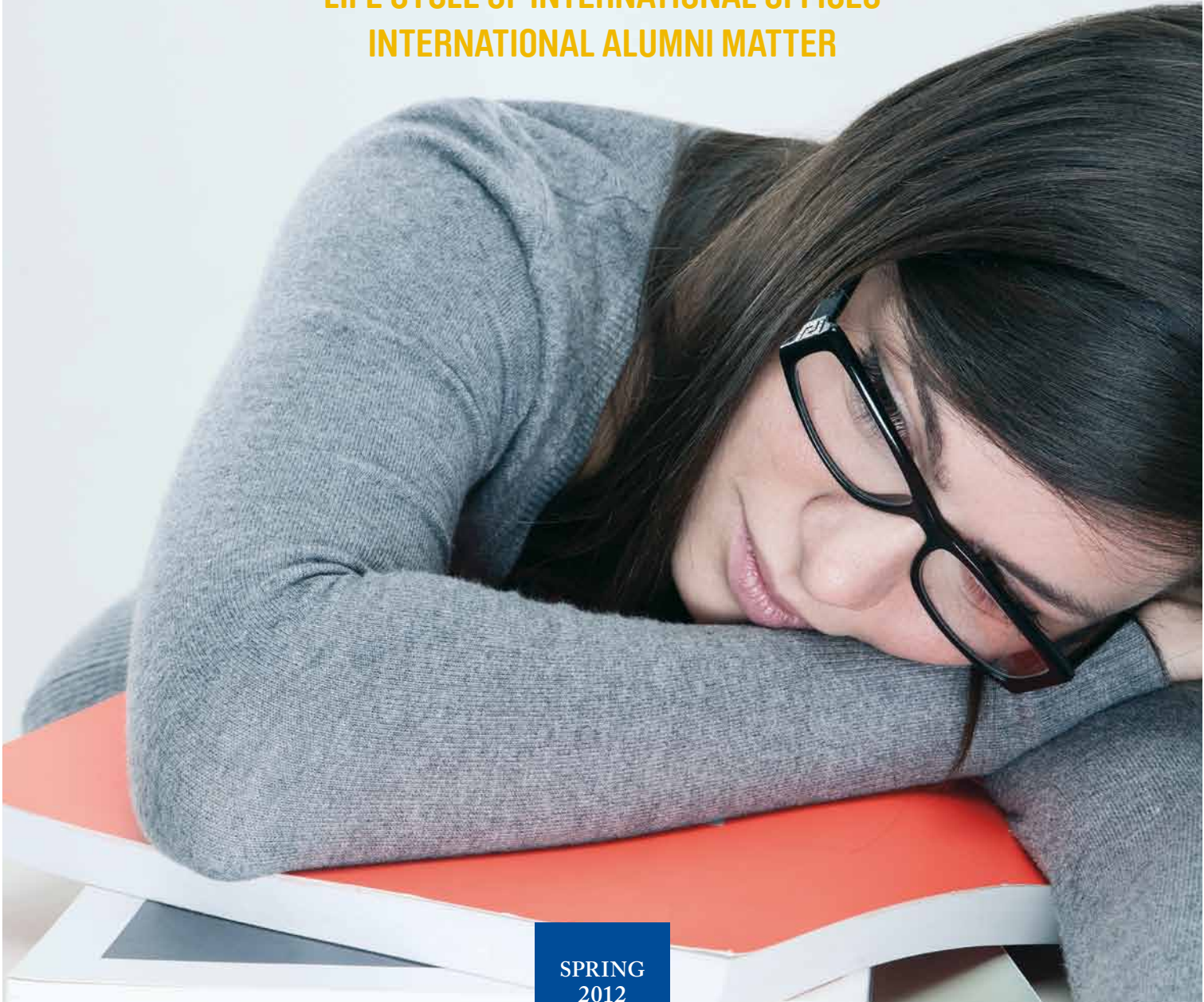


FORUM

Discussing international education

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AFRICA:

A NEW DAWN OF INTERNATIONALISATION

James Jowi looks at what internationalisation means for Africa, calling on African higher education institutions to acknowledge internationalisation as a central part of their activities, however daunting it may seem.

In the past few years, internationalisation has gained much currency and is impacting the activities of universities globally. The overwhelming forces of globalisation have played a part in driving this development. Though Africa has been influenced by global forces for many years, its higher education system is now caught by the increasingly complex realities posed by internationalisation and globalisation.

