modern research university – which African flagships aspire to –

has emerged as the most important actor in these efforts (Powell, Baker and Fernandez, 2017; Zapp and Ramirez, 2019, p. 5).

However, this study also offers insights for those looking at higher education beyond the African continent. The ten flagships offer a case study of large universities tasked with supporting national development but needing to reconcile local and international roles, operating in resource-poor environments, and balancing often complex relationships with national governments. They can also tell us about community engagement in low- and middle-income settings, and conceptualisations and framings of place. As such, this study can help build on studies in diverse locations: from flagship universities in Kazakhstan (Kuzhabekova, Soltanbekova and Almukhambetova, 2018; Gafu, 2019) to community universities in southern Brazil (Fioreze and McCowan, 2018).

Whilst the research university may be flourishing as an institutional model, the processes of isomorphism and internationalisation have been far from universally welcomed. We have seen criticism of marketisation and neoliberal policies, and the withering effects these can have on academics (for example Felde, Halvorsen and Myrtveit, 2021). Convergence can hide power imbalances, in particular between institutions in the North and South (Kraemer-Mbula et al., 2019; Asare, Mitchell and Rose, 2020). The conformity and lack of originality of the research university model has been critiqued, including by former leaders of such institutions (Thrift, 2022). Nor are the local and the global always as neatly reconciled as theories suggest. Teferra (2020, p. 160) argues that widely adopted definitions of internationalisation, which emphasise intentionality and agency, are unsuited to the South as institutions there are coerced into playing the internationalisation game on the terms of the North – a similar charge to that levelled at strategic plans in section 6.1 (this charge does, however, mask the wide diversity in university systems and forms of internationalisation in the South – see section 3.1). As such, institutions 'vigorously pursue aspects of internationalisation under duress'. He argues that internationalisation needs to be more rooted in local contexts and needs.

Although planners and officials may uphold the modern research university as an institutional 'ideal', the entrepreneurial university model has also influenced African flagships. However, there are multiple interpretations within the academic literature of what an entrepreneurial university is. Cerver Romero, Ferreira and Fernandes (2020) describe these as different 'faces' of the entrepreneurial university, one of which promotes internationalisation and seeking new opportunities through global connections (demonstrating considerable overlap with the research university). Another 'face' is regional (that is, sub-national) and national

development, and a more active role in the local environment. Sánchez-Barrioluengo and Benneworth (2019, p. 9) find that university entrepreneurial engagement converges around two models: a focus on specific knowledge transfer outcomes (usually with firms), or towards general contributions to regional economic development activity. These activities also permeate the strategic plans of lower ranked and unranked institutions – both in the study of plans by Stensaker et al. (2019), and in this study.

If we assume the tendency towards isomorphism of universities continues, what are the implications for African flagships? How will relevance be defined? Will flagships continue to 'accrete' new functions? Will the different faces of the entrepreneurial university become more pronounced, emphasising both global connectivity and local development? If the local grows in importance, will we see partnerships between city halls and flagship universities to, for example, attract foreign direct investment, as we have seen in Europe in section 3.2? Or – to borrow the terminology of Vaira (2004) – will a particular African declension, or local variation, emerge?

A study of a subject of this magnitude and complexity can only ever give us a partial picture, and one that is unavoidably from a particular vantage point and moment in time. With these limitations in mind, there are numerous areas both for future academic enquiry and for policymakers to consider.

10.2 Future considerations

There are three broad areas worthy of further work. The first is to extend thinking on the interface between research and community engagement, given how central research is within the plans of many flagship universities, and how it opens a potential stream of funding for local engagement activity. As domestic research funds are often limited, donors have outsized influence. Ssembatya (2020, p. 16) calls for less stringent funding restrictions, and recognises that some development partners have relaxed requirements, allowing funds to be used for supporting the research agenda of the university and for boosting institutional capacity building. Funders such as Sida appear to encourage a more bottom-up approach. Often, however, this is not the case, as an academic at Makerere observes.

