

---

## The Significance of HIV/AIDS for Universities in Africa

Michael J. Kelly<sup>1</sup>

---

### Abstract

There are several reasons why universities in Africa should respond comprehensively to HIV/AIDS, but institutions across the continent are only slowly acknowledging these reasons. Despite the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the environments in which many universities operate, it does not appear that they have institutionalized a consistent response. Instead, there seems to be a tendency to treat the epidemic as a student or health issue, but not as something that must be integrated into a university's core operations of reflecting on issues affecting society, teaching, research, and community engagement. The paper argues for a radical change in institutional focus that would allow the university to use its full potential to get ahead of HIV/AIDS, in its own ranks and in the world it serves. For such change to be realized, institutions must focus on developing dedicated high-level university leadership and total management commitment.

### Résumé

Plusieurs raisons justifient pourquoi en Afrique, les universités africaines devraient-elles apporter des réponses satisfaisantes au VIH/Sida. Mais, à travers le continent, quelques institutions seulement ont commencé à comprendre timidement les fondements de cette intervention. Malgré le taux de prévalence élevé du VIH/Sida dans l'environnement de leurs zones d'intervention, il ressort de leur démarche qu'elles n'ont pas encore réussi à formuler une réponse adéquate institutionnalisée. On assiste plutôt à une tendance à traiter l'épidémie comme des apprenants face à un problème de santé posé mais non comme une problématique devant être intégrée au programme universitaire. La communauté scientifique devrait s'engager dans ce sens car c'est là un phénomène qui touche toute la société dont les secteurs de l'enseignement et de la recherche. Le texte plaide pour un changement radical dans

---

<sup>1</sup> On September 3, 2003, the Association of Commonwealth Universities at its General Conference in Belfast, awarded Michael J. Kelly, staff at the University of Zambia, the Symons Medal for outstanding service given to the higher education world through HIV/AIDS advocacy.

l'approche institutionnelle du traitement de cette question. Ce qui permettrait à l'université de mettre en œuvre toutes ses potentialités afin de jouer pleinement son rôle d'avant-garde dans le domaine du VIH/Sida. Pour réussir de pareils changements, les institutions doivent réorienter leurs efforts vers la construction, à un niveau supérieur, d'un leadership de l'Université tout en assurant une meilleure gestion de son engagement.

### Introduction

Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

John Donne

With unfortunate regularity universities in many parts of Africa are faced with the reality of loss and sadness, as word goes round the institution about the death or funeral of yet another member of staff, yet another close relative of one of the staff or students, and yet another student. For these universities, HIV/AIDS is real. Death has become commonplace. Adjusting to temporary or permanent staff losses has become part of the institutional culture at institutions across Africa. The pervading ramifications of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are experienced on a daily basis as institutions, like the thousands in the society they serve, strive to come to terms with the fact that Africa is living with HIV/AIDS.

Now, almost a quarter of a century into the AIDS epidemic, many universities in Africa are still trying to grapple with this reality. They have not fully grasped the fact of their HIV/AIDS condition and its implications for their continued effective functioning. In the naïve belief that they were responding effectively to the epidemic, many institutions have regarded HIV/AIDS as, essentially, a health problem and a student problem and have concentrated on the "traditional services offered on campuses through the campus health clinics and student support services" (Crewe, 2000, p. 117). In several universities, the principal information, education, and communication efforts for raising HIV/AIDS awareness still tend to be concentrated in the brief period of orientation at the beginning of the academic year. Where there are other responses to the epidemic, these tend to be piecemeal and uncoordinated. They are often based on an inadequate understanding of the dimensions and nature of the problem. They lack the backing of a suitable policy framework, are not rooted in well-developed action plans, and depend on the initiative of a few interested and committed members of the institution's staff. This situation is gradually changing. The Universities of Natal and Pretoria in South Africa were among the first to confront the broad threat that HIV/AIDS posed to their operations and to the populations they served.

Subsequent pioneer efforts by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), and the South African Universities Vice Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA), are stimulating university leaders across Sub-Saharan Africa to recognize the need for a holistic response to HIV/AIDS both within their institutions and across the higher education sector. In an effort to understand how HIV/AIDS is affecting African universities and to identify responses and coping mechanisms that might profitably be shared with sister institutions in similar circumstances, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) commissioned a number of case studies and published a synthesis report in 2001. In response to their own internal findings and those contained in this report, as well as to the urging of the AAU that African universities be in the forefront of research, education and action in the area of HIV/AIDS, individual institutions, such as the universities of Botswana, Copperbelt (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya), Namibia, Nkumba (Uganda), and Western Cape (South Africa), have made significant progress in efforts to institutionalize the issue (Kelly, 2001).

A major recent development in South Africa has been the launching of the "Higher Education Addressing HIV/AIDS Programme." This program, to which the Vice Chancellors and Principals of all universities and technikons (high level polytechnics) in South Africa have committed, seeks to ensure a unified higher education response to the epidemic in the four focal areas of voluntary counseling and testing, peer education, the world of work, and curriculum development (Michel, 2003). In a significant further development, the AAU Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents (COREVIP) adopted "The Role of Higher Education in Building the African Union" as the theme for its meeting in March 2003. Within the framework of this theme, COREVIP gave extensive consideration to the response of African higher education institutions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and recommended that institutions insert relevant HIV/AIDS issues into existing courses, help establish centers of excellence for AIDS management, coordinate their AIDS-related activities, support research, and develop a directory of promising institutional strategies (AAU, 2003a, b).

Progress is clearly being made. What remains for universities across the continent is to ensure that the recommendations and initiatives from the AAU, ACU, SAUVCA, and similar bodies are translated into vibrant action programs. Doing so will accelerate the transformation of traditional, piecemeal, and somewhat cosmetic reactions to HIV/AIDS into dynamic, fully integrated, comprehensive, and pro-active institutional responses.

### **The Imperative of an Institutional University Response to HIV/AIDS**

There are several reasons why every university in Africa must engage dynamically and pro-actively with the HIV/AIDS epidemic:

- ***No university is immune from the disease.*** In a society that experiences HIV/AIDS, no university can regard itself as an AIDS-free enclave. Quite the contrary, a university may well be more severely affected than the surrounding society, because the great majority of the university community's members are young, in their late teens or early twenties, ages where the prevalence of HIV infection is particularly high. The risks are also heightened by the liberal atmosphere that tends to characterize universities and by campus cultures that may be open to activities, behaviors, and lifestyles that increase the possibility of HIV transmission.
- ***The disease has the potential to impair institutional functioning.*** The mechanisms through which HIV/AIDS undermines the operations of other institutions can also be at work at the higher educational level—such as negative impacts on student numbers and learning potential, increased staff morbidity and mortality, reduced staff and student productivity, diversion of concerns and resources to coping or response measures, and increased financial costs.
- ***The long lead-time between initial HIV infection and the development of AIDS has major implications for universities.*** For students, the real situation may not unfold until they have graduated and entered the world of work. The two to five years of most university programs may be too short a time for AIDS to manifest itself on campus in those who were already HIV-infected when they entered the institution or who became infected during the period of their studies or training. The university may be successful in graduating qualified individuals, but HIV/AIDS can undermine its accomplishments by the premature deaths of young graduates. For those who are permanent members of staff—academics, professional staff, and all categories of support staff—the real impact, in the form of sicknesses and deaths, may not reveal itself for several years. Meanwhile the threat that the disease constitutes may seem unreal, leading to what amounts to practical denial that HIV/AIDS is an issue that the university and its members need to take seriously.
- ***The mandate of service to society demands the engagement of every university with HIV/AIDS.*** Universities exist so that, among other things, they can meet society's need for knowledge, understanding, and expertise, particularly in well-demarcated specialized areas. In countries such

as many of those in Sub-Saharan Africa, where higher education institutions serve societies in which HIV/AIDS has become a crucial public concern, they are duty bound to respond to the needs of society for HIV/AIDS-related scholarship and skills. In the circumstances of the epidemic, institutions must interpret their basic service mandate in terms of the many implications of HIV/AIDS.

- ***Universities have a special responsibility for the development of human resources.*** Universities are among the principal agencies for the preparation of a large segment of the professional and skilled personnel that society needs. In the context of HIV/AIDS, this imposes three responsibilities on them: to ensure that all graduates of their programs are competent to deal with HIV/AIDS, personally, in their own lives, and professionally, in their area of expertise; to ensure that institutions continue to produce graduates in response to the changing numbers needed by a society where the epidemic may be eroding the human resource base; and to introduce new areas of professional training to respond to emerging needs in a society affected by the disease.
- ***Universities are crucial agents of change and providers of leadership directions for society.*** Whether one is talking about behavior change, the eradication of stigma and discrimination, care and support for those infected or affected by the disease, or treatment for those who are ill, every successful response to HIV/AIDS requires innovative thinking and the leadership that will guide and inspire individuals, communities, and society to adopt necessary changes. Every university has a crucial role to play in this domain, serving as role model, facilitator, and source of new knowledge, understandings, and skills.
- ***Universities should be at the forefront in developing deeper understandings of HIV/AIDS.*** Universities are the “thinking-caps” of society, which provide resources and freedoms that allow institutions to do the hard work of reflection on society’s behalf. This reflection is urgently needed in relation to HIV/AIDS. Progress in the understanding of HIV as a virus and of AIDS as a biomedical condition has led to the development of antiretroviral (ARV) therapies and may, in time, lead to the development of therapeutic and preventative vaccines. There has been no corresponding growth in the understanding of HIV/AIDS as a social phenomenon or intellectual challenge. The disease continues to flourish behind a wall of silence, while fear of stigma and discrimination prevents its being brought out into the open by those living with the disease.

The discourse of AIDS is characterized by a language of conflict and struggle that works in synergy with a language of exclusion, leading to a

dehumanization of affected or infected individuals and a marginalization of HIV/AIDS concerns. For over two decades, information, communication, and education campaigns have attempted to influence AIDS-relevant behavior but have failed because they were based on inappropriate communication models and did not take adequate account of cultural and spiritual values (UNAIDS, 1999). Universities have the intellectual resources and traditions to deal with these and similar issues. Where HIV prevalence rates are high, as they are throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa, institutions are challenged to dedicate their best efforts to unraveling the many layers of understanding the disease so that humanity can come to terms with its intellectual, philosophical, theological, linguistic, and other dimensions; thereby efforts to prevent and manage it can become more tractable and successful.

- ***HIV/AIDS raises a host of complex moral, ethical, human rights, and legal issues that cry out for the kind of knowledge, understanding, and insights that universities are specially well-equipped to provide.*** HIV/AIDS infringes upon the most basic human right, the right to life. Selective treatment of persons living with AIDS, as may happen when there is limited access to ARV treatment on the grounds of cost, limited availability, or inadequate medical infrastructure, implies decisions about who should live and who can be allowed to die. What is the ethical framework that will support the individual who must make such a decision? In addition, there are the many complex issues that arise from the right to privacy and the obligation on legal, medical, counseling, and religious practitioners not to disclose the HIV status of a client. There are also the issues relating to ethical probity in all HIV-vaccine trials and ensuring the full and sustained protection of every individual who participates in such trials. Responding to the ethical queries raised by these and many other similar situations requires extensive knowledge and understanding, something that will come most appropriately from universities' law, medical, humanities, and theological faculties as they combine their best wisdom to understand the issues and seek to arrive at answers that succeed in "walking the tightrope of competing claims to legal rights and duties" (Bacchus, 2000, p. 151).
- ***HIV/AIDS is not a passing phenomenon but one that is likely to beset society for much of the remainder of this century.*** Projections are that, globally, the epidemic will not peak until about 2050 or 2060 (Feachem, 2003). Before that peak occurs, the epicenter of the disease will have moved from Southern Africa to Asia, with India being the most severely affected country. In the meantime, the disease will have hit Nigeria and

Ethiopia very hard, “decimating key government and business elites, undermining growth, and discouraging foreign investment” (NIC, 2002, p. 5). No university in Sub-Saharan Africa can ignore such a situation. Those in countries where HIV prevalence continues to grow will need to lend all of their energies to developing the human resources needed to replenish the stocks lost to the disease. Those in countries where HIV prevalence might stabilize or decline will need to reflect on the factors that brought about such favorable change, in order to play a significant role in ensuring that the situation does not go into reverse and place at the disposal of newly or continuingly affected countries the understanding and expertise gained during the period when the epidemic was still significant among them.

### **Looking Inwards: The HIV/AIDS Situation in African Universities**

Reports coming from universities in Africa speak of the absence of good information on the extent and impact of the HIV/AIDS on campus. In practical terms, there is much denial and secrecy, but this cannot mask the increase in the number of deaths, more extensive sickness, and some faltering in teaching and research functions (with older members of staff having to fill in for the absence—through sickness or death—of their younger colleagues).

While there are reports of increasing numbers of ill students on campus, there is less evidence about student deaths. One reason for this lack of information on student deaths is that students who recognize that they are progressing from HIV to AIDS may withdraw from the university, terminating their study programs of their own accord—some because of their perception (possibly mistaken) that their having AIDS will expose them to hostility and discrimination on campus, some because they see no point in continuing, and some because they want to be cared for in their home surroundings. AIDS-related student deaths are also less common because the period of studies is usually too short to encompass the full progression from HIV to AIDS to death. This low number of recorded student deaths is cruelly compensated for by high death rates among recent university graduates. For example, the University of Zambia has reported that in 1999/2000 four students from a relatively small diploma program died during the year following their graduation (Kelly, 2001). Likewise, the University of Natal has found that more than 30% of nurses graduating from its programs are dying within three years of completing their study program. This tremendous loss corroborates the estimates for South Africa, that by 2005 more than 30% of undergraduate students in the country’s 25 public universities, more than 20% of postgraduate students, and more than 35% of those in its polytechnics will be infected with HIV (DOE, 2001, p. 128).



Evidence on AIDS-related deaths among academic and support staff is limited, partly because it is very seldom acknowledged when a death is due to AIDS. When staff die in relatively large numbers and at comparatively young ages, however, it seems likely that AIDS was a major contributing factor. At the University of Zambia, slightly more than 350 academic and support staff died during the 1990s—an average of three per month, out of a total staff number of 400 academic staff and 1,500 support staff. 53% of these deaths occurred in the age-range 20–34 and 44% in the range 34–49. Anecdotal evidence is that the frequency of deaths, especially among academic staff, has increased since then.

In this climate of death during or very proximate to university years, it is surprising that there is so much silence about HIV/AIDS at institutional, academic and personal levels. The potential impacts of HIV/AIDS illnesses and deaths on programs and undertakings may be easily and obviously noted, but there is no great sense of urgency to take action and respond to it pro-actively at institutional level. This is partly due to the colossally overwhelming nature of the problem and the difficulty of coming forward with any coherent solution. But, it is also a manifestation of the silence and denial that tend to enshroud the disease. To some extent silence and denial are primordial and protective human responses to situations that are excessively stressful. With great insight, the poet T. S. Elliot summed up this situation accurately, “humankind cannot bear too much reality.” Trying to function as if AIDS were not wreaking havoc, however, as still commonly occurs in many universities and even in some countries, will never lead to mastery over the disease or its impacts.

The result of this lack of consistent attention to HIV/AIDS on campus is that responses to HIV/AIDS tend to be quite piecemeal and uncoordinated. It was not until about 1999 that universities in Africa began to develop worthwhile institutional responses, and, although this situation is gradually changing for the better, many institutions are still taking little formal action. The absence of strong institutional response is compensated for by many generous individual initiatives, however, with academic members of staff valiantly striving to incorporate HIV/AIDS issues in their courses, a reasonably healthy corpus of AIDS-related research undertakings, several student-initiated anti-AIDS programs (though often short-lived), and considerable involvement of knowledgeable academics with agencies dealing with the disease in the non-university sector.

Notwithstanding staff losses, universities have tended to regard HIV/AIDS as being principally a student problem that should be dealt with through campus student support and health services. There is extensive student awareness of the problem, even to the extent of AIDS fatigue, with students not welcom-



ing any initiatives that have the manifest objective of encouraging them to develop a personal lifestyle in which they will not put themselves or others at risk of HIV infection. In addition to this, student attitudes are frequently characterized by denial, fatalism, inevitability, and invulnerability.

### ***University Students and the Risk of HIV Infection***

The tragedy of these student attitudes is that university students constitute a particularly high-risk group for HIV infection. The majority of them are young, and today's young people are the AIDS generation (Kiragu, 2001). They have never known a world without AIDS but are themselves extremely susceptible to HIV infection, with some of them having already progressed to full-blown AIDS. Globally, "an estimated 11.8 million young people aged 15–24 are living with HIV/AIDS. Moreover, about half of all new adult infections—around 6,000 daily—are occurring among young people" (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 70).

Bleak as these statistics are, the situation is, actually, even worse. Two remarkable features characterize the susceptibility of young people to HIV infection: sizeable gender differences and ignorance about the disease. HIV infection does not affect young people equally. Young women are much more likely than young men to become infected. Globally, 7.3 million young women between the ages of 15 and 24 are estimated to be living with HIV and AIDS, compared with 4.5 million young men. In countries with high levels of infection, such as Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, for every 15- to 19-year-old boy who is infected, there are five to six girls infected in the same age group.

In addition, ignorance about HIV/AIDS continues to be widespread. Even though most people, especially young people, allege that they know something about the disease, many show themselves ignorant in ways that could be lethal for them. For instance, in Kenya only 26% of 15–24 year-old girls have sufficient knowledge to protect themselves from HIV infection, in Tanzania, 26%, and in Senegal, 10% (UNICEF 2002, Table 8). The percentages are equally low for almost all other countries for which evidence is available. Another aspect of this potentially fatal lack of knowledge is the large number of young people who believe that HIV infection will show in a person's appearance. Thus, more than half the adolescent girls in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Nigeria—countries where prevalence levels are high—think that a partner who looks healthy could not be infected with HIV (UNAIDS/UNICEF/WHO, 2002, Table 1).

