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Applying Graduate Tracer Surveys as an Integrated Education Quality Management Tool: A Case Study of St. Augustine University of Tanzania

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Abstract
Based on the heavy increase of tertiary enrolment in sub-sahara Africa and the massive proliferation of Higher Education Institutions in the East African region, quality assurance has become more important for institutions of tertiary education. Especially, graduate tracer studies can support Higher Education Institutions to orient their study programmes towards the needs of the labour market and thus to decrease unemployment or inadequate employment of their graduates. The article on hand describes the process and summarizes selected results of a recently conducted tracer study at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT). The study was carried out in the framework of a partnership project between SAUT and the University of Duisburg-Essen, which focusses on the establishment of an integrated quality assurance system at SAUT. The paper gives some practical information for those involved in higher education quality assurance on how to conduct a graduate tracer study. A critical reflection in the end summarizes challenges and sketches a potential way forward for graduate tracer studies in East Africa of comparable contexts.
Keywords: Graduate Tracer Study, Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Survey, Social Sciences

1. Introduction – Graduate Tracer Surveys in East Africa

University Graduate Tracer Studies nowadays are becoming a more and more prominent practice worldwide (cf. Schomburg, 2011). In Europe, towards the end of the 20th century, universities have recognised the large potential of collecting feedback from their graduates in order to improve study programmes, facilitate accreditation processes and positioning institutions of higher learning in the education market (ibid.).

In Sub-Sahara Africa, heavily increasing enrolments starting in the 1980s and 1990s parallel to declining budgets for tertiary education as well as the rapid proliferation of private higher education institutions together with a fast transforming job market have prompted increased reflection about quality in higher education provision on the African continent (Materu, 2007), too. This in turn lead to an increasing demand for empirical evidence regarding the professional relevance of higher education institutions' study programmes using graduate tracer studies. As early as 1998 systematic graduate tracer studies were carried out in East Africa (Baldauf / Lwambuka 1998). Graduate tracer studies and their systematisation in East Africa have gained momentum fostered by the Commissions of University Education (CUE) in Kenya in the framework of the establishment of internal quality assurance systems and quality assurance units, policies and frameworks in the region (cf. Wahome / Egesah / Wanyama 2015). In the years 2010 – 2013 the *University Graduate Tracer Study Training (UNITRACE)* offered by the International Centre for Higher Education Research at the University of Kassel in Germany (INCHER-Kassel) trained a number of quality assurance officers and social scientists in conducting graduate tracer studies. In 2015 – 2016 a second cohort of East African universities' members was

trained in the bounds of UNITRACE 2.0, a training course coordinated by the Centre for Higher Education Development and Quality Enhancement (CHEDQE) of the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) in Germany in partnership with the Kenyan Commission for University Education (CUE), the Inter-University Council for East Africa and Moi University in Kenya. UNITRACE 2.0 was – as was UNITRACE – also funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD) and attended by ten universities from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In the framework of the closing workshop of UNITRACE 2.0 in October 2016 at Moi University the alumni of the training lay the foundation of the East African Graduate Tracer Study Network (EAGTSN), which was strongly welcomed by CUE and IUCEA. The UNITRACE 2.0 alumni and the network profited very much from the presentation of the good practice of St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) in conducting graduate tracer studies held by Mr. Shwaibu Sella, the director of the Directorate of Quality Assurance of SAUT, which is cooperation partner of CHEDQE in a partnership programme called Establishing Integrated Quality Management Systems (EIQMS).

In the following, we will present the case of the graduate tracer study at the Faculty of Education and Mass Communication of SAUT. We will therefore first outline the overall project context of EIQMS before we present the process of conducting the studies and selected results. We will finish by an analysis of the project and a summary of lessons learnt.

2. The project context - Establishing Integrated Quality Management Systems

One recent activity for fostering the establishment of quality assurance structures and the development and conduction of graduate tracer studies in the East African region is the East African-German partnership *Establishing Integrated Quality Management Systems* (EIQMS).

EIQMS is a cooperative project of the Centre for Higher Education Development and Quality Enhancement (CHEDQE) and the Directorates for Quality Assurance at Egerton University in Kenya and St. Augustine University in Tanzania. CHEDQE is the coordinating institution of the project. This project falls within the framework of the programme line DIES - university partnerships with universities in developing countries.