> When donors come here, they have already decided on what they want. They are interested in people who think like them. Professors that work with them are not bringing their innovations [to] the work, but are just fitting into the donors' research agenda. If you are working with donor funds, you are working within the project funders' objectives. (Makerere academic quoted in Kaweesi, Bisaso and Ezati, 2019, p. 16)

In this instance, external funding serves to promote the coercive elements of isomorphism, creating research centres in the donor's image. Who defines 'relevance' is of critical importance (Woldegiyorgis, Tamrat and Teferra, 2022). However, as demand grows for research to have practical outcomes and to inform policy, the potential for universities to incorporate community engagement into projects also increases – especially if they can make the case that local engagement complements national development priorities. Where engagement does take place, effort is needed to make it equitable and effective. Working *for* a community is a different proposition to working *alongside* a community. This is a subtle but important distinction, and separates efforts to work with communities from the very start (for example in formulating research objectives) as part of a bottom up effort, from superficial attempts to consult or involve community members. In other words, *engaging with a community as part of a project* is not necessarily the same as a *community engagement project*. A donor may say, 'see what the community thinks', but this is often not the same as seeking to discover what people in the community want from the university. Petersen, Kruss and van Rheede (2022, p. 890) encourage universities to take this a step further, and seek to co-produce not only scholarly outputs but development outcomes with communities.

A positive example of engagement is provided by Mutero (2021, p. 131), who describe a public health project conducted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The team took personality tests to understand themselves and improve how they interact with the community. A Community Advisory Board acted as an entry-point into the community, explaining the research aims and objectives to the community, and communicating the expectations of the community to researchers. Research agendas were co-set together with community research assistants. Over time, community members have been trained in interviewing and data collection. The authors conclude that these processes 'demystify science as the preserve of the academy'.[49]

A couple of related developments are also worthy of more research. There is a trend towards prioritising interdisciplinary research in flagships, echoing the debates from the formation of the developmental university model covered in section 2.1. The University of Rwanda (2018b, p. 8) plan commits the university to developing 'interdisciplinary, problem-based academic

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[49] We must also learn from examples of where communities refused to engage. For example, Zulu et al. (2019) met resistance from local communities when conducting a pilot project on school-based pregnancy prevention in rural Zambia. Although the research team (based at the University of Zambia and the University of Bergen, Norway) had ethical approval and permission from national and local officials, the majority of guardians refused to participate. In the UK, Melhuish (2015, p. 7) has described UCL's campus expansion into a difficult-to-access, historically deprived East London Olympic Park site (now an innovation district), and the difficulty of intervening in the fabric of communities in a sensitive manner that can engender a long-term relationship.

programmes aligned with Rwanda's development needs'. Makerere University (2020, p. 11) plans to move towards larger, multi-disciplinary, multi-institution research initiatives to promote national development. The University of Cape Town sees interdisciplinary research as a means to understand the past, and to define and tackle future problems (UCT, 2021b, p. 10). The University of Mauritius (2015, p. 7) strategic plan promotes the importance of 'innovative and interdisciplinary exploration'. The University of Ibadan's vice chancellor promised new interdisciplinary institutes, and added that 'I have always been a strong believer that some of the most exciting things in science and discoveries are at the boundary between different disciplines' (Olayinka, 2015, p. 20). Despite this wave of enthusiasm, there is little detail on how disciplines will work together in practice, and what the implications of this are for local engagement, especially at universities with several campuses and where there is often a degree of specialisation at each.

A further development is an increase in attempts to understand, protect and share Indigenous knowledge – with some evidence of this in strategic plans (section 6.6). The Multidisciplinary Research Centre at the University of Namibia (covered in section 5.9) looks to collect and study Indigenous knowledge; there are three nodes of the African Institute of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIIKS) at the University of Rwanda (Mbonyinshuti, 2021a); and Mbah, Johnson and Chipindi (2021) found that academics at the University of Zambia are becoming more deliberate in their engagement with Indigenous knowledge, linking community engagement with sustainable development. Flagships are well-positioned to lead these efforts, and in doing so strengthen their engagement with communities.