The implication for universities is that for long periods each year they are home to, and very often the residential base for, large cohorts of young people whose age makes them particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and who may not know how to protect themselves against infection. In addition, many may

already and, often, unknowingly, be infected, especially among female students. To compound the risk, the culture of campus life in many residential universities appears to be ambivalent about, or even open to, a wide variety of high-risk activities—"sugar daddy" arrangements, sexual experimentation, prostitution on campus, unprotected casual sex, frequent partner change, and considerable physical and psychological violence against women. In the context of HIV/AIDS within student communities today such a culture is in danger of affirming risk more than safety, death more than life. In many respects, students in African universities encounter problems similar to those that affect students in residential universities in the United States and elsewhere:

In a campus environment many students encounter new independence, self determination and strong peer pressure to adopt certain behaviors. For some students, an uncertain sense of identity and self esteem can complicate decision making. Experimentation with sexual behaviors and/or drug use may put college and university students at a greater risk of infection. Young adults often feel invincible and tend to deny personal risk. Many people in campus communities believe that HIV infection and AIDS are problems faced elsewhere, or are concerns only for "other kinds" of people. The long latency between infection with HIV and the eventual development of full-blown AIDS ... will seem to validate the myth among students (and some faculty and administrators) that "it cannot happen here."

ACHA, n.d., p. 1

Recognizing the special vulnerability of young adults to HIV infection, the United Nations has established definite time-bound targets for the reduction of HIV transmission among young people:

- By 2005, reduce HIV prevalence among those aged 15 to 24 by 25% in the most affected countries.
- By 2005, ensure that at least 90% of young men and women aged 15 to 24 have access to information, education—including peer education and youth-specific HIV education—and services necessary to develop the life skills required to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection, in full partnership with young persons, parents, families, educators and health-care providers (UNGASS, 2001, §§ 47, 53).

These targets set clear objectives that should inform strategies to deal with HIV/AIDS in university communities. There is little evidence to date that every university is doing so.

## Looking Outwards: The Situation and Needs in African Societies

### *The Impacts of HIV/AIDS on Society in Africa*

In countries where the HIV prevalence rate exceeds 5%, the epidemic is rapidly undermining every aspect of society—families, health, education, industry, economic development. At the end of 2001, there were 23 such countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 190). Countries where the prevalence rate lies between 1 and 5% are at risk of experiencing the same impacts. At the end of 2001, there were ten such countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In global terms, the entire continent has suffered major development setbacks and is at risk of reverting to human development conditions that have not been experienced since the early years of the twentieth century. One hundred years of development achievements are at risk of being unraveled across large swathes of the continent.

The extent to which development gains have been set back can be gauged from the impact of the epidemic in some key areas:

Average life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa has now fallen to 47 years; it would have been 62 years without AIDS (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 44).

During the coming two decades, Africa is projected to experience 55 million deaths that would not have occurred in the absence of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 46). This is more than five times the estimated number transported as slaves to America between 1518 and 1874 (Curtin, 1969, referred to in Williams, 2002).

The epidemic is leaving a sea of orphans in its wake. It is estimated that 11 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to AIDS, a figure that is projected to rise to over 20 million by the year 2010 (UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, 2002, p. 22, 30).

Household incomes are declining, while, simultaneously, household needs are increasing as they take in increasing numbers of orphans. Externally, households seem to cope. In reality, many break up, reduce the level of food intake, focus entirely on short-term survival and jeopardize their future through the disposal of productive assets, and strive valiantly to keep up appearances and perpetuate the myth of coping (Mugabe, Stirling, & Whiteside, 2002).

Health sectors are experiencing enormous additional pressures arising from the diversion of public and private health care spending to AIDS-related conditions, an increasing number of hospital beds being occupied by long-term AIDS patients, a rapid increase in TB infection, and alarming increases in illness and death rates among health workers.

HIV/AIDS places educational systems and institutions under profound threat. There are fewer potential learners. Financially, many of these cannot afford the

cash and opportunity costs of education. Socially, many are orphans, some with full responsibility for managing a household because all the adult members have died. Deaths among teachers are numerous. Technical, supervisory, and managerial staff are not spared; meanwhile, managing the system to cope with AIDS impacts places heavy demands on those who remain active. Learning achievement, the touchstone of quality in education, is rapidly eroded by frequent teacher absenteeism, shortages of teachers in mathematics and other specialized areas, considerable teacher and learner trauma, repeated occasions for grief and mourning in school, families and communities, and a widespread sense of insecurity and anxiety among learners and educators.

The profitability of business enterprises is declining because of absenteeism, declining worker morale, reduced productivity of workers who experience periodic sicknesses, increased insurance costs, extensive costs for funerals, and increasing demands for training and recruitment (Whiteside & Sunter, 2000, p. 100).

Because of HIV/AIDS, the rate of economic growth in severely affected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa is 2 to 4% lower than it would have been in the absence of AIDS (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 56). In addition to this decline, large losses are being incurred in subsistence agriculture and other informal economic activities. These losses do not feature in national economic data but are the core economic concerns of the great majority of people, ensuring their livelihoods, food security, and general well-being. By removing productive workers through sickness and death and diverting others to providing patient care, HIV/AIDS is steadily undermining this sector and accelerating the downward spiral into poverty.

#### ***How Universities Should Respond to the HIV/AIDS Needs in Africa***

The very bleakness of these situations constitutes an urgent call to African universities to become involved and take appropriate action. They cannot stand apart. In the decades ahead, universities in Africa will be judged by the variety and vitality of their interactions with the societies of which they are part (ACU, 2001, p. iv). In societies that are plagued by HIV/AIDS, these interactions must be suffused by society's greatest concerns: the AIDS epidemic; how to understand it better; how to prevent its further spread; how to provide care, treatment and support; and how to manage the numerous ways in which the epidemic impacts negatively on systems, institutions, communities, and individuals.

If society were to speak to a university that operates in an environment of HIV/AIDS, it would probably make four straightforward requests:

- Protect yourself, your staff and your students against infection; otherwise you will not be able to help.
- Provide the trained and skilled personnel needed by all sectors, in the numbers and areas of need, and with an understanding of the epidemic and a commitment to defeating it.
- Learn to know the disease better, to understand it in all its dimensions, and from that knowledge develop solutions, interventions, and programs that will bring hope.
- Share your knowledge, your understanding, your time, your expertise, and yourself with those who do not belong to the university community, and learn from them, so as to discover what has to be done to control and roll back HIV/AIDS.

### ***Institutional Self-Protection***

The first element, institutional self-protection, is critical. “What HIV/AIDS does to the human body, it also does to institutions. It undermines those institutions that protect us” (UNESCO, 2000, p. 22). When a person is infected with HIV, the immune system slowly but inexorably breaks down, leaving the individual vulnerable to the hazards of several opportunistic illnesses. The disease has a similar effect on institutions and systems. In the absence of appropriate protective measures, organizations are likely to experience various problems that can develop to the stage where they are no longer capable of functioning in the way they ought to.

Ironically, the very systems that should be strengthening society’s ability to protect itself against HIV/AIDS may themselves be in danger of succumbing to the disease. A university that does not protect itself against the potential and actual ravages of HIV/AIDS will not be able to serve as a vehicle for reducing the incidence of the disease. The minimum response a university in Africa can make to the HIV/AIDS situation is to take the steps needed to prevent the spread of HIV infection among members of its community, to establish a caring and supportive environment for those infected or affected by the disease, and to take the steps needed to manage the impact of the epidemic on its operations.

### ***The Development of Human Resources***

The second expectation of society deals with a core aspect of a university’s mandate: to respond dynamically to the human resource needs of society. In the circumstances of economies across Africa, a major responsibility of a university is to ensure a steady flow of well-trained men and women for a broad spectrum of employment areas. This responsibility has always been a chal-

lenge for universities, but the advent of HIV/AIDS has added new urgency and has attached new perspectives. HIV/AIDS is increasingly being recognized as not just a health issue but as a complex developmental issue that requires a greatly increased supply of individuals qualified in traditional areas as well as growing numbers of prospective employees with skills in new areas of expertise. In responding to the challenge posed by this situation, universities throughout Sub-Saharan Africa should prepare to acknowledge and respond to different aspects of their society's human resource requirements.

### ***AIDS Competent Graduates***

Societies across Africa today expect that university graduates will be suitably equipped to function productively and constructively in an environment that is infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The university should aim, therefore, at ensuring that all its graduating students become AIDS-competent; that is, that they have a theoretical and practical understanding of the epidemic, appropriate to the program of study being undertaken, and its implications for their future careers. The purpose would be to develop in all graduates a mature understanding of the epidemic, the aspects of it that they are likely to encounter in their subsequent professional lives, and to equip them with some tools and skills for addressing it within their areas of professional expertise. A further component of this professional understanding is that "as many graduating students as possible will have been fully trained in the management, political, social, economic and legal aspects of AIDS in the workplace. They will (then) be able to generate workplace programs that include peer education and counseling, as well as understanding of the relevant legislation and the effects of large numbers of sick and dying colleagues" (Crewe, 2000, p. 120).

### ***Flexible and Innovative Graduates***

AIDS-related personnel losses are crippling the activities of government, industrial, and business departments. The loss of qualified personnel frequently makes it necessary for other faculty and staff to take over the responsibilities of a sick or deceased colleague, sometimes just temporarily, but frequently on a semi-permanent basis. The university's response should be to promote greater flexibility in graduates so that they can more readily assume responsibilities at the margins of their strictly professional areas. It has never been desirable that university programs focus too closely on developing graduates who would not be able to function outside of narrowly defined areas of expertise. Such an outcome is even less desirable in a society beset with HIV/AIDS. Instead, university programs should seek to adjust their approach and their teaching methodologies so that they foster more independent and self-motivated learning.

They should adopt every available technique to equip students with the intellectual and practical tools that will enable them to be more adaptable and innovative in responding to the needs of a fast-changing and unpredictable world with AIDS.

### ***Graduates in New Areas of Expertise***

University faculties and departments should consider the need to introduce new areas of emphasis or explore areas where the epidemic demands a shift in emphasis. Explicit efforts should be made to introduce HIV/AIDS-related issues into various social science, legal, and humanities programs and to establish new degree programs in such areas as health economics, responding to the challenge of orphans, HIV/AIDS and ethical issues, theoretical and practical understanding of community mobilization, micro-credit, policy analysis, communication strategies for behavior change, decentralization, bereavement counseling, the role of cultural determinants in the formation of values, attitudes and behaviors, program development and management, and HIV/AIDS-related communication and information technology.

### ***Adjustments in Graduate Numbers***

Universities should consider increasing student numbers in areas where HIV/AIDS is eroding society's skills base and in areas where it is foreseen that, because of the epidemic, there will be need in future years for an increasing number of qualified individuals (as has already been recognized in many of the social and medical areas). For instance, it has been projected that by 2010 the demand for health service personnel in South Africa will be more than 11% higher than in a scenario without AIDS (Quattek, 2000, p. 41). Given the duration of the training time, and the possible need for enlarged facilities and increased staff, it is clear that university planning to increase the output of qualified personnel needs to get under way immediately.

### ***HIV/AIDS-Related Research***

Society's third expectation of higher education is that universities apply their research potential to improving both the biomedical and social understanding of HIV/AIDS and the ways of dealing with it. New knowledge is critical to efforts at understanding, combating, and managing the epidemic. Responding to this imperative touches on the core university business of generating and disseminating new knowledge. Given their dense concentration of intellectual expertise, universities are particularly well-equipped to undertake HIV/AIDS-related research. Society has invested heavily in them so that they can develop, elaborate and evaluate knowledge through study, expand and generate it through



research, and disseminate and spread it through publications and conferences. Hence, universities throughout Sub-Saharan Africa must be at the cutting edge in the search for improved biomedical, epidemiological, scientific, social, and economic understandings of HIV/AIDS. They are duty-bound to make their own unique contribution to the various areas of prevention, care and support, treatment, and impact management. Thereby they will contribute significantly to improvements in the quality of life for an appreciable number of human beings.

In June 2001, the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS underlined the importance of research when it stated that “with no cure for HIV/AIDS yet found, further research and development are crucial” (UNGASS, 2001, p. 22). The Assembly also called for increased investment in HIV/AIDS-related research and development, including biomedical operations and social, cultural, and behavioral research (Article 70). More specifically, in words that could have been written with many African countries in mind, the United Nations called for numerous research-related developments in “those countries experiencing or at risk of a rapid expansion of the epidemic” (Article 71). The programs envisaged relate to the development of national and international research infrastructure; laboratory capacity; improved surveillance systems, data collection, processing, and dissemination; and training of basic and clinical researchers, social scientists, health-care providers, and technicians.

A few simple principles can serve to guide the HIV/AIDS research portfolio of a university in Africa:

- Because HIV/AIDS is a multi-dimensional development issue and not just a health issue, much HIV/AIDS research will be characterized by teamwork involving researchers from the biomedical, hard science, and social science fields. Good HIV/AIDS research work will regularly transcend disciplinary boundaries and, at the very least, will take account of findings from a broad spectrum of investigations.
- HIV/AIDS is an area of investigation that lends itself particularly well to collaborative efforts between and among universities, regionally and internationally, and between universities and various bodies in society. The Association of African Universities, AAU, has the mandate of facilitating academic contacts and collaborative work among its member universities in Africa. As such, it is uniquely well-placed to promote collaborative research between them. The value-added of such cooperation would be increased understanding of HIV/AIDS in multi-national, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural settings. Collaborative research is also a powerful mechanism for the conduct of investigations that might exceed the resources of a single institution. Thus, under the auspices of

the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), a vaccine development partnership exists between Oxford University and the University of Nairobi, while another partnership links the University of Cape Town, South Africa's Medical Research Council and National Institute of Virology, and a North Carolina-based biotechnology firm.

- Because the impacts of HIV/AIDS on individual well-being and on development broadly understood are so devastating and all-encompassing, HIV/AIDS research should keep the end-users constantly in view. Until the world can demonstrate greater success in the battle against AIDS, the concern of AIDS-related research should focus less on the production of knowledge for its own sake and more on how the new knowledge will contribute to the development of goods and services that will promote HIV prevention, sustain care and support, and mitigate adverse impacts.
- Mechanisms for the dissemination and sharing of research findings should be integral to every HIV/AIDS-related research proposal. In the absence of these mechanisms, little can be done to utilize or further develop the newly generated knowledge. Universities and research institutions should ensure extensive use of traditional and emerging IT (information technology) channels for the rapid communication of their research findings.

### ***Strategic Engagement with Society***

The fourth expectation of society is that, in responding to HIV/AIDS, a university should not stand apart, going its own way. Instead, it should engage strategically with the HIV/AIDS concerns and challenges faced by society. "Intellectual imagination, energy and experience are a university's stock-in-trade; these are our biggest business assets and we are determined to focus these assets on the concerns of the world around us" (ACU, 2001, §6). HIV/AIDS is the foremost concern in the environment in which very many universities across Sub-Saharan Africa find themselves placed. Hence, they should focus their intellectual and academic resources on working strategically with institutions and individuals outside of the university towards finding ways of addressing the multitude of challenges that HIV/AIDS generates.

By necessity, every university develops a network of working relations with the various organs of society in the public and private sectors. These non-university sectors look to the universities to help them meet their human resource needs and to provide them with better practices, more profound understandings, and new knowledge. But, not all of the traffic should be one-way. Universities must also look to society to learn, especially in the area of HIV/

AIDS. This is a new area of human experience where agencies, communities, and private individuals may well be better informed, especially regarding details, than those in a university. Universities must, then, take on a learning role in their engagement with society. They cannot afford to be arrogant or to act as if they were the controller and sole dispenser of knowledge. Instead, they must work respectfully with agencies, communities, and individuals, seeking jointly with them to identify the problems that need to be addressed and working jointly with them in finding solutions for these problems.

Such collaboration between university and non-university actors has practical consequences for university teaching, research, and community outreach programs:

- It is highly desirable that AIDS-related engagement with and service to society be incorporated into student program requirements, particularly in countries with high HIV prevalence rates. The needs of an AIDS-affected society are too grave to be left either to chance or to individual interest. Universities that require their students to serve society in the AIDS domain proclaim loud and clear that they are serious in their intentions to engage with and overcome the epidemic. A spin-off is that the knowledge and skills that these students would develop when providing this service should later increase their marketability, since in an AIDS-affected society employers attach special value to those with some experience in coping with and managing the disease and its impacts.
- It is equally desirable that, in its outreach to society, the university goes out of its way to ensure the involvement of persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs), whether these be members of the university community or of the wider society. PLWHAs can contribute insights and articulate needs at depths that those who are not infected cannot plumb.
- Procedures for staff advancement should also take into account the AIDS-related accomplishments of a staff member in working with communities, government departments, non-governmental agencies, and other bodies. Once again, attaching special value to these experiences is eloquent testimony that a university wishes to match its expressions of concern with actions that will spur extensive involvement of its staff in working with others for the prevention, control, and management of HIV/AIDS.

The crucial point being made above is that universities throughout Africa should care about HIV/AIDS, within their own ranks and in the societies they serve, and show that they care. It is against this criterion that history will judge the adequacy of their response to the epidemic.

### **Taking Action: Institutionalizing HIV/AIDS**

In his opening address to the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa, in December 1999, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that “this unprecedented crisis requires an unprecedented response.” Universities in severely affected countries must also make unprecedented responses. It is suggested here that what is needed for such universities is to institutionalize their response so that HIV/AIDS concerns permeate every facet of their operations.

Various values shape the atmosphere of universities, virtually constituting the air they breathe—“this needful, never spent, and nursing element; my more than meat and drink, my meal at every wink; the air, which, by life’s law, my lung must draw and draw” (Gerard Manley Hopkins). All would probably agree that academic freedom of thought and expression is the ‘needful, never-spent, and nursing element’ that must sustain every university. For the majority of institutions, the pursuit of academic excellence and the conduct of rigorous, well-structured inquiry are their ‘more than meat and drink’. For others, the vitality and variety of their programs are their ‘meal at every wink’. But for those where the epidemic constitutes a major developmental problem, HIV/AIDS must be the ‘air, which, by life’s law, their lungs must draw and draw’. The gravity of the current situation requires this. The likelihood that HIV/AIDS will remain an issue of major national and international concern for generations to come accentuates the need.