The project is funded from 2014 until 2017. Under the premise *Towards a Culture of Quality,* the project aims to establish structures for integrated quality management systems at both partner universities. Special emphasis is placed on the introduction of evaluation processes at the faculties as well as the conceptualisation and implementation of graduate surveys. CHEDQE trains and mentors both cooperation partners on subjects such as the preparation of self-evaluation reports, review processes, and curriculum development. They also advise on the development of reliable methods and technical infrastructure for a qualitative assessment and analysis of information.

2.1 Background and Project Goals

Since 2001, different activities for developing internal higher education management strategies and for implementing reform processes have taken place in the context of the DIES programmes. DIES (Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies) is jointly conducted by the DAAD and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and is financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In this connection, the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), a network of university representatives and regional regulatory authorities, is a strong cooperation partner.

The affiliated universities in the EIQMS project are DIES-participants from the very beginning and therefore have fundamental experience and instruments for constituting integrated quality management systems. EIQMS is to build on existing experience and structures and to activate and conduct the implementation of concrete quality assurance processes by both African partner universities. This results in the following project goals:

1. capacity development in the area of quality management within the affiliated universities,
2. experts exchange and capacity development in the area of curriculum development and accreditation,
3. piloting and sustainable establishment of internal evaluations and external academic assessments of faculties and study program clusters,
4. development and realization of graduate surveys,
5. development and use of reliable methodical and technical infrastructure for data analysis and quality development.

2.2 Project activities

The project's approach is to connect capacity development concerning different instruments and processes in quality management in higher education institutions with concrete realisation and testing of new elements of quality management within the affiliated universities in Kenya and Tanzania. That way, integrated quality management systems shall develop, which feature sensible connections between existing and newly introduced

elements.

In the context of five workshops and additional coaching, responsible stakeholders within the affiliated universities were acquainted with theoretical foundations and models as well as instruments of quality management in universities, in order to prepare the concrete realisation of internal and external evaluation processes on the level of faculties and study programme clusters. Eventually, the quintessence of this project is the realisation of two evaluations with internal and external components as well as the realisation of graduate surveys within both partner universities.

The implementation of the evaluation processes and the graduate surveys were supported by on-site coachings in East Africa. In addition, an online-platform was developed that facilitates a continuous exchange during stages of planning and realization. All in all, five workshops and two on-site coachings were conducted in the framework of the project *Establishing Integrated Quality Management Systems*:

1. Workshop 1: Setting the stage and Quality Management in Higher Education Institutions,
2. Workshop 2: Methods and Tools for Quality Assurance in HEIs,
3. Workshop 3: Curriculum Design and QA,
4. Workshop 4: Graduate Tracer Studies,
5. On-site coaching: Graduate Tracer Studies,
6. Workshop 5: Faculty Evaluation,
7. On-site coaching: faculty evaluation.

3. Graduate Tracer Surveys at St. Augustine University of Tanzania

Graduate Tracer Studies are one of the major tools for quality assurance in higher education institutions, because they can provide information about the matching of qualifications gained in university education to the requirements of the labour market, the current job position of graduates and thus about the effectivity and efficiency of the higher education institution. Graduates obtain the unique position to successfully have finished their studies and to know the labour market. It is only them, who can provide a retrospective evaluation of their study programmes and their study conditions in relation to their first experiences on the job market. They can give an insight into the interconnection of studies and professional success.

Aiming at integrating graduate tracer studies at SAUT, the CHEDQE supported a working group comprising quality assurance officers of the Directorate for Quality Assurance and faculty members responsible for conducting the study in their faculty. The EIQMS workshop 2 (Methods and Tools for QA) and workshop 4 (Graduate Tracer Studies) facilitated the participants to conduct graduate tracer studies at their universities autonomously. Along the lines of the examples of both course evaluation and graduate tracer studies, the following steps of a social scientific research project have been dealt with in the workshops:

1. formulate a question,
2. identify variables,
3. select a method for data collection,
4. construct an instrument,
5. establish the quality of the instrument,
6. formulate an action plan.