The second broad area relates to the practices of engagement explored in this study. Grek (2021, p. 41) asserts that the education elites of today are often policy actors: 'people who occupy multiple spaces and who are simultaneously national and transnational, experts and brokers' (section 4.5). Given the expanding roles and accretions of the flagship university, it is unsurprising perhaps that the most influential individuals are often those who can move easily amongst different circles – manifesting, in this research, as staff circulation between the university, government and parastatals. Yet there is a parallel phenomenon of 'boundary spanners', covered predominantly by studies in the Global North.[50] Boundary spanners are individuals who work in one institution (such as a university), but proactively work across

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[50] An exception sometimes witnessed outside of the North is the use of 'professors of practice', helping to bridge university and industry (Etzkowitz and Dzisah, 2008, p. 662).

sectors, building relationships and programmes of work. In some cases these may be joint appointments funded by two organisations, or a secondment. The field of Boundary Spanning Leadership advocates cross-sector collaboration to find collective solutions to complex problems, with higher education leaders at the fore (Prysor and Henley, 2018), but boundary spanning has also been studied beyond senior leadership teams, for example amongst staff in university business engagement roles (Martin and Ibbotson, 2019). Boundary spanning efforts often emphasise connections between different disciplines and policy domains, and have a focus on tackling local challenges, and therefore large universities tend to have a leading role, as do other anchor institutions such as hospitals (Stubbs, Dickson and Husbands, 2020; British Academy, 2021, p. 20; Chaytor, Gottlieb and Reid, 2021, p. 60). Further work could explore how staff circulation and boundary spanners reflect the higher education systems and societies in which they operate, their distinctiveness and overlap within frameworks of engagement such as those introduced in chapters 7 and 8, and the potential for mutual learning and applicability in resource-poor environments.

There are practical steps that could support local activity at flagship universities, some of which were suggested by interviewees. These include annual awareness workshops aimed at, for example, city hall staff (especially mid-level managers who have responsibility for transmitting information throughout the organisation, but are more involved in policy detail than the upper leadership team) to share relevant research topics. Consolidating published papers, staff details and summaries of policy or consulting work relating to local challenges into a single portal would allow easy access to university expertise – no simple task, but one that could facilitate greater uptake of knowledge outside of the university (at the University of Rwanda open access journals are fragmented and can be difficult to navigate) and raise awareness of the capabilities of the university. Funders supporting university research could offer technical assistance funding to bring in external partners at the start of projects to raise awareness and build relationships, whilst also building capacity within universities to work effectively with government and other partners. A larger undertaking is to build systems to track alumni. The University of Namibia, one of the newest flagships in this study, has over 17,000 graduates but no details of their subsequent careers. UNESCO notes that collecting this information would help improve the labour market relevance of the curriculum, and that alumni are a force to be harnessed for institutional development (presumably for fundraising), forging new partnerships, and assessing the impact of university education locally and further afield (UNESCO, 2016, p. 76).

Other trends may shape local activity in the future. Worldwide league table rankings have a pervasive impact on institutional decisions and national policies (Hazelkorn, 2007), and the focus on becoming recognised as 'world-class' suggests flagships are not immune from their influence. More recent rankings, such as the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, aim to capture contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, including through outreach activity (Lim, 2018, p. 423). However, staff at flagships may wish to also keep an eye on the proliferation of local economic impact studies commissioned by universities in the North (Guest and Ransom, 2020). This is an 'arms race' in a different form, swapping the quest for a higher global ranking for a bigger monetary contribution to the local economy. Notwithstanding the flaws inherent in many of these studies (Siegfried, Sanderson and McHenry, 2007), they are also laden with the perils of the 'impact' agenda, including short-termism and the erosion of open-ended academic enquiry (McCowan, 2018), and the shortcomings associated with the 'metric society' – a myopic focus on what can be measured above all else (Mau, 2019).