Institutionalizing HIV/AIDS within a university entails a radical change of focus. It is not something that is confined to student activities. It far exceeds the provision of additional health facilities and supplies. It goes beyond sporadic activism and demonstrations of interest. It has room for these and other manifestations, but it is more fundamental, all-embracing, and sustained. It is a radical mind-set that is unshakeable in committing the full potential and resources of the entire institution to the struggle with HIV/AIDS and that translates this commitment into policies, plans, and implementation structures. It is a vision that understands the potential of the epidemic to undermine everything that the university strives to achieve within itself and for society and that recognizes that failure to act decisively means turning one’s back on the greatest challenge ever faced by humanity.

“Institutionalising HIV and AIDS as a university response... involves turning the whole university around to recognize the threat of HIV and AIDS both to the university and the society in which it is located, and to respond to it in a holistic and complete way. It involves addressing the essence, culture and power of the institution and it challenges the relationship between the institution and society” (Crewe, 2000, p. 117). Institutionalizing a response to HIV/AIDS will not derogate a university from its traditional concerns. Its *raison d’être* will

continue to be to serve the real needs of society through the generation, selection, adaptation, transmission, and preservation of knowledge, and the stimulation of intellectual life, rigorous debate, and cultural development. But, HIV/AIDS issues and concerns must permeate every effort to attain these goals. In particular, as indicated already, they must infuse the thinking, teaching, research, and community engagement functions of the university.

The most critical factor in achieving these goals is committed leadership at a sufficiently high level. Given the right leadership, it is possible to inspire key stakeholders, mobilize resources, and establish policies and management structures. Above all, active and dynamic leadership can bring about a circumstance in which, until the disease has been overcome, responding creatively and proactively to HIV/AIDS will stand at the heart of a university's business. If this leadership is present, the university can hope to accomplish a lot. If it is deficient, however, the university response will be far from what it should be and may consist of no more than the uncoordinated, albeit generous, initiatives of individuals and interested groups.

This personal commitment on the part of the university's top leadership should translate into a total management commitment that manifests itself in:

- an authoritative strategic planning and policy development approach,
- the commitment of resources,
- the establishment of the necessary implementation structures within an appropriate institutional framework,
- the elaboration of monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure that steps continue to be taken in the right direction, and
- a sustained challenge to all forms of on-campus denial, stigma, and discrimination, accompanied by steps to facilitate HIV openness.

It will also be important to establish realistic targets, ensuring that these targets correspond with those that appear in national policy guidelines and frameworks. Of particular importance will be the identification of ways in which the institution can foster the attainment, within and outside the university community, of the United Nations goals of a 25% global reduction in HIV infection among 15–24 year-olds by 2010 and access by 95% of persons in this age group to the information, education, and services they need to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection.

Finally, the university leadership must ensure that a commitment to the prevention, control, and management of the disease is widely diffused throughout the institution. Hence, it must take whatever steps are needed to bring about university-wide ownership of all HIV/AIDS policies, strategies, and interventions and to secure the dedicated involvement of all sectors of university community.

### Conclusion

Notwithstanding several significant advances in the first two decades of response to HIV/AIDS, world-respected authorities are showing signs of anxiety and even despondency. Stephen Lewis, the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, speaks about "a curious and distressing lull in the battle, ... a cumulative feeling of inertia rather than energy, of marking time, ... of incrementalism raised to the level of obsession" (Lewis, 2002). Richard Feachem, executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, writes about the battle against HIV/AIDS having "acquired the traits of a distant, low-intensity conflict—distasteful, lethal and a cause for genuine concern, but ultimately remote, difficult to solve and something you can learn to live with" (Feachem, 2003). Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS, warns that "unless more is done today and tomorrow, the epidemic will continue to grow" (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 6). At the level of practice, the Fund established by the United Nations to fight the epidemic estimates that it will need about \$40 billion over the five years 2004–2008 but has received no new sizeable contributions for many months and foresees difficulties in raising the resources that will be needed to fund its third round of grants in October 2003.

Clearly, the climate is one of concern, almost of a stalemate. But, it is also a climate that challenges universities in Africa to come forward and take initiatives that will help their people escape from the bondage of HIV/AIDS. In the past, universities have acted significantly and decisively in bringing about social change. Across Southern Africa they played a vital role in bringing the oppressive apartheid regime to an end. In many parts of Africa they continue to play a similar role, as they speak out on behalf of democracy and freedom. Unfortunately, however, they have not as yet shown the same passionate commitment to ending the oppressive "regime" of HIV/AIDS.

The time is ripe for institutions to change. In a university, as elsewhere, half measures and piecemeal responses may provide temporary and partial relief, but they do not provide the radical solutions required by an epidemic that is so all-encompassing and pervasive as HIV/AIDS. Only a holistic approach, one that looks out on the world through the lens of HIV/AIDS, will be effective in turning the tide against the epidemic. University executives and senior management are challenged to adopt such an approach by guiding their institutions throughout Sub-Saharan Africa in formulating and implementing a holistic response that encompasses the university's mission and permeates its reflection, teaching, research, and community engagement activities.

## References

- American College Health Association (ACHA). (n.d.). General Statement on Institutional Response to AIDS. Baltimore: American College Health Association, Task Force on AIDS.
- Association of African Universities (AAU). (2003a). *COREVIP 2003. Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents. Theme: The Role of Higher Education in the Building of the African Union*. Mauritius, 17–21 March 2003. Accra: Association of African Universities.
- Association of African Universities (AAU). (2003b). *Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents (COREVIP). Grand Baie, Mauritius. Summary of Proceedings*. Accra: Association of African Universities.
- Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). (2001). *Engagement as a Core Value for the University: A Consultation Document*. London: Association of Commonwealth Universities, April 2001.
- Bacchus, R. (2000). Legal and Ethical Dimensions of HIV/AIDS. In G. Howe & A. Cobley (Eds.) *The Caribbean AIDS Epidemic*. Kingston: University of West Indies Press.
- Crewe, M. (2000). HIV/AIDS and the University of Pretoria. Implications for the University of Namibia. In B. Otaala (Ed.) *HIV/AIDS: The Challenge for Tertiary Institutions in Namibia*. Proceedings of a Workshop, 9–11 October, Windhoek, Namibia. University of Namibia, Unit for Improving Teaching and Learning: Windhoek, Namibia.
- Curtin, P. (1969). *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Department of Education, South Africa (DOE). (2001). Impacts of HIV/AIDS on the South African Departments of Education. Technical Report Submitted to the Department of Education. Sandton, South Africa: Abt Associates.
- Feachem, R. G. A. (2003). Deadly Case of Denial—Why Won't the World Face Facts About AIDS? *Chicago Tribune*, 15th January 2003.
- Kelly, M. J. (2001). *Challenging the Challenger. Understanding and Expanding the Response of Universities in Africa to HIV/AIDS*. Washington, DC: The World Bank for the ADEA Working Group on Higher Education.
- Kiragu, K. (2001). *Youth and HIV/AIDS: Can We Avoid Catastrophe?* Population Reports, Series L, No. 12. Population Information Program, Bloomberg School of Public Health. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University.
- Lewis, S. (2002). Address to the African Religious Leaders Assembly on Children and HIV/AIDS. Nairobi, Kenya, 10 June 2002.
- Michel, B., Programme Director, Higher Education Against HIV/AIDS, Website: [www.heaaids.ac.za](http://www.heaaids.ac.za). (2003). Contribution to e-mail discussion "AAI African Perspectives COREVIP 2003".
- Mugabe, M., M. Stirling, & A. Whiteside. (2002). Future Imperfect: Protecting Children on the Brink. Discussion paper presented to Africa Leadership Consultation: Acting for Children on the Brink. Johannesburg, 10 September.



- National Intelligence Council (NIC). (2002). *The Next Wave of HIV/AIDS: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India and China*. ICA 2002-04D. Washington: National Intelligence Council.
- Quattek, K. (2000). The Economic Impact of AIDS in South Africa: A Dark Cloud on the Horizon. *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Papers*, Johannesburg, June 2000.
- UNAIDS. (2002). *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic*. Geneva: UNAIDS, July 2002.
- UNAIDS. (1999). *Communications Framework for HIV/AIDS. A New Direction*. A UNAIDS/Penn State Project. Geneva: UNAIDS.
- UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID. (2002). *Children on the Brink 2002. A Joint Report on Orphan Estimates and Program Strategies*. Washington, DC: TvT Associates.
- UNAIDS/UNICEF/WHO. (2002). *Young People and HIV/AIDS. Opportunity in Crisis*. Geneva: UNAIDS.
- UNESCO (2000). *World Education Forum, Final Report*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNGASS. (2001). *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*. United Nations General Assembly, 26th Special Session, 27 June 2001. New York: United Nations.
- UNICEF. (2001). *Early Childhood. The State of the World's Children 2001*. New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2002). *The State of the World's Children 2003*. New York: UNICEF.
- Whiteside, A. & Sunter, C. (2000). *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau and Tafelberg.
- Williams, L. (2002). Adolescence and Violence in Jamaica. In UNICEF/UNFPA *Meeting Adolescent Development and Participation Rights. The Findings of Five Research Studies in Jamaica*. Kingston: UNICEF.

---

## Formulating Higher Education Policies in Africa: The Pressure from External Forces and the Neoliberal Agenda<sup>1</sup>

Birgit Brock-Utne<sup>2,3</sup>

---

### Abstract

This article analyzes the higher educational policies made for Sub-Saharan Africa by the World Bank and portrays its hostile attitude towards higher education development on the sub continent. Though an organization such as UNESCO holds up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states “higher education shall be accessible to all, on the basis of merit,” the Bank insists on what it calls diversification of funding and “cost sharing”. The ramifications of these policies both at individual and institutional level are discussed. Some recent documents from the Bank now recognize the importance of the sector in Africa without, however, any apologies for decades of neglect. Despite increased emphasis on the sector, the basic tenets, such as more cost sharing and more privatisation largely remain. Furthermore, the article discusses language issues in African universities and calls for the need to nurture local knowledge development. The article underscores the great need for an education that is of Africa and for Africa.

---

1 The analysis and discussion that follow will be limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa has since the dismantling of the apartheid regime become a regional presence with a massive transformation agenda of its own. The historically white universities here have traditionally modelled themselves after universities in Europe and US and have more in common with these universities than universities in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. My own experiences from working with staff development at the historically black universities in South Africa (1996–1998) have been dealt with in one of the last chapters in my book (Brock-Utne, 2000) and will not be dealt with here. The South African government has recently issued a white paper on Higher Education in South Africa where plans are launched to merge the historically black universities (with the exception of the University of Western Cape which used to be a colored institution) with the white institutions (Howell, 2002). According to information conveyed to me by staff at the historically black universities (especially from the University of Venda) these plans have been met with considerable protest from these universities who feel that they are being closed down.

2 Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo, Norway.

3 I would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of two anonymous reviewers to an earlier draft of this paper. I also would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Prof. Akilagpa Sawyerr, the

## Résumé

Cet article analyse les politiques d'enseignement supérieur conçues **pour** l'Afrique subsaharienne et édictées par la Banque mondiale. Il décrit l'attitude hostile de la Banque face au développement de l'enseignement supérieur à travers cette partie du continent. Bien qu'une organisation comme l'Unesco s'évertue à maintenir son soutien à la Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme qui statue que « l'enseignement supérieur doit être accessible à tous, sur la base du mérite », la Banque elle, insiste sur ce qu'elle désigne par diversification des sources de financement et partage des charges. Le texte analyse les ramifications de ces politiques aux niveaux individuel et institutionnel à la fois. De récentes publications de la Banque reconnaissent l'importance du secteur en Afrique. Cependant, ces documents ne présentent aucune excuse concernant l'attitude défavorable de la Banque tout au long de ces dernières décennies d'incitation à la négligence. Malgré ce regain d'intérêt pour le secteur, les doctrines de base relatives au partage accru des charges et à une privatisation plus soutenue, ces options de la banque persistent encore. Plus loin dans le texte, l'article pose la problématique des langues locales dans les universités africaines et en appelle à la valorisation des connaissances au niveau continental. L'article met en évidence l'énorme besoin de promouvoir un enseignement par l'Afrique et pour l'Afrique.

## Introduction

When lost, it is better to return to a familiar point before rushing on.  
(African proverb)

A university's contribution to development turns on the quality of the knowledge it generates and disseminates.

Sawyers, 2002, p. 34

When the historian Ki-Zerbo from Burkina Faso discussed contemporary education in Africa in 1990, he started by quoting the above African proverb. He was concerned about the decline in quality, knowledge generated, and independent research at the African universities at that time. Akilagpa Sawyers (2002), the Secretary General of the Association of African Universities and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, voiced a similar concern in a more recent publication. He noted that the underfunding of African universities, along with market-driven globalization and the neo-liberal agenda of the last 15–20 years, have seriously affected the independent and critical research

---

Secretary General of the Association of African Universities and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana for sending me, still in draft form, his very interesting manuscript *Challenges Facing African Universities-Selected Issues*, which had been presented in November 2002 at the annual ASA (African Studies Association) conference in the US.

capabilities of African universities. The principal contribution of a university to society, according to Sawyerr, can be measured by the quality of the knowledge a university generates and imparts, the habits of critical thought it institutionalizes and inculcates in its graduates, and the values of openness and democratic governance it promotes and demonstrates (Sawyerr, 2002). The quality of performance of African universities can, according to Sawyerr, be assessed through the use of indirect indicators such as:

- the caliber and commitment of the teaching and research staff,
- the range and quality of the curriculum and pedagogy, and
- the quality and extent of educational facilities, including the means of accessing traditional as well as world-wide knowledge.

Sawyerr, 2002

In his book “Educate or Perish” Ki-Zerbo (1990) presented an urgent call to educators in Africa to set immediately to the task of designing an education that is **of** Africa and **for** Africa. He acknowledged the importance of Africa’s returning to her roots, to restore the culture and true independence of Africa. He tells how the break-up of the African educational system was completed by colonial domination. The colonialists replaced the African educational system with an absolutely different system, one designed to serve the overall aim of the subjugation of the continent and its people to European needs. For African societies, education lost its functional role. By this, Ki-Zerbo does not mean that Africa should return to the system of merely informal education that was pervasive prior to colonization. Instead, he believes that the education provided must be built on African culture, on the wisdom and traditional knowledge of Africans, and on their everyday experiences.

In this article, I shall look at the formulation of higher education policies in Africa, and, more specifically, who formulates them. It is not possible to discuss higher education policies in Africa without discussing the important role of the donors and international agencies, the first and foremost being the World Bank. The World Bank’s influence—setting conditionalities and promoting the neo-liberal agenda—will be discussed below. I will also examine the effects of the renewed emphasis on basic education for the higher education sector in Africa. Two rather recent documents from the World Bank show that the Bank has been rethinking its stance on higher education in Africa and is now actually giving some emphasis to the higher education sector across the continent (World Bank, 2000; World Bank, 2002). It does not, however, acknowledge or apologize for the mistakes made during the years since it shifted its own resources

from higher to primary education and encouraged bilateral donors and African governments to do the same.

Other matters worthy of consideration are whether the terms of the Bank's recent engagement (the knowledge competitiveness argument) make sense for Africa and if and how universities in Africa can cope with the current crises. I will devote space both to the neo-liberal agenda and the link phenomenon, as well.

Towards the end of the article, I shall also look into the language policies in higher education in Africa as well as the curriculum development policies. I shall explore the link between the ordinary people of Africa and academia, examining the extent to which national or institutional policies within higher education are taking into consideration the needs, cultures, and experiences of ordinary Africans. Finally, I will look for any signs that African universities have started with what Ki-Zerbo 13 years ago saw as the immediate task of designing an education that is of Africa and for Africa.

### **Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa**

In the beginning of 1988, I was asked by the Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD) to make a critical review of *Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa – EPSSA* (1988), a World Bank publication. At that time I was a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. I had, however, started in my position just six months earlier and felt that I did not know African education well enough to be able to make this analysis on my own. Instead, I should have to rely heavily on African expertise, first and foremost that of my colleagues. I also determined it would also be necessary to elicit the views of educators in other African countries on this document. So, on Thursday, 21 January 1988, I paid a visit to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Malawi in Zomba.

On arriving at the University of Malawi, I was rather startled to discover that the Vice Chancellor was a white British man. He noticed my surprise and told me that Life President Kamuzu Banda had himself decided that the Vice Chancellors of the University of Malawi should be white British men. In Banda's opinion, these were the only leading educationalists he could trust to serve in these important positions. Still, this particular Vice Chancellor identified himself strongly with the University of Malawi and, especially, with the students and the staff.

On this particular day, he was disturbed because he had just been told that the World Bank had insisted that all book allowances to students be cut, as well as all funding for student vacation visits home. In addition, the World Bank had made it clear that students should soon have to pay for their accommodations and food. They had also been told that tuition fees might be introduced.

These were among the conditionalities that the World Bank had established in order for Malawi to get a World Bank loan for its primary school sector. The University had not asked for a loan from the Bank and had been quite proud that they had been able to run their economic affairs to the satisfaction of the students.

“How can we formulate policies for the higher education sector here in Africa when conditionalities are forced on our institutions of higher learning for loans we have not even asked for?” he asked. He was very upset and felt so sorry for the students. Strikes had, at that time, been forbidden by Lifetime President Banda, but the Vice Chancellor knew that such bad news must result in frustration and indignation among the students, since he knew that many of them could neither afford to buy books nor to go home for vacations. When it came to the policy document of the World Bank, he was extremely skeptical as he saw in it an attempt to reduce the role of higher education in Africa and give priority to primary education. “Are we not going back to colonial times?” he asked.

Together with some of my colleagues at the University of Dar es Salaam, I arranged a student–staff seminar on 28 January 1988, to discuss the *EPSSA* World Bank report. Several of them had received the report in its full text, and I had seen to it that everyone had a summary of the report, as well. The discussion was very lively. Most of my colleagues voiced strong criticism of the report. They were annoyed at the audacity of the World Bank to write education policies *for* Sub-Saharan Africa, asking me if the World Bank would write education policies *for* Norway. Certainly not. The question was well-placed.