In the first workshop on tools and procedures the CHEDQE first of all provided an overview of theoretical and methodological concepts and examples for conducting an evaluation project. In the framework of extensive group works the workshop participants were given the opportunity to deal with the topics intensively and with regard to the circumstances and the quality assurance system at their own universities. Concretely, the group learned how to define functions, research questions and aims of an evaluation project. In addition, the participants qualified in identifying important variables and indicators in order to find answers to the research question. In this workshop, for example, participants were asked to operationalise the theoretic construct “academic success” and to identify dimensions and indicators of this construct. The construction of questionnaires was also an important topic dealt with in the workshop extensively as was sensible time planning for an evaluation project.

The fourth workshop of EIQMS was aiming at an intensive preparation of an own graduate tracer study project. In the workshop not only a comprehensive theoretic background was given, but the participants started to plan their own graduate tracer study. For this, not only time planning and advertising the study in order to reach a high response rate was dealt with, but also a training was conducted on using the free SoSci1, a tool for conducting online surveys and the free statistics software PSPP2. In the last part of the workshop, the participants were supported in formulating a project action plan (PAP) for their graduate tracer survey project that was fleshed out in detail by the graduate tracer study team at SAUT after the workshop. In addition, the

1 https://www.soscisurvey.de/index.php?page=home&l=eng (last accessed on 22/12/16).
2 https://www.gnu.org/software/pspp/ (last accessed on 22/12/16).

team developed their own graduate tracer study questionnaire.

The underlying concept of EIQMS envisages that the responsibles at the partner universities are guided in the first application of the newly developed tools. During the on-site coaching the questionnaire and project action plan developed by the quality assurance officers of SAUT were discussed and revised, the target population of the survey was defined, the field phase and responsibilities within the team were planned. This process was supported by the team of CHEDQE, as well as the programming of the questionnaire using the SoSci software. Within only 1.5 working days the survey was programmed in SoSci and the launch of the pre-test was prepared.

Three coordinators at SAUT (the quality assurance officer and two representatives of the faculties, within which the surveys should be launched) were responsible as a team for conducting the studies. After a two-months pre-testing phase the team could start to invite the alumni to participate in the study and to manage the field phase. Directly after the field phase the second on-site coaching took place, which mainly dealt with data analysis. During this coaching, questions concerning the statistics software, the data analysis and report writing could be dealt with. The on-site coaching ended with agreeing on a schedule for analyzing the data and report writing.

3.1 Conduction of the survey

A survey design was employed in this study. The questionnaire was widely shared online through SoSci for four months. Graduates of the study programmes Bachelor of Educatiuon (BAED) and Bachelor of Mass Communicatione (BAMC) of the cohorts 2011 and 2012 were invited to a short, three-part questionnaire asking for: overall satisfaction with conditions of the graduates' respective study programme, attainment of learning outcomes, employability and occupational destination.

Potential respondents were drawn from all over Tanzania. First, the list of graduates was obtained from the admission office. Second, snow balling was used to gather the contact list from the respondents. The snowballing sampling method meant that one graduate from SAUT from the cohort mentioned above nominated another potential graduate from SAUT to be approached for the research. The snowballing sampling method was used based on referrals from initial graduates to collect the contact data of additional graduates. Therefore, members to be included in the sample were recruited via chain referral. From this list, an appropriate sample was drawn using a table of random numbers.

Using an online questionnaire was a big challenge, because most of the graduates were employed in rural areas, which none or bad internet connection. Therefore, the survey team went to different regions of Tanzania in order to administer the questionnaire face to face. The regions were Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, Mtwara, Lindi and Mbeya. Most of the graduates were able to fill in the questionnaire and those that were away from the aforementioned regions were given the link to fill in the questionnaire online.

The sample size for this study was set at 450 from both the study programmes of Education and Mass Communication. Of these, 142 graduates participated in the survey. 82%nof the survey participants have obtained their degree in the education area. Three thirds of the surveyed graduates have been 26 to 35 years of age at the point of time of the survey. About half of the participating graduates was female (48%).

