

PROBLEM AREAS IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study examined some of the problem areas in African universities - dominance by political rulers, inadequate funding, research and teaching, access to university, mid Africa and globalization. It was found that these problems have paralyzed meaningful and sustainable research and development. Lecturers seek greener pastures resulting in 'brain drain'.

HIV/AIDS take a toll on staff and students; there are inadequacies at the primary and secondary schools levels. This affects access into universities.

Only students from high socio-economic background can afford going to the universities. African nations struggle with basic education and are marginalized at the global level. Poor funding is at the root of all these. It is hoped that Africa would have future leaders who would see education as a national emergency to release sufficient funds for meaningful research and for functioning information communication and technology that would launch Africa into the 21st century global knowledge economy.

Introduction

Universities all over the world, are identified as instruments of transformation, development and revolution of societies. Transformation and development are the most important challenges facing the human race and Africa in particular. Despite the varied opportunities created by technological revolutions of the 21st century, more than 2.8 billion people are living on US\$2.0 per day according to Bhola in Oduaran and Bhola (2006:46). The challenge of development and transformation is to improve the quality of life. Better quality of life encompasses better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a clean environment, more equal opportunity and greater individual freedom. Universities constitute the master key to achieving these.

African universities are expected to provide the above needs for their societies. However, they continue to wrestle with difficulties arising from inadequate responses to existing challenges. This paper looks at the problem areas, which have been of major concern among policy makers, the academia and the society. These are issues of interruption by political rulers, inadequate funding, absence of intensive, meaningful and sustainable research and development, the problem of poor access to universities and the marginalization of Africa at the global level.

Dominance by Political Rulers

The establishment and expansion of universities in Africa was understood because there was need for the production of the specialized manpower by society for self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Consequently, various African universities emerged - first generation universities in Nigeria, Universities of East Africa (Makerere, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam), Southern African Universities - Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, etc. Indeed these universities played important roles in training of designers, thinkers and development of human talent, engaged in public and private sectors of the economy.

British, American and later Indian expatriates who were in the majority (especially the British and Americans) set international standards by encouraging research development and productivity, autonomy and academic freedom. Unfortunately, with the interrupted control of political and military rulership the emphasis was on how to contribute and solve national problems. Every effort at international standards was frustrated by the rulers. This situation, coupled with political instability and uncertainty that followed, made expatriates flee. According to Ihonvbere in Jibril (2005), African academia became bitter and accused the rulership of harshness and insensitivity to universities and what they stand for. The general public expected some thing better than what they were seeing. The governments' posture was clear '...lie that pays the piper dictates the tune'. Frequent changes in government gave way to unstable/premature plans and policies and unrealized goals brutality meted out to the universities by the ruling parties, destroyed all the traditions by which universities are known all over the world. Civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts and tussle for

power rage across

the continent. Huggon (2007:14), pointed out that, countries in Africa have been chaotic zones, *dealing* with confrontation of warlords (Somalia, Chad) ethnic (Burundi, Rwanda) and religious *conflicts* (Sudan). University education has stagnated under these conditions. No meaningful academic exercise could effectively take place under the circumstance. Mugabe's current struggles to continue in power in Zimbabwe even when age is not in his favour, is an example the leaders' negative attitude to the needs of the society.

Developed and transition countries seek improvement for their universities. Japan's Ministry of Education recently made a significant move to combat rigidity and assured universities of their corporate status, legal personality and independence. These enabled universities manage their resources judiciously for greater productivity. In 1998, the Chinese government, transferred the responsibility of financing universities to provinces and larger municipalities. This brought significant positive changes that transformed funding for the universities. In 2000, the four leading universities in Indonesia, were granted new autonomous statuses. In Brazil, the attempt at autonomy met with opposition from congress. Morocco, in 2000, adopted a comprehensive university reform law with the aim of promoting university autonomy as encouragement for improved quality and better focus on the development needs of the country. In the same year, the University of Dar es Salaam introduced a successful management reform. It evolved a 15-year corporate strategic plan in areas of finance, information system etc strengthening university's core role, changed the composition of council, senate, boards, and decentralized decision making for easy and quick accountability. Careful planning, leadership commitment, regular reviews by council, government support and lessons from other nations' reforms were some of the factors that contributed to the success of the reform.

The role of the government in improving education is articulated by the Nobel Prize lecturer, Stiglitz (2000). According to him, government has a role in education, in encouraging the funding of creativity and risk-taking that the scientific entrepreneurship requires and in creating the institutions that facilitate ideas being brought into fruition.

