

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper interrogated the role of university education in socio-economic development in Africa in the 21st Century. It set to critically assess how university education is affecting the socio-economic development in this region, given the ever growing number of universities. It also took note of the fact that the region of sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed a remarkable growth of higher education, for example seeing Africa as the home of hundreds of World class universities. The paper however observed that the university being the centre of innovation, research and creation of knowledge is expected to adequately respond to the unique problems known to trouble the continent and enhance sustainable socio-economic development. In that vein, critical questions were raised about the quality of the university education in Africa, and its relevance in enhancing socio-economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. Most importantly the governments' investment in the university which has become a critical issue and beyond establishing the university, adequate funding that is needed for its sustainability and to the effect that it could affect socio-economic development and enhance the capacity of people to do meaningful research to combat the many social problems hindering

socio-economic development in Africa.

Key words: higher education, socio-economic development, research, sustainability, university.

Introduction

Globally, the university has distinguished itself as the critical center for knowledge generation, innovation and technological advances; ideally these are some of the core drivers of socio-economic development. Kaufman (2005) comments,

“The university must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars”.

If then the university is to become a primary tool for Africa’s development, it has to be revitalized in order to, produce experts, strengthen critical institutions, become the leading model for good practice, and link the communities with development experts from the university. It will be difficult to imagine a nation that will develop meaningfully without the inputs from the university because at any rate a strong academic sector is a strong precondition if the said countries will be capable of pursuing their sustainable develops. The university will promote critical intellectual resources, competent workforce and visionary leaders and policy makers able to engineer innovation, creativity, relevant knowledge and technological innovations capable of addressing challenges and enhancement of growth. The university is therefore strategically positioned as one of the most important assets for furthering innovation and enhancement of the economic competitiveness, and vital center designed for solving diverse problems and issues affecting the country.

University education in Africa

The African university has tried to play its role in nation building; for example, it helping its people to access higher education; in this regard, the university has embarked on going to the communities and offering relevant education to solve local problems and thus enhance socio-economic development. Since independence, the African university has been in the forefront producing skilled human resource to match the market demands. Those nationals have ably and rapidly replaced the expatriates who once held important positions in the African continent (Kaufman, 2005).

Maasen (2012) tabulates the factors they considers as important for the African university to enhance socio-economic development in Africa. Knowledge is critical in development; therefore the university in Africa must be involved research and innovation. As a community of experts, the university must be seen to continually solve Africa's problems through empirical research. That goes together with promoting in the society the culture of consuming research. It adds up to nothing if the researches carried out by the university end up in the university's archives and shelves. One of the suggestions made by Nason (2011) is to aim at more participatory research at community level to enable community participation and consequently consumption of the research findings to spur socio-economic development.

Before a new university is established, it should justify its establishment, and the value it will add. In that sense each university will be trying to establish its 'niches of excellences.' Already there are loud voices crying foul because the university is not teaching science and technological programmes; most of the new universities are rushing to establish humanity courses since they do not require heavy investment. It is not about the number of universities we have in the region but mostly it should be about the value they add in relation to the national development challenges. Relevance of higher education is impended on its applicability in solving of social problems. Excellence in education in the university should not be measured by the number of programmes or graduates; instead it should be measured by the market demands and the capacity of the graduates to solve the social problems. Periodic review of the curriculum driving the higher education will be critical to ensure the right content and organization

of teaching driven the desire to enhance problem-solving. Despite good programmes, higher education requires the best brains to drive the learning. Lately the university has suffered heavily from brain drain; the university in Africa has lost its best brains to either foreign universities outside the continent or to the NGOs. The badly hit level of higher education is the supervision of PhD researches. Without adequate number of professors the universities are like empty shells. Good pay for the qualified teachers at the university level will be critical to their motivation and retention if we will continue to have quality education (Nason, 2011; World Bank, 2009).