The data collected online were extracted from SoSci to SPSS for better analysis, other data collected face to face were coded. After coding, the data were entered into SPSS 16 manually. Responses were summarized into a number of different categories for entry into SPSS, the categories were identified after looking through the range of responses received from the respondents, and then each response category was assigned a specific number.

Before entering the information from the questionnaires into SPSS the code book was prepared. This gave the summary of instruction that was used to convert the information that was obtained from each case into a format that can be used with SPSS. The open-ended questions were analysed thematically. Kothari (2004) argues that thematic analysis involves the cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm. Repeated themes were categorized basing on their commonalities and recorded together. Also other categories of themes were recorded as they emerge. This method enabled the researcher to be reliable and to make thorough analysis under each topic. In all cases the analysis was based on the objectives.

3.2 Objectives and Selected Results

The graduate tracer studies aimed at improving learning, training and teaching of the programmes at St. Augustine University of Tanzania. With the help of the surveys strengths and weaknesses of the study programmes regarding study conditions and the transition form university to the labour market could be identified. The results give a base match and mismatch between educational qualifications and the required work skills and shortfalls of an educational programme which helps in aligning the university training to the needs of the economy. The study was specifically guided by three objectives:

1. to identify the level of satisfaction of graduates on study conditions of SAUT BA with education and BA in Mass Communication,
2. to assess the attainment of the expected learning outcomes with graduates of SAUT BA with education and BA in Mass communication,
3. to determine the employability of BA with education and BA in Mass communication graduates in their respective labour market.

Followed by questions concerning the study programme and study motivation, the survey participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the study programmes and the study conditions retrospectively. In doing so, it was possible to identify how the BA in Education and BA in Mass Communication graduates were satisfied with how they were trained at the university. This was based on the assumption that support by lecturers and the university as a whole, proper facilities of the university and a well-structured study programme would support students to accomplish their studies successfully.

In evaluating the programme and study conditions, respondents were provided with several statements and were required to state whether the respective study condition was weak, average or strong (see table 1). Here, main criteria have been study organisation (structure of the programme, organisation of assessment, quality of teaching provision, support by lecturers, facilities and the quality of student welfare (e.g. catering, accommodation).

The results indicate that most of the study conditions were rated as being above average by the surveyed graduates (≥50%, see table 1). With more than 78% the majority of respondents was satisfied with the following conditions: structure of the degree programme, testing/grading system of examinations, lecturers quality of teaching, provision of supervised practical work experience and relevance of the programme to the professional requirement.

Other aspects, which have been rates as “high” by more than 60% include: supply of teaching and learning materials, teacher/student relationship, quality of books in the library, and quality of lecture halls, as can be seen in the following table. Each of the following aspects has been rates as important to improve by one fourth of the survey participants: availability of practical facilities, quality of medical services, recreation facilities and practical facilities.

Table 1. Programme and Study Condition Rating in BAED (in percent)

	n	weak (%)	average (%)	strong (%)
Organisation of Programmes				
Structure of the degree programme	92	3.3	14.7	82.7
Testing/grading system of examinations	91	6.6	11.0	82.5
Number of optional subjects	92	15.2	31.5	53.3
Opportunity to influence university policies and decisions	93	18.3	35.5	46.3
Quality of Teaching				
Lecturers quality of teaching	94	1.1	20.2	78.7
Provision of supervised practical work experience (e.g. teaching practice, field attachment)	90.0	5.6	15.6	78.9
Relevance of the programme to your professional requirement	92	3.3	18.5	78.3
Student Support and Counseling				
Academic advice offered	89	9.0	34.8	56.2
Chances to collaborate with teaching staffs in projects	91	9.9	38.5	51.6
Opportunity of out of class contacts with teaching staff	91	8.8	40.7	50.6
Teacher/Student relationship	94	4.3	33.0	62.7
Facilities				
Availability of practical facilities (labs, equipment, fields, etc.)	93	24.8	33.3	42.0
Quality of practical facilities (labs, equipment, fields, etc.)	90	22.2	34.4	43.4
Supply of teaching and learning materials	94	12.8	24.5	62.8
Quality of books in the library	90	10.0	27.8	62.2
Quality of electronic resources in the library	94	16.0	33.0	51.1
Quality of lecture halls	93	13.0	26.9	60.2
Quality of Student Welfare				
Quality of accommodation	90	15.5	48.9	35.6
Quality of catering facilities on campus	92	8.7	54.3	37.0
Quality of medical services	91	26.4	35.2	38.5
Quality of recreation facilities	92	22.9	34.8	42.4