Funding

Universities are a most expensive venture. They are capital-intensive and claim a significant proportion of a nation's resources. The financing of education is at the heart of educational crisis. Thus, funding means that money is available for research and teaching, for development of physical structures, staff salaries, for equipping laboratories and libraries. Universities in Africa, are largely supported by government funds. This is because the government collects and keeps the lion share of centrally generated revenue in the countries. In Nigeria, for instance, the government controls exclusively the main sources of revenue, such as crude oil, other mineral resources, customs and excise duties etc. According to Okoli (2003:103), the revenue sharing formula of 1991, shows that, the Federal Government got 55%, 36 States got 25% and 880 Local Governments, 15%.

In the past two decades, the budgets of some African universities have been under tremendous pressure due to declining hits and increase in enrollments. Inadequate funding since 1980 to 2000, has been identified as the malady afflicting the universities. Akinkugbe (2002:3), aptly describes the nagging events and circumstances that have befallen the universities: 'fallen and falling standards, declining morale, flight of talents, poor libraries, ill-equipped laboratories, degrees in science without practical work, the open-and-shut campus syndrome, the scepter of cultism, explosion of students' enrollment and self-triggering, implosion of value system'. All these contribute to bring about the steady decay in university system in Africa. These conditions explain why African universities are lagging behind at the global level.

Middle income countries like China, Argentina, Indonesia, etc resort to the World Bank International Monetary Fund (IMF) largest loans to fund universities in their countries. World Bank (2002), reported that, these nations experience higher economic growth, a reduced incidence of poverty, a rise in the average wage, an increased share of trade in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improved health outcomes. The success story is as a result of judicious utilization of borrowed money. African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda, etc that accepted the IMF loans took the risk of being further marginalized at the global level where there is acute competition. In fact, the Nigerian case is pathetic. The academia and all well-meaning Nigerians opposed the loan. The government damned the consequences and took the loan. The Nigerian government was in perpetual debt and payment until the Finance Minister and former staff of the World Bank, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala in 2006

came to the rescue. Suffice it to say that, the IMF was mismanaged in Nigeria. It brought untold suffering

and hardship to the entire nation. Those were the darkest moments in the history of Nigerian universities.

In the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), member nations invested in the things that make up knowledge, base research and development, education, computer software, etc. World Bank (2002), reported that, member countries of the OECD accounted for 85% of total investment in research and development. China, India, Brazil and the newly industrial countries of East Asia ((Malaysia, Singapore, etc) accounted for 11%, while the rest of Africa accounted for 4%. That Africa is marginalized in this global competition is clear from the above data.

The developed countries invest five times more in agricultural related research and development than the developing countries. They invest substantial money in research and development of necessary infrastructure, expertise, organization and incentive structures that allow the investments to yield dividends. In contrast, countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, wrestle with problems of qualification for entry into the universities. The emphasis is not yet on sustainable research and publication. Even where there are substantial funds (Botswana) internal problems are focused upon so much that the global factor does not receive attention. Nigeria has money from oil but it is embezzled and/or mismanaged. The damages incurred as a result of under-funding are irreparable. We have graduates who despite their degrees, have nothing to offer the society they live in. The "diploma disease" that was found in Nigeria, Togo and the large number of graduates who were not absorbed into the work force, are classic examples of waste of talents in Africa. In Angola, so much money was spent on conflicts, that money for training of graduates was no longer available.

Research Development and Teaching

African universities at their inception were virtually meeting international standards as a result of inter-linkages with the developed countries like Britain, America, Columbia, etc. The various British and American Foundations and UNESCO spearheaded the sponsorship of research and teaching. In fact, the quantity and quality of research compared favourably with that in some of the developed countries. Scientific journals were produced by some of the universities. For example, there were the Journal of the Third World Countries in East Africa, the West African Journal of Education and Journal of Research in Curriculum in Nigeria. There were good research training, motivation, equipment and library facilities. The withdrawal of the linkages marked the onset of decay. Meaningful and sustainable research and teaching ceased to be. The benefits that accrue from advancement in research and development, science and technology, new technologies and innovations elude African societies. Progress in agriculture, health, environmental sanitation involves application of scientific innovations. Training qualified and adaptable labour force, including high level scientists, professionals, technicians, personnel for the civil service and business leaders are part and parcel of activities engaged in by universities all over the world. The financial implication is tremendous. African universities do not attain this level as expected because of gross inadequate funding.