They were annoyed at the suggestions from the World Bank that they cut back on higher education, on educational theory within teacher training, and on the already low salaries they were paying teachers. (My colleagues could not live at that time on the salaries they had at the University.) They knew that, at earlier meetings about World Bank policies for the educational sector, African policy-makers had strongly opposed the suggestion of a stagnation in enrolments in higher education. They saw, however, that this suggestion was advanced repeatedly in the *EPSSA* paper.<sup>4</sup>

The *EPSSA* paper suggests that students pay for their upkeep at the university. Furthermore, the paper also suggests cut-backs in university funding for fields like the arts and humanities, threatening exactly those fields, which, ac-

---

4 Africa’s university leadership and their apex organisation, the Association of African Universities (AAU) had consistently argued against a policy of neglect of higher education in Africa. This can be seen from the declarations at the AAU Harare Meetings of the late 1980s as well as the various statements emanating from the Association advocating much greater attention to Africa’s universities (Sawyer, 2002).

According to my colleagues, must be strengthened if an aim of higher education is to restore the African heritage. I listened well to their critiques and built my report to NORAD entirely on what my colleagues had said. A group of them read my report critically before it was sent. I remember one of them saying: "It is a wonderful analysis and critique of that World Bank report, Birgit. You have actually captured everything we said but none of us would have dared to have written that report." The others nodded. They were dependent on donor consultancies to supplement their meager salaries; the World Bank paid the best. I, on the other hand, had my salary from home and was not dependent on consultancies.

In my book *Whose Education for All?* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I ask whether there is a future for higher education in Africa after the Jomtien conference in 1990 and the formulation of the "Education for All" strategy. It has been almost thirty years since the World Bank began the process of emphasizing the importance of primary and basic (including, at first, non-formal) education in its 1974 *Education Sector Working Paper*. The Bank urged that the proportion of education lending to this sector be increased (from 11% to 27%), thus reducing the proportion going to higher education (from 40% to 30%). Although non-formal and adult education soon dropped from Bank priorities, it did prove possible over the next twenty years to raise dramatically the proportion of lending for primary education and reducing the proportion to higher education, as planned, to approximately 30% (King, 1995). The subsequent *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1980) was remarkable in that there was almost no more than a page or two of discussion on higher education in some 100 pages of text.

The thinking of the World Bank was instrumental in shaping the 1990 Jomtien conference "Education for All." At the conference, the countries in the South feared that the donor emphasis on basic education would mean a further starvation of higher education. At the Jomtien conference, a whole series of countries, therefore, were lobbying for more explicit safeguards for higher education, research, and access to high technology. The thrust of this concern was from Latin America, with other signatories coming from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe. *NORRAG News* (1990, p. 6) claims that the pressure from the developing countries led to the article quoted below, Article 8, point 2 in the World Declaration on Education for All:

Societies should also insure a strong intellectual and scientific environment for basic education. This implies improving higher education and developing scientific research. Close contact with contemporary tech-



nological and scientific knowledge should be possible at every level of education.

WCEFA, 1990, p. 8

In an evaluation of the outcomes of the EFA conference from an African perspective, Aimé Damiba, the program specialist in education and planning in UNESCO's regional office in Dakar, Senegal, concludes: "We must avoid the danger of limiting ourselves to basic education and neglecting high-level manpower training and research. It is not possible to solve the problems of Education for All without a national pool of expertise and without an indigenous capacity for research" (Damiba, 1991, p. 11). Yet many officials of Third World countries interpreted the outcomes of the Jomtien conference as a wish from the donor community to limit their own renewed efforts within the education sector to primary education and to tell developing countries to do the same. In hindsight we can see that their interpretation, unfortunately, was correct.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth mentioning that at a meeting with African vice-chancellors in Harare in 1986, the World Bank argued that higher education in Africa was a luxury. Most African countries were, according to the World Bank, better off closing universities at home and training graduates overseas. Recognizing that its call for a closure of universities was politically untenable, the Bank subsequently modified its agenda, calling for universities in Africa to be trimmed and restructured to produce only those skills that the "market" demands. Such was its agenda for university restructuring in Nigeria in the late 1980s, for instance (Mamdani, 1993). Isahaku Sadique (1995), through his analysis of the World Bank's involvement in the university sector in Nigeria, concludes that the World Bank still sees university education for Africans as a luxury. He also shows how the Bank forced the National University Commission (NUC) of Nigeria "to reallocate resources in order to shift emphasis from arts and humanities to science, engineering, and accountancy" (Sadique, 1995, p. 130). He further reports that the World Bank insisted on choosing the contractors who were to supply the needed materials (books, journals, laboratory consumables) and that all of these contractors were foreign companies.

---

5 Sawyerr (2002) mentions that the neo-liberal ideology of the World Bank was reinforced by the argument that the rates of return to basic education were so much higher than returns to university education that efficiency required that the former should attract the bulk of public resources. "This 'rate of return' argument was strongly pressed both as policy advice to African governments and as conditionalities for funding. In addition, it influenced external donors into turning away from the support of higher education in favour of basic education. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a turning away of the state and most external donors from support for the universities, resulting in the under-resourcing and general deterioration of the university sector in Africa" (Sawyerr, 2002, p. 42).

When funds to build up higher education in Africa are cut back, the dependency of Africa on studies overseas increases. African institutions of higher learning are again staffed with expatriates and people who have been trained mainly overseas and given mostly Western or, at least, non-African concepts, ideas, outlooks, and research methodologies. The brain drain from Africa will continue, and the need for expatriates will increase, when institutions of higher learning are financially starved. Sub-Saharan Africa lost 30% of its highly skilled manpower between 1960 and 1990, largely to the European Union countries. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that since the 1960s more than 50% of Africans who pursued tertiary studies in chemistry and physics in the United States never returned to Africa. On the other hand, more than 100,000 expatriates from industrialized countries in the North are employed in Africa (Bekele, 1997).

### **The World Bank on Higher Education, Lessons of their Experience**

In *Whose Education for All* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I show that the emphasis on education for all has, in reality, meant that donors willingly, and African governments unwillingly, have given a priority to investing in primary education, resulting in often drastic reductions in higher education funding. Four years after the Jomtien conference, the World Bank published the policy paper *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience* (1994). It is worth noting that, of the 152 bibliographic references mentioned in this 1994 World Bank paper, only 32 (21%) are not World Bank publications or publications of Bank staff. This fact leads one to question whose experience is meant by the subtitle "The Lessons of Experience"? The World Bank is writing about *their* experience or rather *their policies* for higher education in developing countries. Fernando Reimers (1995) is struck by the fact that even UNESCO's 1993 policy paper *Strategies for Change and Development in Higher Education* is not mentioned as a publication from which to draw lessons of experience, nor are any of the many important publications from the Eastern and Southern Africa University Research Project (ESAURP), written by African university people.

The 1994 World Bank paper on higher education is *not* a paper in defense of the higher education sector. On the contrary, it follows up the strong signals given in *the Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa (EPSSA)* report of 1988. The proposed stagnation of higher education, which can be found in the *EPSSA* paper, is also a prominent feature of the higher education paper of 1994. The safeguards that people from the South thought they had managed to get into the Jomtien declaration do not seem to have had much effect on the World Bank's position in 1994. In the *EPSSA* study, the focus on higher education was principally on the public university sector, whereas in 1994 one of the

main themes was that there should be diversification of higher education, with attention given to the whole range of private sector and non-university institutions. The neo-liberal agenda is even stronger in the 1994 paper than in the 1988 paper.

Lene Buchert (1995) asserts that any expectations that the World Bank higher education paper would defend the higher education sector against other priorities, and argue its relevance among and in relation to other sub-sectors of education, is not fulfilled. For these expectations to have been fulfilled, the document would have had to focus on the importance of both the traditional and modern goals of education. The paper would in that case have focused on higher education as a knowledge producer, a values and culture transmitter, and a capacity builder for industry and business. Instead, the lens through which higher education is seen in the Bank's document is primarily an economic one. The Bank wants to reduce government expenditures to higher education in Africa.

The British economist Christopher Colclough (1995a), however, points to the need for increased support rather than reduction in the expenditures for higher education in many developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank's paper on higher education recommended solutions that sought simultaneously to reduce costs and increase access, specifically to those areas of education that support the utilitarian purposes of the university. The following are the main policy prescriptions around which the higher education paper (World Bank, 1994) is centered:

- *A Redefined Role for the State in Higher Education.* A predominant role is given to the market in relation to the state. This ignores the fact that in most African contexts there is no local industrial dominance and no powerful private sector with which the state can share the responsibility for higher education. Moreover, as Keith Watson (1995) demonstrates in an article on redefining the role of government in higher education, in many of the key country cases (e.g., OECD countries and NICs) the state has maintained an interventionist role in the higher education sector.
- *Institutional Differentiation.* The World Bank gives a predominant role to the private sector among higher education institutions.
- *Diversification of Funding.* The Bank introduces cost-sharing measures, including user fees, university partnerships with business, privatization, and diversification of the higher education system. The assumption made by most advocates of user charges at the tertiary level is that net private returns would remain high enough, even after the imposition of fees for

higher education, to make studies a rational personal investment. Yet, as argued by Colclough (1995b), most of the evidence upon which this assumption is based uses earnings data from the 1960s and 1970s and does not accommodate the strong reductions in real earnings and earnings differentials between university graduates and other workers. This reduction in the real earnings outcomes of academic studies has been a characteristic of the 1980s in many developing countries and, especially, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- *Policy Attention to Quality, Responsiveness, and Equity.* African countries have to prove themselves worthy of Bank support for higher education, and this “worthiness” is measured by results in terms of enrolment and decreased dropout rates at the primary and secondary levels. In his criticism of the 1994 World Bank paper on higher education, Kenneth King (1995) finds that the paper presents a new conditionality: *higher education only after adequate provision of primary and secondary education.* The World Bank paper ignores the importance of a well-functioning higher education system in efforts to achieve quality at other sub-sectoral levels.

### **A Life after Jomtien for Higher Education in Africa?**

Studies after the 1990 Jomtien conference have shown that the focus of aid for education among many multilateral and bilateral donor agencies in the decade following Jomtien was increasingly shifted toward basic education. Lene Buchert (1995b, c) shows that even agencies that had previously allocated the larger proportion of their bilateral education assistance to the higher education sub-sector adopted policies in favor of basic education after the “Education for All” agenda adopted in Jomtien. This included, for example, the Italian Development Co-operation, the Dutch development agency DGIS (Diretoraat-General Internationale Samenwerking), the UK-based Overseas Development Administration (ODA—now DFID—Department for International Development), and the French Ministry of Development Cooperation.

The increase in resource allocation toward basic education is often clearly indicated by the donor agencies as being undertaken at the expense of higher education. For instance Wolfgang Kuper of the German development agency (GTZ) notes:

Since the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the promotion of higher education institutions in developing countries by Ministries of Development Co-operation has no longer been popular—at least in Germany but also in some other industrialised countries.

The promotion of basic education has been getting more emphasis—in our country initially at the expense of the promotion of higher education.

Kuper, 1998, p. 23

These policies that African governments have felt forced to adopt, partly because of donor pressure, partly because of increased enrolments in higher education coupled with limited resources, have had two direct consequences for universities in Africa:

- An increase in user fees at universities (as well as the elimination of book allowances, food allowances, and free tuition) have made the universities in Africa places of learning only for students from better-off families.
- African university people feel compelled to seek donor support for their departments, faculty, and research institutes, by building links with more affluent universities in the industrialised world. They depend on these universities for money for research, publishing their findings, keeping journals going, and training their junior staff.

As for the first point, even World Bank figures are unequivocal in showing that the majority of students in Africa—an average of about 60%—used to come from the ranks of the peasantry, workers, and small traders. These people are not likely to have the means to meet the increasing cost of university education. The natural outcome will be a decrease in enrolments and an increase in dropout rates among students from poorer family backgrounds.

In Kenya's Moi and Egerton universities, for example, with a combined population of about 6,000 students, over 2,000 students were deregistered in early May 1996 over non-payment of fees and tuition (Mazrui, 1997). These tuition "defaulters" are more likely to have come from lower- than upper-class families. According to Alamin Mazrui: "The net effect of the World Bank's structural adjustment programmes in education, therefore, is increasingly to transform the African university into a "white collar" institution in terms of the parental background of its student population" (Mazrui, 1997, p. 40). The Declaration and Action Plan for Higher Education in Africa that was adopted in Dakar in April 1997 at the African regional consultation preparatory to the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO in Paris in 1998 starts by stating that:

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 which affirms that: "Everyone has the right to education..." and that "higher education shall be accessible to all, on the basis of merit," and further recalling the Convention Against Discrimination in the field of Educa-

tion adopted by UNESCO in 1960, which calls on Member States to “make higher education accessible to all, based on individual abilities.”

Point 1, UNESCO, 1998, p. 599

The Declaration goes on to “strongly advise that the economic conditions of families be taken into consideration, and that the only criteria for access or non-access should be merit” (Point 40, UNESCO, 1998, p. 610). This, unfortunately, has proven to be no more than wishful thinking.

In an article analyzing the way policy formulations in developing countries took place in the decade from Jomtien (1990) to Dakar (2000), Rosa Maria Torres writes:

Education for All 1990–2000 was essentially a top-down movement planned, conducted and evaluated by international and national political and technocratic elites, with scant information or encouragement to participate given to citizens, even to teachers and education researchers and specialists.

Torres, 2001, p. 14

She tells how the education policy plans in this decade were drawn up by international agencies and discussed behind closed doors by a few national and international functionaries. In the decade from 1990 to 2000, the world changed fundamentally but this is, according to Torres, not reflected in the Dakar document.

In the immediate post-independence years, the small numbers enrolled in Africa’s universities tended to be drawn from different social classes and all parts of the country. Sawyerr (2002) notes that while it was never a case of equitable representation from all parts and segments, the source of the student supply was sufficiently broad for secondary schools and universities to play a role in establishing the beginnings of a truly *national* elite, an elite with some representation from the different segments of society.<sup>6</sup> He refers to recent studies which suggest that, despite explicit policy and much rhetoric on equitable access to education at all levels, the sources of recruitment into university have become even narrower during the last decade.<sup>7</sup>

6 Obvious exceptions would be situations like apartheid South Africa, where access to education was deliberately discriminatory, or others where subtle cultural or religious conditions created gender, ethnic and other barriers.

7 Sawyerr (2002) notes that while indications of this can be found in virtually all recent studies of higher education access in Africa, some of the most dramatic evidence is provided by recent reports on enrolment in Ghana, Mozambique and Uganda. Using the educational level of parents as an indicator of socio-economic origin of students and relying on survey data, Mario et al. (2001, taken from Sawyerr, 2002) found that 70% of the fathers of students at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane

As for the second consequence of the new policies mentioned above, African universities have become increasingly more dependent on support from over-seas donors. The support to the universities in Africa from the North could, in theory, come as a grant that the universities themselves could use as they wanted. This is, however, seldom the case. In a paper on North and South partnership models in the university sector, Endashaw Bekele (1997) of Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia asserts that the support his university gets from SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) is superior to other donor support. This is so because SAREC is supplying a recurrent budget of foreign currency. This is a much better form of support than the provision of equipment (which often breaks down and for which there is no budget for repairs) or research money for certain projects of limited duration.

### **In Search of the Missing Link**

In order to cope with the present situation, African institutions of higher learning have to go into link arrangements with more affluent universities in the North or seek direct support from western donors. "Experts" from the North coming to teach and distribute the Western curricula are normally part of the link phenomenon. So are books written in the West, computers from the West, and scholarships for master's and Ph.D. students to go to the West to study the curricula offered there. Rarely are provisions made for students from the North to study in the South or for professors in the South to be visiting professors teaching in the North. No wonder, then, that many academics in the South develop a Westernized outlook.

The editorial of an issue of the newsletter of the Academic Staff Assembly at the University of Dar es Salaam especially devoted to the link phenomenon discusses the dilemma surrounding university links with institutions outside the region:

The situation at the University of Dar es Salaam is a microcosm of that in the nation as a whole. Here, in the midst of filthy toilets and classrooms with broken windows and furniture, thrives the LINK phenomenon. Virtu-

---

(UEM) had secondary education or higher, compared to fewer than 3% in the general population. The figures for mothers of students were 50% as against less than 1% in the general population. Using parental tongue as an indicator revealed that Portuguese, the language of privilege in Mozambique, was the parental tongue of almost 70% of UEM students, and the means of family communication for over 60%. This compares to a figure of 9% in the general population. More specifically, the survey showed that students from more privileged backgrounds were disproportionately represented in courses of higher prestige and potential wealth (law, medicine, etc.).



ally every department, under the threat of material and intellectual starvation, has been forced to establish links with one or more institutions, mostly from the West. We depend on the links for the training of our junior staff, for teaching material and equipment, and a host of other things. The link agreements are, almost without exception, as unequal as would be expected. This is despite some efforts to include clauses suggesting reciprocity... What is primarily at stake is that as we lose confidence in our own ability to sustain our education system we shall also have to abandon the pretence of determining our educational future.

UDASA, 1990, p. 1

In the same newsletter, Sheriff (1990, p. 2) writes about the way the once proud academic community of the University of Dar es Salaam “has been brought to its knees, begging from donors and the ubiquitous ‘Links’ merely to keep on breathing.”

In 1990, the Tanzanian university teacher Karim F. Hirji came back to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Dar es Salaam after eight years of studying and working abroad. This is how he describes his experience with the link phenomenon:

As one goes around the Faculty of Medicine, one wonders whether, after a hundred years after Karl Peters landed here, a second partition of Africa is in progress or not. The Dental School seems to be run by the Finnish, the AIDS research program by the Swedes, community health programs by the Germans, with the British, Italian, Danish all having their own corners.

Hirji (1990, p. 23)

Hirji further writes that he is definitely in favor of international exchange, and that such exchange should be cultivated in any university. “However when such exchanges are solely conducted in the framework of a donor-recipient relation, what is there to guarantee that they are conducted on the basis of academic equality and mutual respect?” he asks (1990, p. 23). I shall return to this point later in this article.