The final area represents a call for more work on the topics covered in this study, in particular the local role of universities in the Global South. This may involve studies in city regions on other continents, but also small and private institutions in Africa, universities in smaller towns and rural areas, and flagships in Francophone and Lusophone nations. A few other suggestions for further enquiry have been made in earlier chapters: how can we better understand the informal and intrinsic roles of flagships? What interaction takes place between the 'bridging actors' (government, graduates, industry, communities, the media and so on), and how? What does successful engagement between a university and community look like, and how is 'success' defined by different parties? Following lines of enquiry such as those of Bose (2015) in the United States and Bank and Sibanda (2018) in South Africa, is there evidence of universities inadvertently reproducing local inequalities and undermining community development through their territorial expansion and other activities?

A recurring theme in this study has been the balancing act of the modern flagship university, enabling it to survive and adapt. History suggests that, even in the face of insolvency, government visitation committees, strikes and new league tables, flagships will continue to survive. But a case can be made for empowering the flagship, providing the financial security to take risks, to take on new research and development projects, and to work with communities in the process. This likely entails a balancing act of a different sort. In 1970, as the developmental university model took root in Africa, a Zambia-based nun wrote to Ernst

Stuhlinger, associate director of science at NASA, asking why so much money was being spent on getting a man to the moon when there was such widespread poverty in the United States. His detailed and heartfelt reply acknowledged the dire needs faced by society today, but made the case for balancing these against longer-term investments which may greatly reduce human suffering.

> Significant progress in the solutions of technical problems is frequently made not by a direct approach, but by first setting a goal of high challenge which offers a strong motivation for innovative work, which fires the imagination and spurs men to expend their best efforts, and which acts as a catalyst by including chains of other reactions. (Ernst Stuhlinger in Mazzucato, 2021, p. 78)

Flagship universities, in common with their counterparts around the world, are not without their issues and faults. But as potential vehicles for improving the lives of great numbers of people, they are arguably without parallel.

Appendix: Example of interview question outline

Interview questions for University of Rwanda staff

Background and job

1. Tell me about yourself and the main responsibilities of your job.

Development challenges

2. How would you describe the role of the University of Rwanda in Kigali?

3. What do you think are the top three development challenges that Kigali faces?

4. Are you working (with communities, city or government officials, businesses, or any other organisations) to help tackle any of these challenges? *If yes, how? If no, is there an area where you could collaborate? How do you think you could do this? What would need to happen? Why hasn't this happened already?*

5. Do you have publications or are you aware of publications that can contribute (or have contributed) to the development of Kigali? *If yes, how do you think the city or government has (or should) use these? Are there any decisions or urban policies or regulations that have been developed based on university research or publications? If no, why do you think the city does not use them?*

Relationships with the city

6. Can you tell me about any other work you are doing with city or government officials in Kigali? *(For example, are there any joint projects, or does the university supply evidence or analysis to any part of the city administration, or to any planning bodies?)*

7. How would you describe the University of Rwanda's relationship with the City of Kigali (city hall)? Is it changing, or growing in importance?

8. Do you think city officials are making the most of the university's strengths?

9. Are there obstacles to closer working with the city?

Other activity

10. Are you planning any innovative or exciting projects or research for the future relating to Kigali?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview questions for City of Kigali and Government of Rwanda officials

Background and job

1. Tell me about yourself and the main responsibilities of your job.

Development challenges

2. What do you think are the top three development challenges that Kigali faces?

3. How would you describe the role of your institution/department in tackling these challenges?

4. Is there any collaboration with the University of Rwanda to help tackle any of these challenges? *If yes, how? If no, is there an area where your institution/department could collaborate? How do you think you could do this? What would need to happen?*

5. Are you aware of any university research or publications that can contribute (or have contributed) to the development of the city of Kigali? *If yes, how have you used these? Are there any decisions or urban policies or regulations that have been developed based on university research or publications? If no, is there a reason why? What would you look for?*

Relationships with the university

6. Can you tell me about any other work your institution is doing with the University of Rwanda, or with staff at the university?

7. How would you describe your institution's relationship with the university? Is it changing, or growing in importance?

8. Do you think your institution/department should work closer with the university? *If yes, are there obstacles to closer working with the university? If no, why?*

Other activity

9. Are you planning any innovative or exciting projects or research for the future – either work with the university, *(as appropriate)* the national government/city hall, or internationally?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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