Bhola in Oduaran and Bhola (2006:54), pointed out that, Third World countries attend international summits, seminars and conferences on sustainable development, poverty alleviation and education for all, but do little for their people once they are back home. These participants are willing to share their experience, but the necessary facilities and funds that match the kind of experience they went through, are not available. Some African Countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania) and the five Southern African universities have embarked on reforms in various areas especially in education. Many universities are sourcing for funds to match the explosive enrollments at their level. Ghana has made some progress in this area. The leadership in Ghana is a professor who understands the needs of universities in a developing continent such as Africa. He knows the role that universities in Ghana should play in order for the country to participate in the global knowledge economy. In fact, reforms are on in Ghana and stability seems to be returning to the country. Her student enrollment in Science and Technology has remained constant at about 50% of the student population. This percentage was also recorded in Korea as a result of reforms.

The Mozambique Hood experience of 2000, underscores the need for universities to be adequately equipped to be able to meet the needs of society. World Bank (2002), explained that, British meteorologists had warned about the Hood possibility six months earlier but the country's scientists were incapacitated to analyze the scientific data to enable them make recommendations that would serve as preventive measures. Adequately funded meaningful research will enable African nations deal with the myriad of problems facing their societies. It will help meet the need of adequate supply of nutritious food for ever increasing populations without causing environmental degradation through the utilization of modern biotechnology techniques. Research and development is the key to the new

technologies of the 21st century that has launched many nations into the global knowledge economy. African nations should collectively nurture the NEPAD to serve as a forum for renewed initiative in the struggle to break the marginalization. Brazil's example of leapfrogging into the new global economy through success in plant pathology is a feat that African nations must emulate. Without much facility but team effort, a team of Brazilian scientists virtually funded by the State of Sao Paulo became the first in the world to decode the generic code of the bacterium *Xylla fastidiosa* which has decimated vine yards in Southern California and the group is making progress in other areas in collaboration with USAID's agricultural research service.

In Africa, poor quality of teacher training programmes affects quality of teaching and learning. Most universities in Africa, function on the periphery of the international science community, unable to participate in production and adaptation of knowledge necessary to confront their countries' most economic and social needs. Lack of full-time qualified teachers contributes to poor quality teaching.

Access to University

One of the major challenges facing African universities is the problem of inequalities of access. Access has to do with individuals being in the right, or opportunity to reach, use or visit or be admitted. Despite the explosion in enrollment in most African universities, there is wide gap between those who have access to university education and those who do not. This, in turn, is related to the wide gap between those from high and poor socio-economic backgrounds. Ethnic considerations are barriers in some countries. Addis Ababa (1961), Jomtien (1990), and UNESCO (2001) have evolved goals and objectives yet implementing these goals is a problem.

In Nigeria there is the problem of an insignificant fraction of the number of applicants being admitted every year. Jibril (2005:9), explained that, out of the 419,807 who applied in 1997/98 for admission through the university matriculation examination (UME) 73,432 representing only 17% were admitted. He further, pointed out that, an insignificant number, 5% of university age cohort are available. There is not enough qualified secondary school students for admission. Thus, Nigeria is ill equipped for participation in the global knowledge economy. In Tanzania, gender factor is so glaring in access that the University of Dar es Salaam had taken up the issue of gender inequality as a problem that must be solved. Luharan (2006:3), showed that, the percentage enrollment ratio of female students stand at 33.5%. It is much lower in terms of disciplines like science (21% in 2004, 21.2 % in 2005/2006) and Arts 34% in 2004/2005). With the reform, a little increase was noticed in engineering from (7% in 2004/2005 to 21.2% in 2005/2006). Tanzania has national vision 2025. whose overall goal is to attain human development with all prerequisites for achieving a fully developed economy. However, poverty, inequality, ignorance, etc are limiting factors.

Singh in Oduaran and Bliola (2006), pointed out that, in Kenya educational objectives expressed in the Report of 2003 Review and Development Document of the UNESCO emphasized equal educational opportunity for both youth and adult. This is to enable them produce people with knowledge and skills to be competitive in the global market. In Indonesia, the government has provided necessary resources to support equal opportunity for basic education for all. India's free and compulsory education for children's Bill from 2003, specified total free education in its entire ramification.

America adopted education as the foundation for a true and enduring democratic culture. The capacity of America's education system to create a 21st century workforce, second to none in the world, is a national security. This kind of education has to do with the university. For African nations university education has languished. Only the rich can buy good education from private academies at home and abroad. The middle class spend virtually all their life earning in sending their children to private schools since nothing would be learnt in state schools which have been made to stagnate. Majorities are too poor to send their children to school at all. Thus, for African nations, ensuring access from primary to secondary would give opportunity to children and adults living in poverty and

disadvantaged by economic status, geographical, cultural barriers will ensure that needs are met and those capable of going to the university would be groomed to do so. In this way they would be equipped for global competition in the knowledge economy.