The so-called “experts” and university people from the North go to Africa to teach, to “transfer” knowledge. In reality, those of us from Europe and North America may have more to learn from Africans than they have from us. The fact that we are “experts” in our own countries, for instance, in competitive sports of a Western kind, women’s law in Norway, research methods in a literate society, AIDS prevention in the North, or commercial forestry or fishery in the North Sea, for example, does not make us experts on the use of the body in Africa, women’s law in Africa, research methods among an illiterate population, the spreading of AIDS in Africa, sexual norms among various African

groups, African agro-forestry, or tropical multi-species fishery in shallow waters. Whenever there is a review of a department at an African university receiving donor support, one should ask questions like: How much has the support been given as a help to self-help, as a possibility for Africans to do research on their own culture, and how much has it been another “transfer of knowledge” project? How much do we from the North come to learn: language, culture, traditional law, and traditional medicine? How much do we listen and learn to appreciate the indigenous knowledge?

To establish a North-South co-operation in the university sector which is truly symmetrical is an accomplishment that must be regarded as utopian, given the unequal distribution of resources in this world. The mere fact that one party is giving the money and is a “donor,” while the other party receives the money and is a “recipient,” signifies a disempowering and asymmetrical relationship. I have, in other publications, examined some examples of university link arrangements between African universities and universities overseas (Brock-Utne, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2000a). Several of the examples show that Norwegian academics have been too domineering, too eager to teach or transfer knowledge and showed too little concern for a symmetrical relationship, for development of knowledge built on African roots and on contemporary African society. These are examples I happen to know. And, while they involve Norwegian academics and universities, one would have no problem finding other examples involving academics from other European or North American universities; examples which must certainly exist.

### **Increased Support to the University Sector in Africa from a Non-Apologetic Bank**

Within the last few years, the specific problems of African higher education have begun to attract serious attention, both within Africa and within the donor community. The external agencies have done some re-thinking and now acknowledge the importance of higher education within the educational sector as a whole. They now recognize that the rate-of-return analysis that was partly responsible for the emphasis on primary education was inappropriately used and acknowledge the importance of paying attention to the “public good” contribution of higher education.

The World Bank remains the World Bank, and it rarely apologizes or acknowledges a mistake,<sup>8</sup> but two recent Bank documents dramatize this change

8 The furthest it will go in apologizing is the following sentence taken from the executive summary of the *Constructing Knowledge Societies* report: “There is a perception that the Bank has not been fully responsive to the growing demand by clients for tertiary education” (World Bank, 2002, xviii). A *perception* indeed! It is much more. It is a well-documented fact, as shown above.

of emphasis. Both are major publications. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, a body of experts from 13 countries convened by the World Bank and UNESCO to explore the future of higher education in the developing world, authored the first publication, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (World Bank, 2000). The second, more recent publication is called *Constructing Knowledge Societies—Challenges for Tertiary Education* (World Bank, 2002). After over a decade of pressuring developing countries, as well as the donor community, to cut down on higher education and give priority to basic education, the World Bank appears in these two publications to realize that higher education is essential for the survival of a nation. In the words of Henry Rosovsky, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University, and Co-Chair of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society:

Higher education is the modern world's "basic education," but developing countries are falling further and further behind. It's time to drive home a new message: higher education is no longer a luxury, it is essential to survival.

The new millennium has thus started with new World Bank loans to African nations for higher education development. Apart from these new loans, agencies have also been encouraged once again to give aid to tertiary education in Africa. Sawyer (2002) mentions the agreement in April 2000 of the presidents of four American Foundations (the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation) to constitute a "Partnership to Strengthen African Universities." This Partnership proposes to provide up to US\$100 million in support of selected African universities or higher education systems over a five-year period. While some support has been committed and useful case studies commissioned, it is not wholly clear exactly how the project will work.

While the World Bank has come to realize that the African universities are essential for the development of Africa, it has not, however, changed its neo-liberal agenda or its belief that, ultimately, growth will reduce poverty. The argument is now that "strengthening the capacity of tertiary education institutions to respond flexibly to the new demands of knowledge societies will increase their contribution to poverty reduction through the long-term economic effects and the associated welfare benefits that come from sustained growth" (World Bank, 2002, p. xxxi). Today, tertiary education is given the job of reducing or alleviating poverty. At the 2000 Education for All Conference in Dakar, primary education was given that job. I agree with Rosa Maria Torres, who wrote after the Dakar conference:

The “poverty alleviation” discourse continues to be repeated over and over again, while in this very decade we reached a point where we need to ask ourselves whether the problem is to improve education in order to alleviate poverty or to rather to alleviate poverty in order to improve education and, moreover, to make education and learning possible. Trust is still placed in economic growth as the solution to social equity, while what was reaffirmed in this decade is that growth is not enough, . . . wealth is becoming ever more concentrated in a few hands.

Torres, 2001, p. 10

Rather than economic growth, we need a redistribution of resources. Rather than a reliance on the market, we need to formulate and agree on national aims and plan the economy and change to fit these aims. The so-called “Makerere miracle” in Uganda shows what can happen to a university in a poor country when it becomes governed by the market, rather than pursuing its own national plans for development.

### **The Costs of the Makerere Miracle**

Because of deteriorating terms of trade and high costs of debt servicing, the Government of Uganda did not have the funds to cover the demand for higher education by the 1980s. It bought into the solution which comes with the neo-liberal agenda: make education a commodity, sell what can be sold, privatize what can be privatized. The analysis of what happened at Makerere is interesting for two reasons:

- The restoration of the university from one that had almost fallen to pieces to a functioning institution and the way this was achieved is looked at as a miracle and a success story by the Task Force authors
- Sawyerr (2002, drawing extensively on Musisi, 2001) is much more skeptical to this miracle and asks at what costs it has been achieved.<sup>9</sup>

In 1992, the Government of Uganda allowed Makerere University to charge fees for evening courses and special programmes. Taking advantage of this, the Faculties of Law and of Commerce started evening classes exclusively for paying students. In 1995, the University Council allowed Faculties to admit fee-paying students to fill quotas not taken up by government-sponsored students. The result was that from a 1993/94 enrolment of 3,361—made up of 2,299 government-sponsored and 1,062 private students—the situation metamorphosed to a total enrolment of 14,239—made up of 1,923 government-

---

9 The following account is built on Sawyerr (2002).

sponsored and 12,316 private students—in 1999/00, with no significant increases in the resources available to the university from the government.

Through income from student fees and the small profits from commercialized units, as well as considerable donor support (estimated at around US\$5 million per annum during the period), Makerere University succeeded in reducing its dependence on government subvention. Average staff incomes rose above a “living wage,” facilitating staff retention and, indeed, the return of some who had left the university during the difficult days. The curriculum was expanded and diversified, mainly in response to demands arising from the economic and social environment. Still, both the housing and learning environments for students and the research environment for the academic staff suffered considerably under “the miracle.” The Musisi et al. (2001) study referenced by Sawyer finds it “remarkable how little attention has been paid to student welfare compared to that given to their capacity to pay and provide the university with income.” The study tells of “unbearable pressure on space, facilities and staff, as there had been little increase in physical infrastructure.” Nor had there been any “significant” increase in building space or the numbers of lecturers, despite the tripling of the student population. Not surprisingly, a report issued by the Makerere University Academic Staff Association found that

...more than half the registered students in some courses did not attend lectures because of a lack of seats and poor audibility in the lecture halls. Such insufficient facilities and high student-lecturer ratios compromise academic quality.

Sawyer, 2002, p. 56

The study itself concludes

If the problem [of insufficient facilities and staff] is not addressed, the large number of students and the resulting decline in standards pose a real danger to the quantitative achievements and innovations in admissions and programming made by Makerere over the last seven years.

Sawyer, 2002, p. 56

Income generated in the new ways goes to benefit the faculties/units that generated it and their staff. According to Sawyer (2002), “laboratory-based and facility-intensive faculties such as science and medicine do not generate as much income as the humanities because there are absolute limits on the number of students that they can accommodate,” so those “underachieving” faculties in such areas have gained little from the improved financial situation of the university. Sawyer continues his lament by stating that:

Not only does this result in severe imbalances in the distribution of “earned” revenue, it also means that the allocation of the new revenues among university activities no longer corresponds to university or national priorities, but follows the logic of the market! Is this relative under-funding of science and technology what Makerere wishes, or Uganda needs?

Sawyerr, 2002, p. 56

### **An Education that is of Africa and for Africa**

Julius Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, was one of the most prominent thinkers on education in Africa. His educational philosophy is best outlined in the 1968 publication *Education for Self-Reliance*. In it he stressed that education in Africa at any level must inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community and help the students to “accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those of our colonial past” (Nyerere, 1968, p. 52). He explained what he meant by this: “This means that the educational system of Tanzania must emphasize co-operative endeavor, not individual advancement” (Nyerere, 1968, p. 52). These values are very different from the ones now in vogue and actively promoted by Western donors, institutions, and consultants who aid them.

In its 2002 publication *Constructing Knowledge Societies*, the World Bank applauds the decision by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to offer all its courses free of charge on the web. This may be more worthy of praise if there was some reciprocity in it. What Africa needs is to develop its own courses, research, and publications, more directly suited to situations in Africa. The World Bank also applauds the agreement among six leading publishers of medical journals in the industrialised countries to give free access to their journals to more than 600 institutions in the 60 poorest countries. Laudable as this may be, it does not attack the problem of publishing in Africa, or the lack of medical journals tackling Africa specific problems, or other problems or interests most specifically aimed at Africa and African needs.

A book by Kenneth King and Simon McGrath (2002) on education, training, and development in Africa examines this issue further and came out of work on the “Learning to Compete” project commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Department For International Development (DFID). The project developed a partnership amongst researchers in the following three African countries: Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, as well as with researchers in Scotland. Strategies for the Africans to survive in the current world, must, according to King and McGrath, become strategies to compete better in markets increasingly impacted by globalization. The authors hold the position that glo-

balization leads to a competitiveness that will be based on the knowledge and skills possessed and utilized by individuals, enterprises, and nations. The core theme of the book is what the authors call “learning-led competitiveness.” The authors are of the opinion that “at the core of the globalization message is the argument that pockets of activity isolated from the global market are rapidly diminishing. It is essential, therefore, that policy interventions and projects that seek to help the poor survive better are closely intertwined with policies for competitiveness” (King and McGrath, 2002, p. 11).

When the authors write about skills, they are primarily writing about what they call “high level skills” or “core learning skills” which are requirements for knowledge workers. These are the skills that, according to the authors, knowledge workers in Africa need to acquire in order to compete in the current process of knowledge-driven globalization. Rote learning, they claim, is irrelevant in the information age. They find that there is a need to do away with rote learning and embrace the core learning skills forms a major part of the debate surrounding the South African introduction of Curriculum 2005, as well as what they term outcomes-based education, which can also be seen to a lesser extent in both Kenya and Ghana.

The authors do not seem to criticize the value of competition or ask how it, if at all, can be reconciled with the cooperative endeavors that still are important values in Africa. They do not ask the questions: Whose knowledge are we talking about? Knowledge developed by whom to profit whom? King and McGrath (2002) do not use their work to attempt to explain why rote learning is going on in most African classrooms and even universities, but this is a concern that deserves further consideration.

For some of us who have visited many classrooms and lecture halls in countries across Africa, the rote learning situation of students is a familiar phenomenon. In lecture halls, I have seen how students take down every word the teacher says and copy notes, which they then try to memorize. The situation is partly caused by the fact that there is a scarcity of textbooks. Often the only textbook that exists is the one the teacher or professor reads from and uses when s/he writes notes on the blackboard. My daughter, who studied for one year at the University of Dar es Salaam, experienced a situation where none of the books mentioned on the reading list was available in the bookstore. Normally, just one copy of the books were available in the library. That copy was put on special reserve, and one could check it out for one hour. In one instance, after having waited a very long time to take out the book from the reserve desk, she eventually got hold of the book only to find that the chapter which was required reading had been torn out of the book.



### The Language Issue at African Universities

Another very important reason that underpins why rote learning exists and flourishes in African education has to do with the fact that teachers are forced to teach, and learners to learn, in a language they do not command well. This situation begs serious and important questions about issues surrounding language in higher education. How can you develop skills of abstraction and system thinking if you are required to do this in an unfamiliar language? How can you develop the ability to communicate if you are forced to communicate in a language you do not command (Brock-Utne, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2001 (Ed.); Brock-Utne et al., (Eds.), 2003; Prah, 2003)?

In the 1990 UNESCO-UNICEF publication *African Thoughts on the Prospects of Education for All*, the African educationist Babs Fafunwa wrote:

We impart knowledge and skills almost exclusively in foreign languages, while the majority of our people, farmers, and craftsmen perform their daily tasks in Yoruba, Hausa, Wolof, Ga, Igbo, Bambara, Kiswahili, etc.... The question is: Why not help them to improve their social, economic, and political activities via their mother tongue? Why insist on their learning English or French first before modern technology could be introduced to them?

Fafunwa, 1990, p. 103

The use of a foreign language as language of instruction is also a grave problem at the university. Even in an African country like Tanzania, where all the students and lecturers communicate in Kiswahili outside of the classroom, the language of instruction and exam writing is English.

In 1997, the Tanzanian researcher Grace Puja interviewed 34 second-year female students as well as 22 university teachers in connection with her Ph.D. research. She explains in a forthcoming article that her interest in the role of Kiswahili in Tanzanian higher education was prompted by some of the findings of this study (Puja, 2002). She had written her interview guide in English, since she was taking her Ph.D. in Canada and had expected to conduct the research in English. Her interview subjects had, after all, had English as the language of instruction for eight years. She found, however, that most of the Tanzanian female undergraduates that she interviewed asked if they could have the interview in Kiswahili. As a result, she then let them choose the language in which they would like to be interviewed, and only 8 of the 34 subjects chose to be interviewed in English, with the rest preferring Kiswahili. Among the eight who chose English were several of Asian descent. Most of the university teachers Puja interviewed stated that most of their students were not competent in either

spoken or written English. This is an observation Puja made during her field-work:

During class observations and during my visits at the three University campuses, I noted that most students (male and female) do not speak in class [where the medium of instruction is English] but as soon as the class is over, both teachers and students switch to Kiswahili and communicate freely.

Puja, 2002, p. 1

Today, no university in Sub-Saharan Africa has an indigenous African language as the language of instruction. The languages of instruction at the universities in Sub-Saharan Africa are European languages: English, French, Portuguese, Dutch<sup>10</sup> (in South Africa), and Italian (when the university in Somalia was still functioning).<sup>11</sup> Ali Mazrui (1996) argues that the choice of European languages as the media of instruction in African universities has had profound cultural consequences for the societies served by those universities. He gives as an example professional Japanese scientists who can organize a conference and discuss professional matters entirely in Japanese. (He could have also mentioned Korean, German, Norwegian, or Finnish scientists who do the same.) Mazrui states: “But a conference of African scientists, devoted to scientific matters, conducted primarily in an African language, is for the time being sociologically impossible” (Mazrui, 1996, p. 4).

Generally, Mazrui is correct when he maintains that almost all black African intellectuals conduct their most sophisticated conversations in European languages. “It is because of this that intellectual and scientific dependency in Africa is inseparable from linguistic dependency” (Mazrui, 1996, p. 4). Mazrui quotes Jomo Kenyatta in the old colonial Kenya, who said: “When the white man came to Africa he had the Bible and we had the land. And now? We have the Bible and he has the land” (ibid., p. 5). Culture, including language, was offered in exchange for material goods. The West exported its ideas and languages and imported Africa’s riches.

In its publication on higher education, the World Bank (1994) does not even mention the language question. For the further growth and development

10 Afrikaans, the language of the Boers and also the Coloured of South Africa is, according to Dutch people I have talked with in South Africa, 95% Dutch.

11 In Somalia the language of instruction in all the faculties except the Faculty of Education was Italian (even though the language of instruction in primary school was Somali and in secondary school English) because the University got development aid from Italy. The Faculty of Education was, however, sponsored by the Americans and therefore English was the language of instruction there (Personal communication from Hassan Keynan from Somalia, who attended my “Education in Africa” seminar while in Norway, see also Warsame, 2001).

of a language, its use as language of instruction at higher levels is of fundamental importance. The West African educational researcher Adama Ouane from Mali, now the Director of the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg, Germany has accurately observed:

Unless these languages (the indigenous African languages) can step beyond the door of primary schooling, and face the challenges of secondary and higher education, with increased number of subjects to deal with, their modernization will be achieved only half-way.

Ouane, 1991, p. 10

At the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, however, there is one department and one institute that use an African language as the language of instruction: the Department of Kiswahili and the Institute of Kiswahili Research. Referring to the history of the Department of Kiswahili, Zaline Makini Roy-Campbell (1992a, 1992b) counters the frequently heard argument that African languages do not have a vocabulary that is developed enough to be languages of scholarship and instruction at higher levels in the educational system. She holds that this department gives a good practical example of the coinage of technical words which was undertaken in the process of changing from English to Kiswahili as the medium of instruction.

Prior to 1970, the courses in this department were also taught in English. There were no Kiswahili terms for guttural sounds and phonemes, nor terms even for linguistics and vocabulary. Once the decision was made to teach the courses in the Department of Kiswahili in Kiswahili, however, words were developed in the process of teaching and were later standardized. Some words were used side by side as synonyms. English terminologies were used until Kiswahili terms were developed. Some English terms became Kiswahili-ized and some terms were found in some of the other languages of Tanzania. The process of creating new words was done with the assistance of all teachers in the Department of Kiswahili and the Institute for Kiswahili Research. This example illustrates the fact that a language develops and grows through use.

### **The Link that Is Really Missing**

At the installation of the University of Zambia on 12 July 1966, President Kenneth Kaunda gave an address in which he stressed that the people of Zambia had every reason to be very proud of their university. "The University of Zambia is our own university in a very real sense," he said. He told how the ordinary people of Zambia helped to build the university:

Humble folk in every corner of our nation—illiterate villagers, bare-footed school-children, prison inmates and even lepers—gave freely and willingly everything they could, often in the form of fish or maize or chickens. The reason for this extraordinary response was that our people see in the university the hope of a better and fuller life for their children and grand-children.