Regardless of the many gains made by the African university in the past decades, there seems to be huge criticisms about the quality of the university education in sub-Saharan Africa to the extent of the university being branded an ivory tower, irrelevant and out of touch with social reality. Some of the graduates from the African university have become a laughing stalk and taunted to be mere 'Paper Tigers.' This makes us question the landmark achievement of establishing over 200 universities in the continent of Africa in the 21st Century (Kaufman, 2005). Perhaps the university in Africa needs to reexamine its relevance in terms of the market needs, quality and suitability of the graduates, quality of the curriculum and the programmes offered. Relevant stakeholders should also collaborate with the university in realization of university education in Africa. All stakeholders for example can cooperate to rid the problems which are responsible for the university's poor performance, dwindling image and poor public perception. Problems like ethnicity and nepotism in staff recruitment, poor and weak governing policies, internal management boards that are weak, visionless, and flippancy in their leadership must be urgently replaced. If all these problems are effectively looked into introspectively and objectively by the relevant institutions; then the African university can be revitalized to serve the citizens to improve their livelihoods and enhance more socio – economic development. Secondly the African university will produce graduates who are able to tackle the many problems weighing down this continent. This paper therefore seeks to address ways of revitalizing the African university in order to enhance its performance and sustainability (Mansen, 2012).

There are many signs of progress recorded by the African

university; for example, in 1960s the region had merely a handful of universities, but in a span of 33 years it had 100 universities. Currently, the continent has more than 800 universities over 1,500 institutions of higher learning (Shattock, 2007). Therefore, it is evident that even though the African university is young it has however shown remarkable resilience, growth, and relevance by mounting corresponding degrees and courses that reflect the needs of the sub-Saharan African continent. Quality education has generally been accepted as one of the leading instrument for achieving economic growth for any country. Indeed, for the sub-Saharan African region, such growth is critical if ever the region is to climb out of the abject poverty, education is then significantly important (UNESCO, 2001).

For a healthy university, its mission and mandates are threefold: quality teaching' participation in research and finally the carrying outreach programmes (Shattock, 2007). The African university lamentably so, has by and large remained a teaching university. Evidently there is little interest and participation in research; a question needs to be answered, how then does the African university generate knowledge and innovation if it has so little activity in research? Secondly, due to lack of concrete outreach programmes, the African university has so little integrative activities to society's socio-economic or socio-cultural life. Francis (2011) adds the point that when the African university has not integrated itself to the society's life, it has consequently resulted to heavy criticisms by the same society who continue to see the university as a mere ivory tower (Johnstone, 2005).

The African university has made some remarkable contributions. For example it has helped its people to access higher education by enhancing outreach programmes, and opened satellite campuses closer to the people. In producing quality graduates, the African university has produced nationals who have ably and rapidly replaced the expatriates who once held important positions in the African continent. The university has produced skilled human resource to match the market demands the university has successfully been mounting of relevant and need-driven programmes, finally, though in a limited manner due to limited resources, the university has been embarking on research to solve some of the pertinent problems in the continent (Bloom, et al. 2006; Ajavi, 1996). Thus, some degree,

the African university has not been running in vain. Perhaps, with minimal addition of relevant support, it can soar higher in growth and development. It should be noted that today the African university finds itself in a new terrain as the world continues to change. In the late 19th and 20th Century, the African university existed mainly as a center for offering advanced training for skilled human resource. But the times have changed, in that regard, if the African university will remain globally relevant and competitive, it must change. Francis (2011, p.1) notes,

There is much to suggest that African universities are nearing the end of their initial phase of development. Their mandates at the time of independence now require reassessment as a result of changes in the world, in Africa, and in the universities themselves. Internationally, the emergence of global markets has created a competitive world economic system characterized by rapid knowledge, generation and technological innovation. These changes affect local labour markets and the types of skills they require....Universities have also changed, becoming mass-based and diversified institutions operating under severe financial constraints.

The 21st century has come with significant social change that demands institutions of higher learning to change their focus. The delay to adjust itself as a center for knowledge generation and technological innovation explains why the African university has done so little in research.

Currently there is consensus that the African university needs to rethink of a radical surgery and modeling if it will improve its performance and public image (UNESCO, 1998). Core areas in the African university needing urgent surgery and reengineering have been identified as governance structure and management, quality control and assurance, research and development, access and equity in university education, relevance and networking, adoption of modern technology, and finally adequate financing of the African university (Kibas, 2009; Nason, 2011). Despite the expansion of the

African university, the demand for higher education in Africa has been phenomenal. However the gap created by the demand for higher education in Africa has been readily exploited by the foreign universities to some great measure. If the African university were to be duly reengineered and revitalized, it would occupy its rightful place in admitting such big number of students going to foreign universities and save the foreign currency paid to such universities. Ordinarily, with rigorous efforts the standards of the foreign university can be achieved by the African university if it makes the achievement of world standards its benchmark (Lorange, 2007). There is no limit to what a revitalized university can do to spur development in Africa. Nason (2011) quotes in a recent speech by the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argued:

The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.