Source: SAUT BAED GTS Report (2016)

The graduate tracer study results indicate that most of the study conditions were rated as being above average by the surveyed graduates set shows that the university is performing above average (≥50%, see table 1 above). while other few study conditions shows that the university is performing below average due to different reasons. Overall, about 71% of the programme and study conditions are well implemented by the university.

This means the university is moving to the right direction as far as learning and teaching is concerned.

Additionally, the graduates have been asked, in how far their studies have equipped them with competencies, which are important in the job market. Asking graduates how they valuate the contribution of a specific study programme to the development of particular skills, knowledge and competences in different areas can indicate, whether the content and structure of a study programme was able to support the development of these and whether – ultimately – the graduates are prepared for the job market. This can also provide information about potential deficits of the study programme.

To assess the attainment of the expected learning outcomes with graduates the respondents were provided with a question asking, to which extent the study programme has equipped them with the following competences:

1. problem solving skills,
2. communication skills,
3. research skills,
4. information technology skills,
5. team spirit,
6. professional skills.

The findings of the graduate survey of the BA in Education suggest that 60%-85% of the surveyed students assessed the competence gain positively. With a majority suggesting that the attainment of the expected learning outcomes positively contributed towards attaining their professional skills.

On the other hand, the open-ended questions of the questionnaire showed that many survey participants suggested for an increased offer for the development on practical computer skills. According to the statements at the end of the questionnaire, offers for the improvement of communication and language skills are missing.

One of the main assests surveying graduates lies in the fact that only this group can give information about how successfully they act in the jobmarket on the basis of their accomplished studies. Thus, important content of the applied questionnaire are the period and manner of searching for an occupation as well as the current occupational situation and success.

To assess the employability of graduates the following closed-ended questions were asked to obtain results of the aforementioned aspects, including:

1. Reasons for getting employment immediately,
2. graduates' current position at work,
3. type of employment,
4. name of the employer,
5. whether the graduate holds a management position,
6. field of employment,
7. relevance of the courses at work for enhancing skills for the current job.

As an exemaple, the answers of the graduates of the BA in Mass Communication suggest that about 71% of BAMC graduates were employed immediately (i.e., within 6 months after graduation). However, with regard to the reasons for immediate employment of the graduates, the majority got employment immediately, not because the jobs were readily available for them, nor because of their exemplary academic performance but rather because they had connections of some kind with employers or because they had been working there before as employees or interns.

For the graduates who did not get employment immediately after graduation, the majority (67%) cited a lack of experience in the jobs they applied for as the reason. A few more (17%) cited a lack of job opportunity as a reason for their delay of employment while the same number (17%) citing delay in allocation of jobs by the government as the reason for the delay.

Results also suggests that the majority (67%) of SAUT graduates who completed the BAMC in 2011 or 2012 are working full-time and a few more (17%) are self-employed. According to the findings, very few graduates (6%) are either working part-time while still seeking for full-time employment; or just working part-time and not seeking full-time employment; or still not working and looking for a job.

The Majority of the BAMC graduates have either remained their jobs and positions without changing to other areas or positions (20%) or have changed their jobs or areas of work only once (28%). Very few graduates (8% and 12%) have changed areas of work twice and thrice, respectively.

As data suggest, graduates are employable immediately and most specific in full-time jobs. It can now be concluded that since in general 71% of the programme and study conditions are well implemented by the university according to the graduates, graduates were equally able to gain competence by a range of 60%-85% as data suggests and were easily employable in different fields.

3.3 Graduate Tracer Survey as Part of the System

The graduate tracer study report was shared across the respective departments at the university an discussed in

meetings. It was also taken as an information basis in the framework of the preparation for the evaluation of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Communications, which was also part of the abovementioned EIQMS project in the year 2016. Therefore also – but not exclusively – based on the GTS reports the following recomendations were put forward and will serve as the basis for an action plan for the faculty.