Kaunda, 1966, taken from Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996, p. 1

In their book *The African Experience with Higher Education*, Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) state that the address by Kaunda at the inauguration of the University of Zambia captured the communal pride and identity, which everywhere initially greeted the coming of the University to Africa. But they wonder about “the real sense” in which the African people can now claim the African universities to be “their very own.”

Again and again the people dance to welcome the University and bring their fishes and best wishes on the day of inauguration but, if they ventured to show up at the gates on the day after inauguration, they find that no-one there knows their name or understands their language.

Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996, p. 1

Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) present the debate about what constitutes the African university and how to make the University the “very own University of African peoples” as central to the African experience with higher education. Xabier Gorostiaga, former rector of the University of Central America (UCA) in Managua, Nicaragua, is concerned with the same question when it comes to the situation of Latin American universities:

What, then does it mean to train “successful” professionals in this sea of poverty? Does an institution that does not confront the injustice surrounding it, that does not question the crisis of a civilization that is ever less universalizable to the great majorities of the world, merit the name “university”? Would not such an institution be simply one more element that reproduces this unequal system?

Gorostiaga, 1993, p. 29

What is really missing in most of the universities in the South is the link between academia and the ordinary people.

Values and knowledge creation, particularly through independent and basic research, is critically important in order to develop the African continent as a creator of science and technology and not simply a consumer of imported versions. This knowledge creation has to be produced together with the local people. Examples of the missing link between local and university know-how can be

found in most departments in all of the universities in Africa. University know-how has come about through studying texts that are relevant in the North but not necessarily in the South.

Xabier Gorostiaga (1993) writes about professors of business administration in the South who cannot research businesses of twenty workers because such businesses do not use the sophisticated accounting systems that they studied in the texts from the North and which are used by only a small minority of factories in the South. In countries where the immense majority of farms belong to small and medium-sized growers, some professors of agricultural administration are only comfortable with the business and state administration schemes that they know from the Harvard manuals.

The missing link is between the universities and the masses of people in Africa, between the macro (policies adopted, though often unwillingly, by national governments) and the micro (local experiences). There is a lack of what Gorostiaga calls “people-bridges” capable of creating communication links among different local experiences, of promoting experimentation among them, or of pushing viable national programs based on their successes. Aklilu Habte, the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Addis Ababa stated that:

The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but one growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil.

quoted in Karani, 1998, p. 117

### **Attention to Local Knowledge**

Even the Jomtien declaration mentions the need to base curricula in the South on local knowledge. The preamble to the World Declaration on Education for All (WCEFA, 1990) states that “traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development.” In light of the “Education for All” emphasis, Professor Komba of the University of Dar es Salaam stresses the need to “analyze the possibilities to revive and use dying traditional learning systems in various tribes” in an assessment of the Tanzanian “education for self-reliance” policy (Komba, 1996, p. 6). In the book *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education* (Teasdale and Ma Rhea, eds., 2000) I have probed further into the issue of transforming African universities by using indigenous perspectives and local experience (Brock-Utne, 2000b, see also Brock-Utne, 2002).

To me, the fundamental question is: How is it at all possible to reconstruct the curriculum of African schools, to root it in African culture, without a significant emphasis on indigenous research, preferably by African scholars who

are clearly African-based in their outlook? Ali Mazrui (1978, p. 352) notes that “the full maturity of African education will come only when Africa develops a capacity to innovate independently.” This independent innovation may incorporate elements from the West but must be based in African roots.

In his book on academic freedom in Africa, Ali Mazrui notes that any academic freedom in Africa is being devalued by intellectual dependency:

It was not the traditional African that resembled the ape; it was the more Westernized one, fascinated by the West’s cultural mirror. A disproportionate number of these cultural “apes” were and continue to be products of universities. Those African graduates who have become university teachers themselves have on the whole remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the West. African historians have begun to innovate methodologically as they have grappled with oral traditions, but most of the other disciplines are still condemned to paradigmatic dependency. This includes those African scholars who discovered Karl Marx just before Europe abandoned him.

Mazrui, 1994, p. 119

Staf Callewaert, who has done extensive research in Namibia, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, tries to explain why one seldom finds African researchers questioning Western schooling as such: “As a rule you cannot expect the educated African to use much energy to reconstruct and problematize the break, by which he or she became exactly what they are: educated in a modern Western sense of the word” (Callewaert, 1994, p. 108).

According to the Tanzanian biologists Adelaida Semesi and Felister Urassa (1991), many African women have accumulated knowledge about some of the causes and effects of crop failures and spoiled food and have devised ways to overcome such problems. Some solutions work very well. Moreover, village women are great science teachers in the fields of agriculture, medicine, and food technology, and they pass their knowledge on to their children, friends, and neighbors through practical training. A mother will show the children how to select and plant seeds, weed, and identify pests, and she will even explain about the different soils suitable for the different crops. She will also talk about food processing and food preservation, for instance, through drying or smoking meat.<sup>12</sup>

12 Since much of this knowledge is not documented, it is not easily developed or challenged. As a consequence the accumulated knowledge is seldom consulted to develop a better understanding of the environment. This can be illustrated by the Kongwa groundnut scheme, which failed because local people were not consulted to assess the suitability of the soils and reliability of the climate to cultivate groundnuts (Semesi and Urassa, 1991).

Lancy (1996) points to sensitive and open-minded research by ecological anthropologists in recent years which has shown that the kind of subsistence practices followed by slash-and-burn horticulturalists, such as the Kpelle people in Liberia, instead of being inefficient, are wonderfully adapted to the local ecology. He sees Western aid, whether in the area of agriculture or schooling, as something that destroys the original culture and sets the Kpelle society on to the *Kwii* way. (*Kwii* in the Kpelle language is a general term that refers to Westerners and Liberians who dress and talk like Westerners, live in towns, participate in the cash economy, and so on.) In order to avoid African societies going further on the *Kwii* way, according to Lancy, African universities need to pursue research based on local experience in collaboration with the people of Africa.<sup>13</sup> What is most needed now is for African researchers to be able to develop academic fields from African roots.

Archie Mafeje (1992), writing on the indigenization of intellectual discourse in Africa, reminds African intellectuals of the guiding principle in Socratic thought: "Know thyself." Looking at African philosophical thought, he finds grounds for reconstruction and self-realization. He sees that unwritten accounts, transmitted in stories, legends, myths, and so on reflect African philosophical thought in various ways and are sources of high significance and authenticity. In an article on the teaching of philosophy in African universities, Kwasi Wiredu (1984) laments:

An African may learn philosophy in a Western institution of higher learning abroad or at home and become extremely adroit in philosophical disputation; he may even be able to make original contributions in some branch of philosophy. The fact remains that he would be engaged in Western, not African philosophy. Surprisingly, many Africans accept this; they have even seemed to take it as a matter of course.... The usual practice seems to reserve all references to African conceptions to classes on African philosophy. As far as the main branches of philosophy are concerned, African philosophical ideas might just as well be non-existent. This trend, I suggest, ought to be reversed.

Wiredu, 1984, pp. 31–32

Wiredu makes himself a spokesperson for the strategy of "counter-penetration." This strategy is meant to impress upon the world that it has something to learn from Africa, that in the global culture that is evolving, the West would do

---

13 In my book, *Whose Education for All?* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I have shown that in the fields of African languages, culture, and dances; physical education; philosophy; law, and environmental studies Africa has a lot to offer.



well to listen to Africa.<sup>14</sup> It is a strategy also mentioned by Ali Mazrui (1978, p. 350), who raises the question whether African universities that have been so permeated by Western culture in turn can affect Western thoughts and values. Mazrui thinks this is possible and outlines his strategies of domestication, diversification, and counterpenetration (Mazrui, 1978). The balance of cultural trade between the North and the South has to be restored. The strategy will not work, however, unless Africa builds on its own foundation and stops mimicking the West. Neither will it work before Africa is allowed to work out its own educational policies instead of being forced to adopt those worked out by the World Bank or by donors overseas.

Pai Obanya (1999), for many years the Director of the UNESCO regional office for West Africa, BREDA, located in Dakar, Senegal, writes that successful future prospects for higher education in Africa will require African countries to formulate their own national policies on higher education. These policies should, according to Obanya, follow certain systematic steps. They must first contain statements about what type of learning should be undertaken, “what types of activity are of the greatest worth, and how should these be reflected in higher education?” (Obanya, 1999, p. 548). After an agreement has been reached on such issues a statement of the qualities expected of academic and other staff must follow. According to Obanya (1999, p. 549): “Higher education in Africa in the years to come has to be guided by national policies, which are understood and accepted by the populations it is supposed to serve.” But, as we have seen above, the Makerere “miracle” has not been guided by national policies but by advice from the World Bank and the neo-liberal agenda it adheres to. This agenda makes it difficult for any country to govern according to national policies.

I agree with Obanya, Wiredu, and Mazrui that African researchers need to develop national policies of higher education and develop academic fields from African roots. The West can help by showing interest in the endeavor, giving economic support, and no longer sending so-called “experts” who come to teach and not to learn. These experts or consultants often have the audacity to impose Western culture on a defenseless continent that is now lost because of colonial and neo-colonial interventions, a continent that needs to return to a familiar point—its own roots—before rushing on.

---

14 There is much the West could learn from the black people of Africa about leading a good and harmonious life, taking care of each other and the beloved dead ones, respecting the wisdom of older people and being one with nature and the spiritual world.

## References

- Ajayi, Ade J.F., Goma, Lameck K.H., & Johnson, G. Ampah. (1996). *The African Experience with Higher Education*. Accra: The Association of African Universities. London: James Currey.
- Bekele, Endashaw. (1997) The North and South partnership models, and views for partnership in the Future. Paper submitted to the Norwegian Council of Universities Committee for Development Research and Education (NUFU) on a conference entitled: "Partnership models, experiences and trends so far and views for partnership in the Future." University of Tromsø, Norway, June 3–4, 1997.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. (1999). African universities and the African heritage. *International Review of Education*, 45(1), 87–104.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. (2000a). *Whose Education for All? The Recolonization of the African Mind*. New York/London: Falmer Press.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. (2000b). Transforming African universities using indigenous perspectives and local experience. In G.R. Teasdale & Z. Ma Rhea (Eds), *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education* (pp. 153–169). New York: Pergamon Press.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. (2001, March). Education for all—in whose language? *Oxford Review of Education*. 27(1), 115–134.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit (Ed.). (2001). Special issue on globalisation, language and education. *International Review of Education*, 3–4.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. (2002). Stories of the hunt—Who is writing them? In Catherine Odora Hoppers (Ed.), *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems. Towards a Philosophy of Articulation* (pp. 237–257). Pretoria: New Africa Books.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit, Desai, Zubeida, & Qorro, Martha (Eds.). (2003). *The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*. Dar es Salaam: E & D Publishers (in press).
- Buchert, Lene. (1995a). Introduction. In Lene Buchert & Kenneth King (Eds.), *Learning from Experience: Policy and Practice in Aid to Higher Education* (pp. 9–17). *CESO Paperback, No.24*. The Hague: CESO.
- Buchert, Lene. (1995b). Current foreign aid patterns and policies on education in developing countries among some like-minded nations: Some key issues. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 39(1), 61–74.
- Buchert, Lene. (1995c). The concept of education for all: What has happened after Jomtien? *International Review of Education*. 41(6), 537–549.
- Callewaert, Staf. (1994). Are African pupils different? Paul Riesman's contribution to ethno-pedagogics. In Karsten Schnack (Ed.), *Export of Curriculum and Educational Ideas* (pp. 99–129). Didaktiske studier. *Studies in Educational Theory and Curriculum*, 14. Copenhagen: Royal Danish School of Educational Studies.
- Colclough, Christopher. (1995a). Diversifying the funding of tertiary institutions: Is the Bank's agenda the right one? In Lene Buchert & Kenneth King (Eds.), *Learning from Experience: Policy and Practice in Aid to Higher Education* (pp. 145–157). *CESO Paperback, No.24*. The Hague: CESO.

- Colclough, Christopher. (1995b). Raising the private costs of public schooling. The user-fees debate. In Birgit Brock-Utne (Ed.), *States or markets? Neo-liberal solutions in the educational policies of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Proceedings from a seminar. *Rapport Nr.3*. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research, 39–79.
- Damiba, Aimé. (1991, March). The world conference on education for all and Africa's expectations. *UNESCO AFRICA*, 8–11.
- Fafunwa, Babs A. (1990). Using national languages in education: A challenge to African educators. In: UNESCO-UNICEF, *African Thoughts on the Prospects of Education for All*. Selections from papers commissioned for the Regional Consultation on Education for All, Dakar 27–30 November 1989, 97–110.
- Gorostiaga, Xabier. (1993, July). New times, new role for universities of the South. *Envio: The Monthly Magazine of Analysis on Central America*, 12(144), 29–40.
- Hirji, Karim. (1990, February). Academic pursuit under the link. *UDASA Newsletter/Forum*, No.10, 11–26. Issued by University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly.
- Howell, C. (2002). The Implications of the White Paper 6 for Higher Education in South Africa: Developing a Programme of Action. Consultative document prepared for the Directorate on Inclusive Education, National Department of Education.
- Karani, Florida. (1998). Relevance of higher education: Policies and practices. In UNESCO, *Higher Education in Africa: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects* (pp. 109–129). Dakar: UNESCO Regional Office, BREDa.
- King, Kenneth. (1995). World Bank traditions of support to higher education and capacity-building: Reflections on 'Higher education: The lessons of experience.' In Lene Buchert & Kenneth King (Eds.), *Learning from Experience: Policy and Practice in Aid to Higher Education* (pp. 19–41). *CESO Paperback*, 24. The Hague: CESO.
- King, Kenneth & McGrath, Simon. (2002). *Globalisation, Enterprise and Knowledge Education, Training and Development in Africa*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Ki-Zerbo, Joseph. (1990). *Educate or Perish. Africa's Impass and Prospects*. Dakar: BREDa with WCARO (UNESCO-UNICEF -West-Africa).
- Komba, Donatus. (1996). Education for self-reliance revisited in light of the world declaration on education for all. *Papers in Education and Development*, No.17, 1–7.
- Kuper, Wolfgang. (1998, October, 23–25). The end of development cooperation in the universities? *NORRAG NEWS*, No.23.
- Lancy, David. (1996). *Playing on the Mother-Ground. Cultural Routines for Children's Development*. New York/London: The Guilford Press.

- Mafeje, Archie. (1992). African philosophical projections and prospects for the indigenisation of political and intellectual discourse. *Seminar Paper Series, No.7*. Harare: Sapes Books.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. (1993). University crisis and reform: A reflection on the African experience. *Review of African Political Economy, No.58*, 7–19.
- Mazrui, Ali. (1978). *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mazrui, Ali. (1994). The impact of global changes on academic freedom in Africa: A preliminary assessment. In Mamadou Diouf & Mahmood Mamdani (Eds.), *Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 118–141). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Mazrui, Ali. (1996). Perspective: The muse of modernity and the quest for development. In Philip Altbach & S.H. Hassan (Eds.), *The Muse of Modernity. Essays on Culture and Development in Africa* (pp. 1–18). Trenton, NJ: RICA World Press.
- Mazrui, Alamin. (1997, January-March). The World Bank, the language question and the future of African education. *Race & Class. A Journal for Black and Third World Liberation*, 38(3), 35–49.
- Musisi, Nakanyike B., & Muwanga, Nansozi (2001). *Makerere University in Transition, 1993–2000: Opportunities and Challenges*. Kampala. (Unpublished). *Norrag News*. (June 1990). Published at the University of Edinburgh.
- Nyerere, Julius. (1968). Education for self-reliance. (Issued in March 1967) In *Ujamaa, Essays on Socialism* (pp. 44–76). Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press.
- Obanya, Pai. (1999). *The Dilemma of Education in Africa*. Dakar: UNESCO Regional Office, BREDA.
- Ouane, Adama. (1991). Language standardization in Mali. In Utta von Gleich & Wolff Ekkehard (Eds.), *Standardization of National Languages. UIE-Reports. No.5*, 1–11. Symposium on Language Standardization, 2–3 February 1991. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute of Education. (Joint publication with the Research Centre for Multilingualism and Language Contact, University of Hamburg).
- Puja, Grace Khwaya. (2002). Kiswahili and higher education in Tanzania: Reflections based on a sociological study from the University of Dar es Salaam. First presented as a paper at the LOITASA launch in Morogoro, Tanzania 21–24 April, 2002. To be published in Birgit Brock-Utne, Zubeida Desai & Martha Qorro (Eds.), *The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*. Dar es Salaam: E&D publishers.
- Prah, Kwesi Kwaa. (2003). Going native: Language of instruction for education, development and African emancipation. First presented as a keynote lecture at the LOITASA launch in Morogoro, Tanzania, 21–24 April, 2002. To be published in Birgit Brock-Utne, Zubeida Desai, & Martha Qorro (Eds.), *The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*. Dar es Salaam: E & D Publishers.