There is evidence that the African university has suffered neglect and inattention, no wonder, the problems in the continent have been left to be solved by the outsiders. The outsiders' performance has been poor due to their lack time and space, and understanding of the local context to tackle such problems. Still commenting on the poor performance of the African university, Francis (2011, p.2) adds, "There is general agreement that educational quality is declining as the result of increased enrollments and/or reduced funding. This decline is manifested in: falling student examination scores, reduced rigor in staff recruitment, promotion criteria, diminished research output, complaints by employers regarding the ability of university graduates' performance, cutbacks in research, staff development, library acquisitions and maintenance and rising graduate unemployment. The issues tabulated above have led to public concerns, scrutiny and outcry due to the seemingly unsatisfying university performance. Hard questions have remained unanswered, the kind of university that is needed in Africa, and the affordability of a quality university rather

than quantity of the universities in the African continent (Kretovics, 2004; Kibas, 2009). In the entire region of sub-Saharan Africa, every person is pushing for improvement in education is being felt at all levels and institutions.

There is relationship between management and success in the core university activities namely teaching and research. Therefore, the African university needs to be restructured to become a true community of scholars, and enhance its governance structure to enhance interplay whereby the structure allows participation by both staff and students. In the past as World Bank (2003, p.4) observes that has not been the practice, "Few of our universities have a governance structure that allows for participation of all cadres of staff and students...some university administrative structures are characterized by cumbersome administrative rules and bureaucratic procedures."

Mutual respect and support by all members of the scholars' community will promote the envisioned development and growth in teaching and research. In this regard, Shattock (2007, p. ix) clearly comments,

"Successful universities are successful primarily because of their teaching and research...but good management can over time provide the conditions in which teaching and research can flourish, just as, more usually, poor management can undermine teaching and research and precipitate institutional decline."

Therefore, the reengineering of the African university is urgent, and holistic. It should address the delivery, product, strategy, quality and enhance the inputs of all the stakeholders in the academic community.

The concept of the African university

The word university is not new to many readers. It comes from the Medieval Latin word *Universitas*, which means a group of scholars (Nason, 2009; Nzioka, 1995). While there is no consensus in regard to the first university; there is a popular theory that the first university was founded in Europe in the twelfth century (see Nason 2011, 3). Pankaj (2007) informs us that the Christians were usually the first people behind the establishment of such institutions; the medieval

universities were therefore normally headed by chancellors or rectors who were mainly bishops duly appointed by the Pope.

The university exercises critical thinking, integrity, and is free from any interference by the society; rather the society upholds the university as the pillar and custodian of the truth. The general public looks up to the university to describe felt problems and consequently solve them. IESS (1968, p.192) in Nason (2011, p.4) rightly asserts, "...the Medieval University was the organization for embodying the public recognition of the corporate autonomy of specialized intellectuals who perform important social functions". Conclusively, put together Ajavi (1996) and Nason (2011) point out that in regard to the purpose of the university, character and structure; today's university should be exactly built on the same foundation as that of the Medieval University: public recognition, autonomous, and staffed with specialized intellectuals. Further, still building on the Medieval University's foundation, today's university can find its purpose of existence, (Musisi, 2001) "...the disinterested pursuit of learning and repository of universal values." Such statement has remained being the lighthouse for any university that is worth of its salt. For example, the university should be steadfast in pursuing a national development build on the principle of merits, critical decisions and rather not being parochial, and a regionalist.

Therefore, the idea of pursuing the ideal African university is geared to revitalizing the African university to objectively enhance its vision, mission, quality, performance, management and output in order to become comparatively world class. Presently, this is a tall order for the African university which its image is riddled with ethnicity and tribalism, poor performing management boards, poor quality assurance, flippancy admissions, decaying infrastructure, inadequate financing, understaffed, brain drainage and high exodus of quality teaching and research staff, and de-motivated lecturers (World Bank, 2003; Nason, 2011). The sorry state of the African university was very well captured by Dike who was the Vice Chancellor in Ibadan University who had this to say (Schattock, 2007, p.29),

It must be said to our shame the Nigerian intellectual, far from being an influence for national integration, is the greatest exploiter of parochial and clanist sentiment...As you leave us, you are going to a Nigeria torn by tribal strife a country in which deep suspicion exist

between different sections. You will be no credit to this university if you leave us to join the bunch of educated advocate of tribal divisions and strife and worshippers of tribal gods.

