

Views of Finnish Africa-related researchers on research on Africa and its development in Finland



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Main results and suggestions

- The most significant research partners for Finnish Africa-related researchers are researchers and universities in the African target countries but this varies substantially
--> How to increase cooperation also in Finland? How to increase cooperation elsewhere?
- Researchers knew mostly about Africa-related topics connected to their specific field of research. In addition, research and researchers being committed for long time were well known
--> Rising awareness and creating forums for researchers, also multidisciplinary research.
- Long-term engagement and presence in Africa were seen as good research practices.
--> Long-term commitment and proper funding allocation by the Finnish universities to Africa-related research and self-organisation of researchers in Finland were seen as main positive factors contributing to Africa-related research in Finland.
- Global Africa-related pilots (OKM:n globaalipilotit) were relatively unknown for researchers
--> Targeted communication for Africa-related researchers.

Background

- As a part of MCE's FAPI project we interviewed Finnish researchers who have studied Africa extensively.
- An interview invitation was sent to approximately 40 researchers, 21 of whom participated in the interview.
- Interviewed researchers were selected from individuals collected from different Finnish universities. We selected most cited researchers by using Google Scholars tool (over 1000 citations).
- In addition, 9 interviews were conducted with researchers at the University of Turku.
- Interviews were conducted by telephone and e-mail, and all interviewees were asked the same five questions.

Questions of the interview

- What issues have you researched about Africa?
- Do you have partners in your researches about Africa? (In Finland, In Africa or elsewhere in the world) Where? Who?
- Do you know anyone else in Finland who has researched Africa? Who and which topics?
- Do you have any suggestions or good practices on how to promote Africa-related research in Finland?
- Have you been involved in the Ministry of Education and Culture's global pilot projects FAPI, EDUCASE, GINTL or SAFINET?

Universities, fields of research and target countries of the researchers who participated in the interview

- The number of interviewed researchers at the University of Helsinki was the highest because they were the most cited ones.
- There were also interviewees from Åbo Akademi University, Hanken, the universities of Eastern Finland, Oulu, Tampere and Turku.
- Many fields of research were selected, most often in Science and Medicine.
- The most common research areas were Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and Western Africa.

Collaboration of researchers

- The collaborative patterns and networks of the researchers were very different. Those who had done research longer had wider networks.
- Each researcher had patterns of collaboration with other researchers.
- The main partners were local universities, colleges and their researchers in African countries, where research was conducted.
- In addition, researchers had collaborations in Finland.
- In addition to Africa, Western European universities and U.S. universities were important partners as a part of the study.
- Elsewhere in the world were only few partners.

Finnish researchers' perceptions of Africa-related research

- Researchers knew another researchers who had conducted research on Africa. Each researcher had also contacts and networks related to their specific research fields.
- The knowledge of researchers' own discipline about Africa-related research and researchers was wide. In addition, previous collaborative patterns and the names of long-term researchers were highlighted in the interviews. Researchers also knew well-established research stations such as the Taita station in Kenya.
- UniPID and the network of researchers came up in some interviews.
- The Universities of Helsinki, Turku and Eastern Finland were mentioned most often as sites for African related research in Finland.
- Researchers had a broad understanding of research on Africa. The own field of research and the network built around it were the best known. The challenge is how to get more information from other disciplines?
- -> Persistence and long-term commitment increase awareness among researchers.
- A specific Africa mailing list for social science researchers has served as a good way to communicate and keep in touch with other researchers in Finland.
- -> Visibility also for new and young researchers through networks and multidisciplinary research

Commitment and presence as an important part of research in Africa

- The long-term commitment of researchers to conduct research on Africa was highlighted as a good practice
- Presence and onsite visits in Africa are important in working with Africans. Personal relationships with locals were perceived as important.
- In research, the involvement of Africans is important as responsible task of to establish a functional connection.
- -> Building trust and commitment with Africans is important.
- In addition, knowledge of the local culture, use of collaboration organizations and research networks, multidisciplinary research and utilization of social media (Twitter) were perceived as good practices as a part of research.

Researchers' proposal to promote African research

- Funding was mentioned as significant mean to promote research in Africa. Ongoing and steady increase of funding demonstrates universities' appreciation and enables research commitment, but also targeted, grassroots projects need to be funded. Emphasis was placed on a more even distribution of funding across disciplines. The Academy's funding program for Africa (the need of it) came up several times in interviews with researchers.
- Another major theme was the organization of Africa-related researchers in Finland. A common list or organization is needed for researchers to find and know each other. A researcher forum, seminar or Africa Days would bring researchers together and allow sharing and reflection.
- Inter-university relations and agreements, responsible research (impact assessment on the research area), interdisciplinarity, business cooperation, cooperation with UN agencies and permanent research stations would promote research.

Participation of researchers in MCE's global pilot projects

- There were only a three of researchers who were involved in some of the four global pilot projects.
- Six of the researchers were aware of the projects, or at least one of them.
- Most of the researchers had not even heard about any of the projects.
- MKE's global pilot projects were mainly foreign to researchers.
- -> Communication about global pilot projects should be the target, especially for those who are interested in Africa-related research. The pilot projects attracted the interest of the researchers and they wanted to hear more about them. They felt that the projects could be useful for their research or collaboration.



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