- Reimers, Fernando. (1995, May). Higher education. The lessons of experience. Book Review. *Comparative Education Review*, 39(2), 245–247.
- Roy-Campbell, Zaline Makini. (1992a). The politics of education in Tanzania: From colonialism to liberalization. In Horace Campbell & Howard Stein (Eds.), *Tanzania and the IMF: The Dynamics of Liberalization* (pp. 147–169). Oxford: Westview Press.
- Roy-Campbell, Zaline Makini. (1992b). Power or pedagogy: Choosing the medium of instruction in Tanzania. *Ph.D. Thesis*. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 304 pp.
- Sadique, Isahaku. (1995). The image of the World Bank within Nigerian Universities. In Birgit Brock-Utne (Ed.), *States or Markets? Neo-liberal Solutions in the Educational Policies of Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 108–135). Proceedings from a seminar. *Rapport Nr.3*. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research.
- Sawyer, Akilagpa. (2002). Challenges facing African Universities. Selected Issues. Unpublished study presented at the 2002 ASA (African Studies Association) conference.
- Semesi, Adelaida & Urassa, Felister. (1991, April). Educating female scientists in Tanzania. In Birgit Brock-Utne & Naomi Katunzi, (Eds.), *Women and Education in Tanzania. Twelve Papers from a Seminar* (pp. 124–135). *WED-Report 3*. Dar es Salaam.
- Sheriff, A. (1990, February). Incentive schemes, SCOPO, and the need for a living wage. *UDASA Newsletter/Forum*, No. 10, 2–10. Issued by University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly.
- Teasdale, G.R & Rhea, Z. Ma (Eds). (2000). *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Torres, Rosa Maria. (2001). What happened at the World Education Forum? *Adult Education and Development*, No. 56. *IIZ-DVV*, 1–14.
- UDASA. (1990, February). The squeeze of education. *UDASA Newsletter/Forum*. No. 10. Issued by University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly.
- UNESCO. (1998). *Higher Education in Africa: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects* Dakar: UNESCO Regional Office, BREDA.
- Warsame, Ali. (2001). How a strong government backed an African language: The lessons of Somalia. *International Review of Education. Special Issue on Globalisation, Language and Education*, Nos. 3–4, 341–360.
- Watson, Keith. (1995). Redefining the role of government in higher education: how realistic is the World Bank's prescription? In Lene Buchert & Kenneth King (Eds.), *Learning from Experience: Policy and Practice in Aid to Higher Education* (pp. 125–145). *CESO Paperback*, No. 24. The Hague: CESO.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. (1984). *Philosophical Research and Training in Africa: Some Suggestions*. Paris: UNESCO.
- World Bank. (1974). *Education Sector Working Paper*. 3rd Ed. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

- World Bank. (1980). *Education Sector Policy Paper*. 3rd Ed. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- World Bank. (1988). *Education Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa: Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion*. Report No. 6934: Document of the World Bank. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- World Bank. (1994). *Higher Education. The Lessons of Experience*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- World Bank. (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*. Washington, DC: The World Bank Global Joint Task Force.
- World Bank. (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- World Declaration on Education for All*. (WCEFA), New York: April 1990.

---

## Failed or Self-Hindering Prophecies? Employment Experiences of African Graduates in the 1990s

Alexis-Michel Mugabushaka,<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Teichler,<sup>2</sup> and Harald Schomburg<sup>3</sup>

---

### Abstract

The 1980s brought about sweeping and far-reaching structural changes in many African countries, which greatly affected the higher education sector. Though, the task of training the professional and political elite had been achieved in the previous decades, early reforms now faced new challenges. Concerns were raised that, without substantial new reforms, there may be a mismatch between higher education and the labor market, leading to massive unemployment among graduates, a tedious transition process from higher education to the labour market, and the underemployment of highly skilled laborers in low-skill jobs. This article uses survey data, conducted in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda to examine the basis of such concerns.

### Résumé

L'Afrique a subi dans les années 80 des vastes et profonds changements structurels qui ont affecté entre autre le secteur de l'éducation supérieure. Les institutions de l'enseignement supérieur ayant accompli leur mission initiale de former une élite professionnelle et une génération de dirigeants, des nouveaux défis se faisaient sentir. Les observateurs remarquaient que sans de reformes majeurs, il pouvait y avoir un déséquilibre dans les relations entre l'éducation supérieur et le marché du travail, avec les risques du chômage pour les diplômés ainsi qu'une période transitoire (entre l'éducation supérieure au marché du travail) difficile et une sous-utilisation

---

1 Alexis-Michel Mugabushaka is a Research Associate at the Center for Research on Higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, Germany. E-mail: mugabo@hochschulforschung.uni-kassel.de.

2 Ulrich Teichler is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Research on Higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, Germany. E-mail: teichler@hochschulforschung.uni-kassel.de.

3 Harald Schomburg is a Senior Researcher at the Center for Research on Higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, Germany. Email: schomburg@hochschulforschung.uni-kassel.de.



des connaissances et compétences acquises. Cet article analyse les résultats d'une des enquêtes réalisées au *Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzanie, et Uganda* pour examiner les bases de ces inquiétudes.

### Introduction

At the climax of African independence, a broad consensus held that the most urgent task faced by the newly independent countries was to provide economic development and bring about "social modernization." All sectors of society and state were legitimated, and the resources devoted to them justified, by the role that they could (and should) play in national development. The educational sector was seen as the cornerstone in this process.

The overriding idea about higher education was that it had to be a lever of national development, both by contributing to it and shaping it. This idea can be summed up as the idea of the "developmental university," which was pervasive in the 1960s and 1970s. This approach, found scattered throughout writings of political thinkers (Nyerere, 1968; Nkrumah, 1985) and scholars (Yesufu, 1973), follows two basic principles.

First, higher education institutions (HEIs) were expected to train the professional and political elite needed to replace the colonial civil servants and to take up the administration posts in the growing number of public and parastatal organizations. Secondly, HEIs were to play a crucial role in shaping national development. The African university had to "decolonize" its contents and be relevant in addressing the genuine needs and solving the real-life problems of the newly independent nations.

In the mid-80s, the justifications set forth to legitimate the "developmental university" were being re-examined. Educational economists submitted the idea that higher education was too expensive and its return rate too low (Psacharopoulos, 1985). Development theories also criticized higher education as being too "elitist," and the resources committed to it were seen as not being spent on a broader education from which the majority of people in developing countries could profit. An appeal for a reorientation of the focus towards basic and mid-level vocational education developed from these concerns. At the same time, the higher education sector was feeling the effects of the economic decline of the "lost decade." The financial endowments of HEIs across Africa fell dramatically, resulting in the deterioration of the student welfare system and a decrease in quality standards (World Bank 1984).

In this context, the basic tenet of investing in higher education in order to support professional preparation was called into question. HEIs have been credited with achieving the goal of training the professional elite needed to run the country. According to the World Bank's William Saint "the initial task of pro-

ducing professionals to lead and manage the institutions of governments has been largely accomplished” (Saint, 1992, p. 4). But, it was feared that the higher education systems may no longer be suitable to face the emerging challenges. Concerns were expressed that “... in a context of general economic crisis, with the civil service no longer providing jobs for graduates of Higher Education and the private sector offering very little prospect of employment for those completing classical university courses, a serious problem arose concerning the relevance of higher education and training, in relation to the needs” (Toure, 1998, p. 165).

The empirical basis for the articulated fears and the pessimistic scenarios being drawn is arguably thin. Graduate surveys—the instrument par excellence for scrutinizing such issues—were rarely conducted in the mid-1980s. The findings of the surveys conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the International Institute for Educational Planning concerning the relationships between higher education and work change at that time (Sanyal, 1987) had to be updated.

A comparative analysis of 10 graduate surveys, conducted between 1996 and 1997 in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda can help to examine the substance of those concerns. This analysis attempts to answer the following two major questions:

- Did the massive unemployment among graduates and the predicted tedious transition process from higher education into the world of work actually materialize?
- Were graduates led to accept positions not suitable for the highly skilled?

### **Methodology of the Study**

The present analysis is based on graduate surveys conducted under the auspices of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in its Study Programme on Higher Education Management in Africa (Sawyer, 2000). The AAU provided financial support to 10 research teams to conduct the surveys in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda. The research reports of the individual studies are in the process of being published by the AAU.

### ***The Single Studies***

In Nigeria, four surveys were conducted. Omoifo (1999) studied the early achievements of the graduates of all faculties of the University of Benin, who had graduated with a Bachelor’s degree between 1981 and 1991. Omotosho (2000) surveyed the graduates from the University of Ilorin of all study levels, from Bachelor’s degree to Ph.D. Anyanwu (2000) set the focus of her study on the transition of arts, agriculture, and education graduates of the University of

Nigeria from higher education into employment. Ugwuonah's study (2000) differs from the others in that its focus is not on graduates of a single institution but includes graduates of HEIs in both Enugu and Anambra, two states in the southern Nigeria.

The Ghanaian Study conducted by Djangmah (1999) deals with graduates of the University of Ghana, the University of Science and Technology, and the University of Cape. In Uganda, the study carried out by Mayanja (1999) compares the professional situations of the graduates of the Faculty of Arts with the Faculty of Sciences of Makerere University. Kaijage (2000) studied the knowledge and skills in the job market of graduates of the Faculty of Commerce and Management of the University of Dar es Salaam. Zembere (2000) examined the career patterns of the graduates of the University of Malawi. In Kenya, two studies conducted in two different universities were confined to the graduates of the Education Department: Kimani (2001) at Nairobi University and Karugu (2000) at Moi University.

### ***Sampling and Tracing Strategies***

Among these studies, there are differences in the way the graduates were sampled and traced. In three of the studies, no specific sampling was made. Omotosho (2000), Zembere (2000), and Kimani (2001) targeted their surveys on all of the graduates of the chosen faculties. In the remaining seven studies, the researchers used the stratified sampling method. This sampling strategy, widely held to be as reliable and as accurate as the non-stratified random sampling, consists of dividing the study candidates into groups according to a specific characteristic (for example, the year of graduation) and then randomly sampling the graduates in the particular "strata."

Tracing the graduates was done using a combination of strategies including: using university records of alumni, employer records, snowball techniques, and advertisements in the mass media. The university records, which were very helpful in sampling the respondents, proved to be of little use for tracing the graduates. Though they included regular addresses and the contact information of the students at the time of enrolment at the institution, generally such information was no longer valid a few years after graduation. In some cases, however, the researchers were able to rely on the university administration. At some institutions, the university supports the alumni associations and works closely with them. In this way, Anyanwu, Omoifo, Omotosho, and Zembere were able to get access to lists of alumni with their current addresses. And, while those lists are supposed to be updated during the regular meetings of the alumni, this is often not the case, and the researchers found that the lists were only reliable when the time of graduation was not far in the past.

Another strategy used to trace the graduates was to contact employers. The two Kenyan studies, which targeted graduates of the Faculty of Education, contacted the public service commission, the central employer of teachers in Kenya. Ugwuonah, in her survey of the graduates of the HEIs in the Nigerian states of Enugu and Anambra, established contact with the graduates through enterprises at which they were likely to be employed. This strategy is subject to yielding a biased sample. Non-employed graduates were not likely to be in the sample, and those graduates working in other sectors or other regions may have fallen out of the range. To lessen the risk of bias attached to this method, the researcher asked the traced graduates for help in locating other graduates (the so-called snowball technique). In three of the 10 studies, researchers placed newspaper and radio advertisement in mass media, asking the graduates of their respective institutions to contact them.

After having successfully traced the graduates, the next step was to get into contact with them in order to send them the questionnaires and collect the filled-in. Here the poor post and telecommunications in the countries posed a major challenge to the researchers. In order to increase the participation rate, in some cases, they had to travel miles to collect the completed questionnaires.

**Table 1:** Key Design Elements of the Single Surveys

Researcher	Country	Faculty/Department	Target Sample	Completed Questionnaires	% Return Rate
Djangmah	Ghana	All, except Medicine	1,500	979	65.3
Karugu	Kenya	Education	2,500	466	18.6
Kimani	Kenya	Education	1,170	547	46.8
Zembere	Malawi	All	1,975	487	24.7
Omoifo	Nigeria	All	4,200	1,047	24.9
Omosho	Nigeria	All	2,800	979	35.0
Anyanwu	Nigeria	Agriculture, Home Economics, Arts, Education	800	579	72.4
Ugwuonah	Nigeria	Engineering, Management, Science, Social Science	500	266	53.2
Kaijage	Tanzania	Commerce and Management	650	331	50.9
Mayanja	Uganda	Arts and Science	1,000	430	43.0

Without disaggregated data about the graduates in the countries and the HEIs included in the study, no assessment can be made of the extent to which the sample can be reliably extended to the entire pool of graduates being studied. The return rates of the studies, varying from 24.7% to 72.4% (Table 1), are also not reliable measures of the accuracy of the sample. Thus, it should be noted that biases in the sample cannot be ruled out in the subsequent analysis of the data.

### *The Comparative Database*

The focus of the 10 surveys varies thematically, and, to some extent, different design approaches have been adopted. The surveys are based on a common “core questionnaire,” however, derived from the standard instrument for conducting graduate surveys developed by Schomburg (1995). The questionnaire, which has been used in different countries and continents, covers various aspects of higher education study and the world of work. The themes taken into account are, among others: the course of study, the field of study, and the higher education institution; the retrospective assessment of the study conditions and provision; the factors influencing the choice of a particular institution; the strategies and course of employment search; the current employment status and the characteristics of the position held; the perception of the use of skills and qualifications gained during the study; and the assessment of the satisfaction with the jobs tasks assigned, the position held, and the status achieved. The “core questionnaire” served as a basis for merging the data of the 10 surveys into a single file with 6086 graduates. The resulting comparative study and the methodological background are described in detail in Teichler et al. (2002). This volume also includes several comparative analysis studies of the data set.

The comparison covering the key dimensions (country, fields of study, gender, and year of graduation) may also be jeopardized by the heterogeneous designs of the studies. A description of the sample—provided below—may help to assess the validity and the limitations of the undertaken comparisons.

### *Description of the Sample*

The description of the sample may help to assess the differences and similarities found in the comparisons covering some key dimensions (country, fields of study, gender, year of graduation, etc.). Almost half of the respondents (47%) in the sample graduated in Nigeria. Kenyan and Ghanaian graduates make up 17% and 15%, respectively, of the sample. A relatively low number of respondents are from Malawi (8%), Uganda (7%), and Tanzania (6%).

With regards to the fields of study chosen by the respondents, education accounts for 30% of the sample. Health science graduates are the least represented, at only 2% of the sample. Graduates of business, law, and social sci-

ences are the most strongly represented, each making up 16% of the entire sample. The representation rates of the remaining areas under examination include humanities and arts (12%), natural sciences (11%), engineering (6%), and agricultural sciences (7%).

Women make up 27% of the respondents across the countries. This is largely due to the choice of faculties from which the research teams selected graduates. In the past few decades, the number of women attending higher institutions has risen consistently, but there remains an imbalance in the gender distribution across different fields of study. For example, humanities and arts and education show graduation rates for women above the overall rate, at 35% for humanities and arts and 36% for education.

The origins of these disparities can be found in the choice of core courses at secondary school levels. In some countries, with separate schools for women and men, scientific courses are rarely offered at the schools that enrol women (Rathegeber, 1991). Even when female students have the opportunity to access a wide range of subjects at the higher education level, their preference is often to enrol in courses that appear to offer flexible career opportunities, which would accommodate the combination of career and family needs.

Though the surveys were carried out between 1996 and 1997, the various studies targeted graduates who had finished their studies between 1980 and 1996. 8% of the sample had graduated in the years from 1980 to 1984, 27% in the years from 1985 to 1989, and the vast majority (65%) finished their studies in the 1990s. For this analysis, we differentiated between the graduates from the beginning of the decade (1990–92) and those who had graduated shortly before the surveys took place. The respective proportions for those groups are 34% and 31%.

Regarding the age of the respondents at the time of the survey, the youngest (up to 29 years old) account for 30% of the sample. 33% were between 30 and 34 and 25% between 35 and 39 years old. The oldest group (40 and up) makes up 15% of the total.

The questionnaire also includes a question on the educational background of the graduates' parents. 24% reported that their fathers had not completed compulsory primary school. 54% had fathers with a level of education between primary school and secondary school, and 18% of the graduates' fathers had at least one college degree. The corresponding figures for the level of education of the respondents' mothers are 38%, 52%, and 8%, respectively.

## Findings

### *Employment Rate*

Graduate surveys are not the best medium for measuring the rate of employment, because the non-response units may not be random. It is often argued that such surveys are inherently biased against non-employment, since “successful graduates” are more prone to participating in the studies than graduates who feel less successful. In the cases represented here, this bias may be exacerbated by the graduate tracing strategies used by the researchers. Nevertheless, in countries where reliable and exhaustive official statistics are rare, graduate surveys are invaluable in providing an overall, though imprecise, picture of the employment rate (Teichler et al., 2002).

The analysis of the survey data unveils a less dramatic picture than the scenarios presented above would indicate. A comparison of the countries shows that altogether, 5% of the respondents reported not being employed. The non-employment rate appears to vary between 1% in Kenya and 10% in Uganda, while it is 3% in Malawi, 5% in Tanzania, and 7% in Nigeria. A look at the distribution of the non-employment rate by years of graduation shows that the most recent graduates were more likely to be unemployed than graduates from the earliest cohorts. Virtually all respondents who had graduated by the end of 1984 were employed, whereas 10% of the 1993 to 1996 graduates were not. Minor differences emerge in comparing the employment rate across different fields of study. Graduates of humanities and natural sciences were equally likely to be unemployed (8%), while only 3% of business administration graduates were unemployed. Engineering and education graduates were equally less likely to be unemployed (both at 4%).

### *Transition from Higher Education to Employment*

The transition from higher education to the labor market was expected to be increasingly more turbulent due to the deteriorating economic situation across Africa. As graduates could no longer rely on guaranteed employment in the public sector, which was strongly compressed during the mid 1980s, and with the private sector still in its burgeoning stage, the transition period between school and work represented a challenging time for newly graduated men and women. As indicated by the data, students responded by devising various strategies to face the challenges of finding employment after graduation.

The respondents were asked to state whether they had started looking for employment before or after graduation. A third option—“I did not seek employment”—was offered especially for those who, for example, had either decided to continue on to further studies or, due to child-rearing activities and/or



civil and military service, may not have been seeking access to the labor market. 16% of the graduates chose this third response option. A considerable number of these respondents consisted of graduates who had established their own businesses and, as a result, did not seek external job opportunities. A comparison of the self-employed and the employed shows that 33% of the self-employed did not seek employment, compared with 16% of the traditionally employed.

Overall, almost a third (28%) of the graduates surveyed had started looking for employment before graduation, but this figure varies strongly from country to country. In Ghana, only 11% sought employment prior to graduation, and in Nigeria the figure was 14%. By contrast, 75% of the graduates in Malawi had started looking for employment before graduation. The East African countries take a middle position in this range: In Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, respectively, 47%, 48%, and 53% of the graduates had started looking for employment before graduation.

These particular differences among the countries should not be over-emphasized, however. In Nigeria and Ghana, for example, the lower rates of graduates who looked for employment before graduation may be due to compulsory civil and military service. Table 2 shows that the range of those who looked for employment before graduation spanned from 14% of those who graduated prior to 1985 to 41% of those who graduated between 1993 and 1996.