It is against such a background like this that the reengineering of the African university is advocated and pursued if ever the African university will be relevant and possessing the ability to initiate sustainable change and development in Africa: becoming an antidote for negative ethnicity and regionalism.

How to reengineer the African university

The problems that have threatened dwarfing the African university are known and commonly discussed at various levels and forums (see the above paragraphs). What is needed therefore is not reinventing the wheel, but rather a strategic thinking, planning, and implementation of the solutions by the concerned stakeholders to solve the perennial problems thwarting the progressiveness and development of the African university (Sharttock, 2007; Nason 2011, p.7).

The thriving of the African university will need a good socio-political environment (UNESCO, 1998). Four stakeholders stand out in the enhancement of a good socio-economic environment: the African university, the African government, civil society and the NGOs within and without the continent of Africa (Kibas, 2009). Put together, these stakeholders have a role to ensure the enabling political climate, economic conditions thrive. The civil societies and NGOs need to push and take audit as to the commitment and the good will of the government's intentions to put in place a good political climate where the African university can grow, mature and attain the world class standards. To realize any sustainable reengineering and revitalization; the African university will most likely spearhead the reforms from within. Indeed, this is the only way of promoting relevance, speed and accuracy in the reengineering of the African university (Unesco. 1998).

Improving governance, and management structure in the African university

With all the alluded managerial problems in the African university, it is urgent to interrogate and scrutinize the performance of the institutions'

management and the entirety of the management instruments. There has been a genuine outcry in relation to non-performance and highly bureaucratic university management boards that so to speak end up holding the African university at ransom (Sharttock, 2007).

If we are to improve the management of the African university there are critical questions to answer. What does the concept of management mean? Who is a manager? The Winston Dictionary defines management as prudent dealing; skillful direction and as the act or administration; control. Therefore, according to Winston dictionary, a manager will be seen as a person who conducts business or household affairs with skill. Indeed, in regard to the African university her managers and the management boards need a quick revitalization in order to foster in them innovative and entrepreneurial minds and thus introduce prudence, skill and unique strategies (Bloom, et al.2006). All the appointees to such boards must be people who not only add value but have what it takes to be in such boards and councils. World Bank (2006) tabulates some of the considerations for the members of such councils, some representatives from the business community who can represent the interests of the sector, local administrators who can drive the governments agenda for stronger partnership with the university, some senior faculty members able to sustain the academic agenda and focus; finally the representatives of the students from the university to link the students' concerns with the senior university management (World Bank, 2006).

In relation to the university management, a new concept of thinking has been introduced of late, Kibas (2009, p.2) wants to see managers as entrepreneurs; he describes entrepreneurs as,

...entrepreneurs are people who appear to live in "the horizon" looking for opportunities and challenges to bring pragmatic change and by making a difference through provision of alternative solutions. They are people who have foresight, they think laterally, and are innovative and driven by conviction to achieve set goals...they measure highly on the need for achievement...factor i.e. the need for achievement is the driving force. They are neither wasteful nor "failures". In fact the term 'failure'

does not exist in their vocabulary – they slip but do not fall; and they rise up again to look for new alternatives and windows of opportunity. Each experience in their lives is a new beginning full of lessons to grasp and use for future decision-making and actions as they take up new challenges and opportunities. They have developed what may be called an entrepreneurial mind...

So, what value does the concept of entrepreneurship add in regard to the African university management? In an attempt to unpack what Kibas (2009) brings out, 'the managers with entrepreneurial minds', the following can be gleaned out, entrepreneur managers are proactive people; they are looking for opportunities and challenges to midwife change. For long it has been business as usual in most of our universities, if we will move from where we are, there is need to think outside the box. University managers in Africa need to pursue relevance hence their inclination to change which is vision and mission driven (Shattock, 2007).