1. There is a high risk that the number of BAED students will discontinue their studies in the near future, if the government will stop sponsoring them, as the government gives priority to other sectors of the country. This can influence the whole university, especially since a majority of BAED graduates enrolled to SAUT due to the availability of government loans.
2. As it seems, the highest impediment to the students' pursuit of further higher education qualifications was a lack of financial support. The government should consider increasing the funding graduate studies to increase the transition rates from undergraduate to graduate studies.
3. The faculty of Education and Mass Communication should revisit the courses offered to check, whether some could be optional to reduce the high student workload which may impede learning (e.g. the French language course is nowadays still obligatory in all study programmes).
4. There should be a comprehensive review and adpation of the Bachelor of Arts in Education programme and other programmes in order to cater the need of the learners and the labour market at large.
5. There should be improvement in the accommodation services. This will help students to live near the university and it will help the university to generate more income.
6. The quality of the recreation facilities should be improved.
7. The university should buy quality practical facilities in order to help students acquire hands-on experiences.
8. The university should emphasize the use of information technology (IT) facilities in order for its graduate to fit in this world of science and technology.
9. The university should establish a strong link with its graduates. This could help both parties to support each other when the need arises.
10. Students should be involved more the development of the university's policies.
11. The number of courses for some specialties should be minimised.
12. The student-staff-relationship should be strengthened to minimise students being mistreated.

4. Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward

The graduate tracer study projects of the Faculty of Social sciences and Mass Communication turned out to be very fruitful for quality assurance at St. Augustine University as can be seen from the areas of improvement that are going to be addressed on the basis of the studies outlined in chapter 3.3. However, a major experience made with GTS at SAUT was that such an exercise is costly both in terms of personnel costs and additional costs like travel expenses, printing of questionnaires, advertising etc. Based on the experiences from the training UNITRACE 2.0, Karl-Heinz Stammen in his handbook (2017) estimates an average time-frame of at least nine months for the conduction of a graduate tracer study. This time-frame can vary according to the method of data collection. At St. Augustine University of Tanzania one of the most challenging aspects in conducting the study was the lack of a well-structured data bank of alumni's addresses. Thus, at SAUT it was necessary to use alternative ways for inviting students to participate in the online-survey and a mixed mode of methods for data acquisition had to be applied (see chapter 3.1). This not only extended the time-frame of the study but also imposed costs (for travel for example), which were not planned beforehand. The project funding of EIQMS did only cover a certain amount of the actual costs of the study and it needed commitment of St. Augustine's management for the study in order to support it.

These experiences of SAUT are more or less comparable to the challenges other universities face when conducting graduate tracer studies in the (East) African region. For an interesting overview of common challenges and possible solutions see Stammen (2017: 47).

As for the embeddedness of the graduate tracer study projects into the partnership EIQMS, the following can be summarised: The mode of cooperation in the framework of UNITRACE 2.0 was most convenient and beneficial for all partners involved. While other activities in East Africa relied on a concept of training a larger number of participants over a longer period of time (e.g. in UNITRACE and UNITRACE 2.0), within the bounds of EIQMS there was one workshop dealing with tools and procedures of quality assurance in general (including questionnaire design etc.) and one workshop addressing the conduction of a graduate tracer study in particular. Both workshops were designed as very hands-on events and tailored to only participants from the two partner universities of EIQMS. Additionally, EIQMS provided the opportunity for face-to-face mentoring and very active and hands-on collaboration in the framework of an on-site coaching on GTS. This coaching format together with the possibility of the German partners to remotely access the survey on the platform SoSci, which made it possible to give assistance in using the tool from a distance, turned out to be key for the successful implementation of the studies. While in other projects the special circumstances and different

demands of many cooperation partners have to be taken into account, the GTS projects in the bounds of EIQMS benefited a lot from having only two partners and one coordinator.

The two successful graduate tracer survey projects put the St. Augustine University of Tanzania into the position, to be connected to EAGTSN from the beginning on without having participated in the UNITRACE 2.0 training. EAGTSN is planning to acquire funding from both DAAD and the East African political stakeholders in order to further foster the successful conduction of GTS in East Africa.

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