Africa and Globalisation

The technological innovations of the last century have seemingly reduced the whole world to a global village. Though Fischer (2001 I, observed that, there now exists trade and investment tie case of travel, ease with which we can see and hear news and most extraordinarily, the internet which gives

virtually limitless access to store of knowledge in the entire world, yet, not all countries in- being carried along. The accelerated pace of technological development has made access a knowledge a crucial requirement for participation in the global economy. The impact of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has significantly changed the speed of production, use, and distribution of knowledge as seen in the increased publication of scientific papers. A country can benefit from the knowledge economy depending on how much it can generate and share knowledge. The developed countries are in the forefront of global economy because of the level of their research and development.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2001, explained that, new technologies can have positive impact on countries no matter their level of economic development. Transition countries like China, Costa Rica, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Romania have successfully created, with the help of relative effective education systems, information technology niches that make it possible for them to compete at the global market. They enjoy the benefits of the new technology in many ways. Although, there are many benefits of the ICT yet, it has grown digital gap among nations. Disparities in per capita income and standards of living have resulted in the marginalization of countries globally. It divides the developed countries according to their ability to use, adapt, produce and disseminate knowledge. Thus, it places the developed countries on a pedestal while the developing countries, especially, African nations stand marginalized in the global outfit, for example, in Table 1 it could be seen that Burkina Faso has less than one computer per 1000 inhabitants compared to one computer to 172 and 348 inhabitants in Singapore and Switzerland respectively. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there exists one Internet user per 5,000 inhabitants while in Korea and Japan, 3,000,000 and 450,000 households respectively, are connected to Internet. Africa is highly marginalized. It reduces their chances of participation in the global knowledge economy.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Personal Computers Per 1000 Inhabitants</i>	<i>No. of Households Connected to Internet</i>	<i>No. of Internet Users Per Population</i>
<i>Korea</i>	-	<i>3,000,000</i>	-
<i>Japan</i>	-	<i>450,000</i>	-
<i>Burkina Faso</i>	<i><1</i>	-	<i>0.01 in 1,000</i>
<i>South Africa</i>	<i>21</i>	-	<i>3.82 in 1,000</i>
<i>Chile</i>	<i>38</i>	-	
<i>Singapore</i>	<i>172</i>	-	
<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>348</i>	-	
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>1</i>	-	<i>1 in 5,000</i>
<i>Europe and North America</i>			<i>1 in 6</i>

Source: Adapted from The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development The World Development Report 2002.

Glanz, in World Bank (2002), explained that, in the 21st century global market, the countries strive to attract and retain world's best brains through effective policies that stimulate research and development activities which increase direct investment, offer attractive post graduate training and research opportunities and recruit younger graduates and professionals. These developed countries attract the best brains from all over the world for their global labour market and work for.

For instance, Thisday (2002), reported that, one of the leading computer experts in the world is a Nigerian and resides in the U.S. Africa on the reverse, suffers 'brain drain' for many of her best brains migrate to developed countries for study and employment. Australia, Canada, and European Union members open recruitment offices in countries (Africa in particular) and they compete for well-trained people. In 2000, the USA introduced, an amendment to its immigration laws that made available 600,000 new visas for scientists and engineers. France and Germany have modified their issuance of visas to attract foreign

professionals in technology-related areas. On the other hand, graduates from Africa, India, Korea, etc seek employment abroad. Many Africans with PhD work overseas while millions are studying abroad. Brain drain is therefore, enhanced and Africa stands more marginalized at the global labour market.

Conclusion

African nations are marginalized in the global knowledge economy for lack of meaningful and sustainable research and development, science & technology and the new technologies that have launched many developed and transition countries into the 21st century global knowledge and labour market. African governments should release substantial funds to enable the universities engage in meaningful research and publication. They should put in place functioning ICT and good conditions of service to attract and retain their scientists and engineers in their own lands. There is so much inequality in access - poor and rich, male and female, bond or free, ethnic and linguistics barriers, which prevent the majority from having access to education. Thus, there are not sufficient number of vibrant students who would compete at the global knowledge and labour market. Africans should vote for educated elites to lead their countries in that (they already know the necessity of education for their people and the role of universities in the 21st century global breakthrough for Africa. African nations should collectively nurture the NEPAD to serve as a forum for renewed initiative in the struggle to break the marginalization.

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