Shattock (2007) in Kibas (2009) thus describe successful entrepreneurial managers as having the following attributes: their ability to see new business opportunities before they are obvious to everyone else and communicate and market these ideas to the key stakeholders in the firm; finally the ability to mobilize the best team who will be tasked to develop such opportunities to fruition, and the ability to lead the relevant project teams in democratic way. The introduction of the concept of entrepreneurship in the African university comes to revolutionize the traditional concept of management and to revitalize the African university management for change and development will take higher education to very high levels. Johnstone (2004) is of the same opinion,

"...decades of futile efforts to strengthen universities in Africa during the last half of the twentieth century had given rise, with good cause, to extremely pessimistic predictions of the impossibility of sustained reform." Conclusively, it can be said that it is possible to revitalize the African university to improve its status; however, relevant reform can only be possible and sustainable if we begin from the top leadership.

Entrepreneurial managers are good public relations promoters (Francis, 2011, p.11). Thus, the entrepreneurial manager helps to shape relations with divergent stakeholders both internally and externally. In reference to the internal relations this will include lecturers, researchers, staff and students at large. Indeed, conducive relationships/climate within the university duly ensures good room for decisions and institutional stability. According to Nason (2011), students are critical in higher education as they are irreplaceable stakeholders; there is no way a good manager can ignore their importance. External relations will widely include other institutions of higher education, business community, NGOs, policy makers and even the religious fraternity who by their own right have a stake in the society and consequently institutions of higher learning (Shatton, 2007).

Pushing for adequate financing for the African university

The desire to improve performance, quality and output is enormous in the African university. Thus there are needs for new structures, renovation of the old ones to cope with the growing number of students and staff, maintenance cost to keep the structures in ideal form, keeping electricity and water facilities running, subscribing to quality academic journals, and allocating effective pay to the teaching and non-teaching staff. However, the resources needed for such endeavours are incredibly inadequate; thus the African university can only at best live in wishful thinking and not reality. Shattock (2007, p.99) captures this well,

...Makerere exhibited in extreme form the resource constraints facing universities throughout Africa. No new physical structures had been built and no maintenance carried out in twenty years. Journal subscriptions had declined to zero, as had chemicals for science laboratories. Supplies of electricity and water were spasmodic, cooking and sewage facilities were stretched to their limit. Faculty members received the equivalent of \$30 per month and were forced by this soc-called 'leaving' wage to depart to country or seek any available paid employment for most

of their day...

When institutions are run down like it is shown in the above paragraph, their capacity and ability to make any meaningful contribution to the society becomes inadequate.

Lack of adequate financial resources for the African university results into a dilapidated condition in the university. Often stories like empty library shelves, bare laboratories, inadequate scholastic materials, overcrowded halls of residence, and crowded lecture halls are but common complaints from some of the local universities in Africa (World Bank, 2006; Nason, 2011). Therefore, to thrive the African university needs to bring to an end the mentality of totally depending on the state for funding, it is delimiting, suicidal and against the spirit of the urgently needed revitalization in the African university (Shattock, 2007, World Bank, 2006). The African governments have never shown a good will in making adequate funding of the university; nevertheless, most of their budgets go to military hardware even when there is no evidence of external aggression. In attempt to go around the problem of inadequate funding for the African university, Musisi (2001, p.103 - 105) suggest some workable strategies that were tried and proven in Uganda in particular at Makerere University. Firstly, the university started to mount demand-driven academic programmes. The individuals, families and companies were willing to pay for such courses. On top of such courses, the university allowed a lot of flexibility. Thus flexible times were set to enable mature and working students to attend the courses. With more than tripled admissions, the university was able to enhance its financial capabilities and thus carry out some of the desire renovations and new structures. Secondly, it improved pay for the staff not only motivated the staff but made them to remain at the university. Retention of experienced and qualified staff is critical for the assurance of quality education. With already enhanced financial capabilities, good pay for the teaching staff was enhanced and thus ensuring more quality teaching and motivation for the teaching fraternity (Ajari, 1996; Kibas, 2009).

The African university has thus to move away from its traditional discipline-driven courses to embrace the market driven course which individuals, families and companies are willing to pay. This will be a

sure way of cutting the dependency on the state as the sole financier of the African university (see Nason 2011, p.7). Accordingly, the African university has an enormous role in enhancing financial capability and freedom; indeed the cry to the government for more funding is not genuine, there are other effective pathways to enhance financial independence for the African university.