“Pray the Devil back to hell!” These were some of the opening words by Leymah Gbowee in her keynote speech during the 2010 EAIE Conference in Nantes, France. This was the powerful voice of an enigmatic African woman who, one year later, received the prestigious Nobel Peace prize and thus added more honour to a continent always put at the footnote of world happenings.

Important to the very few Africans in that forum was Leymah’s convincing challenge to universities on their global responsibilities, which, if accepted, could make the world a much better place to live in. Her main call was for Western universities to collaborate fairly with their African counterparts. She pictorially narrated the challenges facing the higher education sector in Africa and the transformations that partnerships were already creating. I celebrated her as a champion of fair internationalisation.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

In one of the sessions during the 2011 EAIE Conference in Copenhagen, Philip Altbach, Professor at the Centre for International Higher Education, Boston College, US, expressed his worries about the future of higher education in Africa compared to the transformations in other parts of the world. He enumerated the many challenges facing the continent.

DEBATES ON INTERNATIONALISATION HAVE
BEGUN TO PICK UP ON THE CONTINENT

years, debates on internationalisation have begun to pick up on the continent, seeking to address the realities of this inestimable phenomenon. African universities are now starting to recognise the importance of internationalisation, a phenomenon that in a real sense has been part of the system since its inception. To a large extent, internationalisation in Africa has been externally driven and now requires that Africa decides on its agenda for internationalisation and the strategies to pursue it. This approach could enable African universities to develop strategic responses to the risks and challenges of internationalisation and, in essence, maximise the opportunities.

INTERNAL INTERNATIONALISATION

In addition to institutional initiatives, African governments and regional organisations are now taking deliberate steps to revitalise the higher education sector and develop structures that would foster internationalisation within the continent. Africa's starting point would be to strengthen university collaborations within the continent to consolidate their areas of strength and develop a viable higher education and research area which they can then use to engage with the rest of the world. With this strategy, Africa can change its position as a bystander and

mandate is to advance research, professional development, information sharing, and advocacy on internationalisation of higher education in Africa, is providing a new platform for engagement with internationalisation in Africa. In its third conference held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2011, ANIE brought together African university leaders and policy makers to discuss new policy directions for internationalisation in Africa. The priority areas they identified were for African universities to work together with development partners to strengthen their institutional capacities for research, enhance utilisation of ICT for teaching and learning, and to develop the next generation of African scholars.

It has been touted that the 21st century belongs to Africa. This now seems elusive, however, in different aspects, Africa is rising. After decades of slow growth, Africa has the chance to continue rising. Africa has historically faced many odds and still continues to face quite a myriad of them, which have implications on how it steps into the future. Higher education presents one of the opportunities for continued growth. Internationalisation both within Africa and between Africa and other parts of the world also becomes key in this.

Photo: Lisa Thornberg (istock)

Something needed to be done. Consequently, during the Copenhagen conference, the EAIE Board had very successful discussions with representatives of higher education organisations in developing countries including the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the African Network for Internationalisation of Education (ANIE), which I represented. This led to further constructive discussions between ANIE and the EAIE on how to support the developments of internationalisation in Africa.

AFRICA NEEDS TO TAKE CHARGE

While internationalisation is growing in importance and becoming central to higher education activities, policies and planning, it has created new realities for Africa. These new realities are compounding the challenges of increasing demand, quality concerns, low capacities, governance and research concerns facing the comparatively young and growing sector. In the past few

become a real player in the global knowledge society. It is already becoming evident that through regional protocols and frameworks, especially within the SADC region and within the East African Community, student mobility and university cooperation are beginning to take root.

A NEW PLATFORM FOR AFRICAN ENGAGEMENT

The decision by Africa's higher education sector to establish the African Network for Internationalisation of Education (ANIE) in 2009 has given new breath to internationalisation in Africa. ANIE, whose main

While there are ongoing debates on the potential of internationalisation in Africa, noting its challenges, risks and opportunities for the continent, it has now dawned that internationalisation is a reality that Africa has to deal with. Positive outcomes will be realised when African universities acknowledge internationalisation, not as a peripheral but a central part of university activities. ANIE will continue working with its African and international partners to promote the understanding and development of internationalisation in Africa. The terrain is daunting, but can be treaded. **E**

POSITIVE OUTCOMES WILL BE REALISED WHEN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES ACKNOWLEDGE INTERNATIONALISATION