The essential roles of the revitalized African university

This section is attempting to answer the following questions, "How will revitalized African university look like? If any, what value will the revitalized African university add in the continent? These questions are important as they will measure our success/failure in reengineering the African university; again the questions offer the road map, and the vision for the same (UNESCO, 2001; Kaufman, 2005).

Improved access and equity in the African university

A revitalized university in Africa will address the issue of access and equity in higher education which are pillars of society's change (World Bank, 2009, 2004 and 2003). The realities in the Sub – Saharan Africa show that the level of qualified human capital has overwhelmingly remained low, rare, and scarce compared to the developmental needs of the vast continent. In this regard, the expansion of the higher education is still one of the topmost agenda in Africa. So the universal enhancement of knowledge in Africa is critical for the growth and socio-development in the continent, World Bank (2009, p.44) has it right when it says, "Knowledge has become a key driver of growth and development; countries with higher skill level are better equipped to face new challenges and master technological discoveries."

Indeed, qualified personnel in areas like medicine, teaching fraternity and technology are in great need in Africa. Since there is no shortcut to development; increase in skill level must be enhanced therefore in order to stimulate growth and development that is sustainable. The complex social problems that continue to trouble Sub – Saharan Africa will only be conquered if the African university is revitalized to enhance access and equity in higher education in Africa (Human Development Report, 2008; World Bank 2006, and 2009). A university that does not seek a universal access of higher education amongst its people: rich or poor, men and women, and equity among

all regions risks being seen as irrelevant in the 21st Century. Access implies equity for all citizenry in accessing higher education; the African university should vigorously pursue that doctrine and be seen to cross all boundaries whether social, ethnic, gender and regional boundaries (Nason 2011; Johnstone, 2004).

Improved relevant education in the African university

Three basic questions stand out in regard to this section. One, "How does the education in the African university meet the needs of its students?" Two, "How readily does the African university's education fit in the market driven need?" Three, "Does the African university education policy promote the realization of the continent/countries' vision?" Nason (2011) has commented,

The foci of the above articulated questions are hinged on fact that university education should be marketable. In that regard, university education should be demand-driven in order to meet the existing demands in the society. Secondly the graduates should acquire the skills that not only make development sustainable, but also develop life sustaining skills in order to survive in the seemingly increasing competitive and sometimes hostile socio-environment; this is what is seen as being educated for life rather than for job.

Echoing the same need, World Bank (2003, 5) adds, "Universities need to adopt/strengthen the use of quality measurement parameters and tools for all the different dimensions of quality in academic programmes that are universal...it is important to inculcate the idea in the university students that one is being educated for life not for a job, and to be able to survive in an increasingly competitive and sometimes hostile environment." Therefore, it is important for the African university to strongly interrogate its programmes in relation to their ability to meet learners' needs, the market demand and comparatively the competitiveness of its programmes in relation to quality with the World Class Universities (Lorange, 2007).

Bloom et al (2006) lauds the critical role of the university in relation to steering socio-economic development in the continent.

According to Bloom, "the University must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars."

Relevant education from the revitalized African university should be able to address critical issues like production of development expertise, identify and analyze the African problems, develop critical institutions in the continent, enhance good governance that is able to uphold human rights and freedoms.

Improved research in the African university

Research is an extremely expensive venture. Thus in the African university research has overly been curtailed by the perpetual bottleneck funding by the countries governments. World Bank (2003) has indicated that, "Funding of Research and Development is an expensive enterprise. It is grossly under funded in many African counties with the governments' contribution falling below 1% of the GDP. In Kenya this is currently about 0.3% of her GDP." Although there is consensus in regard to the underfunding of research, there is need to research more in order to establish the causes for the mismatch between low research funding by the African governments, relevance and consumption of the researches conducted by the university, and the actual need for research in the African university (Pakaj, 2007). Otherwise the underfunding at present should not be adequately seen as a political factor squarely. Besides waiting for sponsorship from the government to fund research, the African university should seek other sponsors from the international bodies like UNESCO, World Bank, Rockefeller foundation, and other local institutions like AMREF (Ajayi, 1996; Kretovics, 2004; UNESCO, 2001).

Responding to hunger and famine in Africa

The possibility of African continent feeding its people is remote, and nowhere visible; it is estimated that over 200 million people suffer from food insecure. With the unchecked population growth, the number of people lacking adequate food is on the rise. Thus hunger has

remained as the largest cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa. Hunger is responsible for taking far more lives compared to HIV and AIDS. According to the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (2005),

... African university can adequately respond to issues of food insecurity, train scientists to use plant breeding and plant pathology to develop more robust strains of crops that can resist a wide range of viruses and pests. Training of this type has typically occurred in the U.S. But such programs are cost-prohibitive and can be counterproductive, if they have little in common with agricultural conditions in the students' home countries—the very areas where expertise is most needed.

Until the voice of the university is added in all attempts to alleviate food insecurity; the possibility of coming up with a strategy that is airtight may be a mirage. The African university has the capacity to conclusively tackle food insecurity, for example, it can, easily facilitate research in the community to generate relevant information and knowledge that can be used by all stakeholders, it can partner with the agricultural extension officers to teach farmers new farming methods that are effective, efficient and contextual, and introduced quality seeds that maybe high yielding, or even drought resistant; finally the university can help communities to overcome farming practices that are anti-scientific and modernity (Ajavi, 1996; Kaufman, 2005; Kibas, 2009).

Reinforcement of the teaching of science and technology

Renovation is a major role to be played by the African university to speed social change and higher living standards in the continent (Maansen, 2012). Therefore, teaching of science and technology becomes critical; the university should be seen bridging the gap between theory and practice if the people will use modern science to solve their day to day problems. History has shown clearly that the introduction science and technology in all levels of education are indispensable in the promotion of skills that are essential for the personal development of persons in their immediate socio-environment (see Nason, 2011; Francis 2011).

Introduction of ICT in the African university

UNESCO (2010) argues that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has globally become a tool that is increasingly being utilized in the university for, developing relevant course materials at the university, helping the deliveries of content and sharing the same in the university community locally and beyond. To embrace the use of ICTs, the African university needs to adequately invest in the same. UNESCO (2015) underscores the importance of the university in enhancement of the capacity to train people in ICTs. Kibas (2009) has remarked,

The trend towards a knowledge-based economy has emphasized the importance of universities as repositories of valuable human capital to help secure shares in the global market. The accelerating shift to high-technology and information technology economies requires sustained human resource development and training. Driven by globalization and pressures to teach and train knowledgeable, skilled and competitive professionals, universities face a huge challenge to increase access to higher education and improve the quality of higher education against the stark reality of decreasing resources. Because today's market is interconnected, the African university has no choice but train its people in ICTs to make them competitive in the global market. The African university should aim at producing graduates whose employability and functionality knows no boundary.

Graduates from the revitalized university of African should be able to fit in the global market. As such, the university must produce qualified human capital that has high-technology knowledge and ICTs for the purposes of functionality and employability.

Conclusion

The hope for Africa's transformation of Africa is anchored on the

capacity of university's education to produce a new generation of graduates with a capacity to solve the perennial problems in the continent. Those include graduates who are entrepreneurial and scientists to lead science-based development approaches in the continent. The African leaders have to recognize the importance of investing heavily on science, technology and innovation as essential drivers of nurturing deliveries in the African university. To become a world class university; the African university must be backed up by adequate funding. For example, funding in research is indispensable; without investing in reach, the university education in Africa cannot match that of the status of a world-class university. The revitalization and relevant reengineering are necessary for a successful transformation of the continent of Africa. To stem the problem of brain drainage, dynamics to be put in place by the African university include enhancement of a motivated, and well enumerated lecturers to enhance their retention. The university's management boards need to be objective driven and comprised of members with entrepreneurial minds. Critical stakeholders like governments, NGOs, and business fraternity all have a role to enabling the university in Africa to enhance its full potential in enabling socio-environment for the continent of African. Africa's socio-economic development will remain a dream too high without quality university educations.

Based on the foregoing, the following views are worthy of note:

1. The government needs to invest in the university education to enhance its quality
2. There is currently underfunding in research, if the university will respond adequately in solving the African problems, more should be invested in research
3. The current brain drainage needs to be stemmed by paying the university lecturers good salaries
4. ICT needs to be integrated in all university education; all world class universities are investing in ICT.

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