**Table 2:** Employment Search by Year of Graduation (*Percent*)\*

	Year of Graduation				Total
	Up to 1984	1985–89	1990–92	1993–96	
Before graduation	14	18	27	41	27
After graduation	65	67	57	45	57
I did not seek employment	20	16	17	14	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Count (n)	(349)	(1,366)	(1,600)	(1,441)	(4,756)

Source: AAU Surveys: Question 6: When did you start seeking a job?

\*Some figures may not add up to 100.

The efforts of the graduates to secure employment are reflected in the strategies used in seeking employment. Most African countries have public job centers, which allocate jobs to graduates, but in times of anticipated difficult transition, graduates cannot rely on those agencies alone. They are often forced to

find more resources and pro-active solutions to the problem of finding employment.

The survey respondents were given a rather long list of possible (but not mutually exclusive) search strategies and were asked to indicate which of them they had used in their first job search. Strategies included: applying directly to a job vacancy, receiving an offer directly from an employer, applying to an organization without knowing if there was a vacancy, joining the enterprise of relatives or parents, and getting the first job with the help of a university teaching staff member or a relative. For the purposes of analysis, these points were regrouped into five categories: active search strategies, university contacts, personal contact, employment agency, and "other."

The strategy most often used was the active strategy, chosen by 38% of the respondents. (An active job search strategy is one in which the job search process is done entirely by the graduate alone, without the help of employment agencies, personal and academic contacts, or being approached by the firm.) The employment agency option was also extensively used (35%). In addition, it appears that the use of public employment agencies is still held in high regard by aspiring teachers. In Kenya, where the graduates of the Faculties of Education were surveyed, 98% of the respondents reported having made use of public agencies in their search for a first job. In contrast, university and personal contacts as search strategies scored relatively lowly with 10% and 18%, respectively.

The respondents were additionally asked to state how many employers they had contacted in order to find their first position after graduation. Overall, 30% responded as having contacted only one employer, and 38% acknowledged having contacted between two and five employers. A look at the distribution by graduation year shows that in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, the number of who said they had contacted between six and ten employers and eleven to twenty employers grew slightly.

Concerning the amount of time spent on the search for initial employment, the vast majority of respondents (73%) reported having spent less than one year searching for employment. 53% even reported spending less than six months. The pattern outlined above does vary according to the economic conditions at the time of graduation. For those who graduated prior to 1985, the average time spent seeking employment was seven months. The average rose to twelve months for those who graduated between 1985 and 1990, and subsequently declined back, to seven months for graduates from 1990 to 1992, and even lower for 1993 to 1996 graduates, who averaged four months for their job search.

The graduates were also asked which factors, in their view, influenced employers the most in their decision to provide them with employment. Job elements relating to their studies rank highest, with 82% of the graduates estimating that their field of study was a significant factor and 70% of graduates noting that their main academic focus—in the case of specialized majors—influenced their employers' decision to hire them. Only 14% of the respondents estimated that the theme of their major thesis had played a role in the decision of the employer. Institution-related factors, like the reputation of the university or the faculty with whom they had studied and worked were also seen by the graduates as not being significantly important in the eyes of employers.

### ***The Employment Sector***

The public sector remains the biggest employer of the graduates. Overall, 73% of the graduates reported working for a public employer, whereas 22% were working for a private employer, and 4% were self-employed. (The remaining 1% were working for an employer who did not fit into the above named categories, such as an international organization). A more precise impression of the significance of employment in the public sector appears when one looks at the employment distribution of graduates according to their field of study. 98% of education graduates were working for a public employer, mainly at public schools. In other fields of study, the proportion of public sector employment was not as high (i.e., 69% for graduates of natural sciences and 66% for both social sciences and the humanities). 57% of business administration graduates were also working for the public sector. Conversely, in health sciences and engineering the proportion is less than half, at 44% and 48%, respectively.

A closer look reveals a trend showing a diminishing share of the employees in the public sector over the years. 77% of pre-1985 graduates were employed in the public sector, in contrast to 74% of those who graduated between 1993 and 1996. The private sector increased its intake of graduates from 10% (pre-1986) to 21% (between 1993 and 1996) during the same period of time. Industry (manufacturing, mining, construction, etc.), commerce, and finance are among the economic sectors that had an especially large share of graduates working in the private sector.

Self-employment is also slightly on the rise among graduates. Health sciences graduates are more likely to become self-employed than graduates from other fields of study. Considering graduates from Ghana and Nigeria, in which the proportion of self-employed respondents is large enough to be meaningfully analyzed, we see that 17% of the graduates in health sciences are self-employed. In agriculture, the share of self-employed accounts for 11%, humanities for 10%, business for 8%, and engineering for 7%. In the remaining

fields of study, self-employment seems not to play as big a role. The proportions of self-employed in social science and in natural sciences are equally low (3%). Among graduates from education, only 2% report being self-employed.

A separate analysis of the data for Nigeria and Ghana shows that investment-friendly fiscal reforms and the encouragement of private entrepreneurship over the last few years have influenced this situation, and a comparison of the working conditions of employed graduates and those who have their own business reveals no striking differences (Mugabushaka, 2002).

### ***Position, Status and Income of the Graduates***

The battery of questions regarding features of employment (type of work, income, and nature of work assignments), the “subjective” respondents’ views on the adequacy of the job in relation to their level of education, and their perception of their use of the qualifications gained during their studies may help clarify whether or not graduates took on positions suitable for highly skilled workers. Apart from the personal stress associated with being an underemployment highly skilled worker, underemployment is also a problem with far-reaching implications for education planning. When graduates take positions below that of their level of education, people with fewer qualifications may be not be able to compete. In the long run, this situation may result in a depreciation of the value of mid-level qualifications, creating greater disparities between the educated and the less- or non-educated. Furthermore, considering the financial means needed to train higher education graduates as an investment, graduates taking up positions in which their productivity is low means, in economic terms, a loss of resources, which are already scarce in African countries.

Another noticeable feature of the work that the graduates were doing is that it was most often full-time employment. We first look at whether the graduates are full or part-time employed. Overall, part-time employment seems to be a marginal phenomenon. Only 2% of graduates report holding part-time jobs. There are some differences, however, across the fields of studies. In social sciences and education, only 1% of the graduates work part-time; and in agriculture and engineering, just 2% of graduates are employed on part-time basis. The corresponding share among natural sciences and business graduates is 3%, while in the humanities, graduates holding part-time employed account for 5% of all graduates, and in the health sciences, that figure rises to 12%. An examination of the respondents’ work assignments indicates that while the graduates were working in areas for which their field of study “typically” prepared them, other tasks, which are outside of their fields of study, were also being assigned to them. Table 3 shows the distribution of a categorized list of work assignments according to field of study.

**Table 3:** Major Area of Work Assignment by Field of Study (*Percent*)\*

Area of Work	Field of Study								Total
	Bus	Soc	Eng	Edu	Hum	Agri	Nat	Health	
Engineering	24	16	68	6	19	21	26	25	20
Business & Management	55	55	15	5	32	32	20	14	30
Research & Development	4	5	4	1	3	8	4	7	3
Training & Teaching	7	15	8	88	40	29	40	38	41
Advisory & Consulting	7	5	5	1	5	9	7	16	5
Others	3	3	0	0	2	1	1	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Count (n)	(748)	(691)	(274)	(1,164)	(348)	(282)	(357)	(56)	(3,920)

Source: AAU Surveys: Question 20a: What is your current major area of work assignment?

Note: The core questionnaire included a list of 34 possible work assignments, which have been divided here into six categories.

\*Some figures may not add up to 100.

According to Table 3, graduates were more likely to be found in three major areas of work assignments: teaching (41%), business and management (30%), and engineering (20%). When these figures are contrasted with those of advisory work and consulting (5%) and of research and development (3%), it is clear that most graduates took positions in typical managerial and professional areas of work, while fewer are employed in knowledge producing areas. Table 3 also reveals that graduates gained employment in a wide range of work assignment categories, the exception being the graduates of education, who showed the smallest dispersion across the work assignment area (i.e., 88% of the graduates of education take teaching positions).

The lack of an accepted general definition of what is an appropriate relationship between education and employment has resulted in the use of a variety of measures to gauge these issues (Teichler, 1999). These measures incorporate a number of intertwined but not interdependent aspects. The extent to which graduates actually use the skills and knowledge they have acquired during their studies is an important indicator of the level of occupation they have. Also, their own subjective perceptions of how the content of their jobs relates to their qualifications hint to the appropriateness of the position achieved.

Overall, 70% of the respondents reported that they were, to a high extent, using the skills and qualifications they had acquired during their studies. 20% took a middle position, whereas 10% said they were not applying the knowl-

edge gained through higher education (or were using their skills only to a very low extent). The percentage of those who were not using their skills was higher than the average in some fields of study, including agriculture (15%), humanities (14%), and social sciences (12%). In addition, the majority of those who believed that they were holding a position in which they were not making use of the skills they had acquired were working in areas of commerce, business, and management. One explanation for this outcome might be that commerce and business attract a great number and variety of graduates, whose studies are not specifically linked with those activities.

The graduates were asked to state why they had taken employment only vaguely linked to their studies, and they reported that it was largely due to a lack of appropriate job opportunities in areas closely related to their field of study. The most frequently cited reason (17%) was that their current job offered better career prospects than positions more closely related to their academic degrees. 24% of graduates of business and management cite this as their reason for being employed in an area different from their academic backgrounds, a percentage higher than the average. Another reason cited was the opportunity for part-time or flexible schedules, chosen by 12% of respondents, while 11% said they took positions in other areas because they could not find a job closely linked to their studies. Also worth noting is the fact that, of the graduates who held teaching positions, 14% reported that they chose teaching because they could not find jobs linked to their studies.

Graduates were also asked to assess the extent to which they believed their position and employment status was appropriate to the level of their education. A five point scale was provided, with one standing for “completely appropriate” and five for “not at all appropriate.”

59% of the graduates considered their position and status to be appropriate to their level of education (scores of 1 and 2). On the other hand, 18% perceived an imbalance between their academic background and their employment level (indicated through reported scores of 4 and 5). Most of those who reported scores of 4 or 5 were teachers (at 24%, their proportion lies 6% above the overall rate). This is mainly due to the income of teachers and fringe benefits such as housing and pension schemes. The income of teachers is lower than in any other area of high-skilled work. The mean monthly gross income of teachers was US\$175, whereas in other areas of skilled work, it was between US\$264 (business and management) and US \$337 (consulting). Engineering graduates were earning US\$293 a month.

The graduates overwhelmingly indicated dissatisfaction with income and fringe benefits, among other characteristics of their professional situation aspects when asked to assess their satisfaction with their professional situation (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Measures of Professional Satisfaction by Gender (*Percent, Responses 1 and 2*)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Possibility to use qualifications acquired during my studies	62	61	62
Opportunity to benefit society	63	59	62
Job security	61	59	61
Content of work / professional tasks	61	57	60
Possibility to work in a demanding job	60	54	59
Opportunity of pursuing continued learning	45	44	45
Chance of fulfilling my own ideas	43	38	42
Working atmosphere	38	40	38
Position achieved	35	32	34
Workplace surroundings (noise, space, climate, etc.)	30	32	30
Promotion prospects	30	25	29
Equal treatment of all employees	29	29	29
Equipment of the workplace	24	25	24
Income	20	20	20
Fringe benefits	17	16	17
Count (n)	(3,969)	(1,415)	(5,384)

Source: AAU Surveys: Question 34: To what extent are you satisfied with the following characteristics of your professional situation? Scale from 1 = to a very high extent, to 5 = not at all.

Only 17% were satisfied with the fringe benefits associated with their jobs, and 20% reported being satisfied with their employment income. The aspects with which the graduates were most satisfied were the possibility to use qualifications acquired during their studies (62%), the opportunity to benefit society (62%), and job security (61%).

Respondents were also asked to rate how personally important those and other aspects were to them. 79% rated the possibility of using acquired knowledge as highly important, while 74% noted job security, and 73% the chance of doing something useful for society. It seems that the aspects of work the graduates were most satisfied with were those that were most personally important to them.

There is also another very interesting finding. In regards to satisfaction with work content and the opportunity to work in a demanding job, the graduates



were, overall, highly satisfied, but there were notable differences between male and female graduates. The proportion of those satisfied with the content of their professional tasks and the possibility of working in a demanding job was 61% and 60%, respectively, for male graduates and 57% and 54%, respectively, for female graduates. These differences may be due in large part to gender differences in the graduates' areas of work. The surveys show that female graduates were more likely to work as teachers, whereas male graduates were working in most of the other areas of work. Gender distinctions proved significant throughout the survey findings.

### **Gender Comparisons**

Education has become one of the most important levers for social mobility in African societies. This has led to familiar debates, particularly concerning women, about the fairness of the access procedures existing in countries across Africa. There have been many discussions regarding the participation of women in primary, secondary, and higher education, discussions that are part of ongoing debates about the broader place of women in African society. Beyond the problem of fairness in access to higher education, it is interesting to look at the professional paths of women, once they have completed their studies.

Minor differences can be observed between the experiences of men and women in the process of the transition from higher education to the labor market. Although 56% of both male and female graduates started looking for employment before graduation, women spent more time searching than men (an average 10.3 months for women, compared to 9.7 months for men). The gap is even larger in some countries due to the fact that male graduates, constrained by compulsory civil or military service, have longer employment search times. In addition, more female than male graduates reported that they had not sought employment following graduation, most likely because of child raising factors.

The assessment of the factors that influenced employers to recruit the graduates also appears to differ between men and women. Academic factors (study subject, grades, etc.) were regarded by most respondents, male and female, as being decisive for recruitment. Women seem to believe, however, that personal traits are as important as academic preparation. In fact, 57% of women (compared to 47% of men) considered their own personality as having played a role in their recruitment.

The concentration of women in certain fields of study has repercussions in employment outcomes. For example, a comparison of employment sectors shows that 51% of women (compared to 38% of male graduates) were working in schools. This is the only employment sector in which the share of women is higher than men. Whereas one in five male graduates (20%) work in industry,

the same can only be said for one in seven woman graduates (14%). In other economic fields, too, the proportion of women lies (though slightly) beyond men. 5% of women (compared to 7% of men) work in agriculture, and 13% (compared to 16% of men) work in commerce.

The measures of employment conditions, however, do not reveal perceivable differences between women and men. Still, the median monthly income of women graduates is slightly lower than that of their male counterparts (US\$172 compared to US\$174).

**Table 5:** General Job Satisfaction by Gender (*Percent\**; Arithmetic Mean)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1 to a very high extent	12	9	11
2	32	28	31
3	35	39	36
4	13	13	13
5 not at all	9	10	9
Total	100	100	100
Count (n)	(3,866)	(1,381)	(5,247)
Arithmetic mean	2.7	2.9	2.8

Source: AAU Surveys: Question 35: Altogether, to what extent are you satisfied with your professional situation? Please take also into account in your statement any professional sidelines. Scale from 1 = to a very high extent, to 5 = not at all.

\*Some figures may not add up to 100.

In addition, those who estimated using their skills to a high extent in their work is the same, 69%, for both males and females. This parity also appears in the rating of the appropriateness of position and status, where 60% of men and women held the view that their position and status were adequate to their education. Women, however, seemed to be less satisfied with their jobs than men, with 44% of men reporting high levels of satisfaction with their job situation, while just 37% of women were equally satisfied (scores 1 and 2, Table 5).

### Conclusions

The challenges faced by the higher education sector in Africa in the mid-1980s were seen by some observers as the beginning of the mismatch between the increase in access to higher education and the decrease in employment opportunities in the labor market. The imbalance between educational and employ-

ment opportunities was thought to have serious consequences for graduates in at least three ways: the possibility of massive unemployment among higher education graduates; the likelihood of a tedious transition process from school to work; and, for some of the “fortunate few” who were even able to get a job, often the underemployment of highly skilled workers in lower skilled positions. An analysis of the graduate surveys conducted between 1996 and 1997 in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda shows that those scenarios did not actually occur, however.

Although our data cannot give a precise estimate of overall unemployment rates among graduates, the general findings appear less dramatic than feared. On the whole, 5% of the graduates reported not being employed. The transition process from school to work seems to have been difficult in the mid- and late-1980s but “normalized” in the 1990s. The average time spent searching for employment was highest (13.3 months) between 1985 and 1989 and fell to 6.6 months in the 1990s. As for employment conditions, most of the graduates held jobs related to their studies. The majority (59%) of the graduates also felt that the position they held and the status they had achieved were appropriate to their level of education.

The data also suggest that the endeavors undertaken by students to face the challenges of a changing labor market in the 1980s played a role in achieving this somewhat satisfactory situation. An appreciable number of students had started looking for employment before graduation, and they did not rely on the help of existing institutions with their search. Instead, they used “active searching strategies.” It is likely that graduates chose active searching strategies in response to the propagation of the pessimistic scenarios discussed in the introductory part of this article, and such pro-active responses may have actually helped deter the feared outcomes from actually occurring.

The picture of graduate employment given above does apply, however, to the time in which the research was done. The relationship between higher education and work is subject to changes due to prevailing economic situations, societal changes, and external constraints. Studying its match and mismatch cannot be achieved in a single scientific inquiry and is a task that should be conducted on a regular basis. The surveys on which this comparative study is based have shown ways to overcome the barriers facing research when complex surveys are undertaken. We hope this will encourage other researchers in African countries to conduct ambitious examinations of higher education in Africa.

The process of reaching the equilibrium between higher education and the world of work involves a number of actors, including the state, HEIs, employers, and, of course, graduates. In further research, public employment policy,

higher education policy, the initiatives taking place at HEIs, and the approaches of employers in recruiting graduates should be strongly emphasized and comprehensively examined in order to form a coherent picture of the employment circumstances of graduates.

Another significant finding from the study examines the relationship between higher education and the world of work. Our findings highlight issues that can be seen as measures of a possible mismatch between educational opportunities and available career options. Understanding these issues can give the actors involved hints as to how to resolve the situation, if such resolutions are necessary.

In her reflections on how to improve communication between researchers and policy makers in higher education, Elaine El-Khawas (2000) emphasized the role researchers should play in fostering the exchanges between the spheres of research, policy, and practice. Her appeal that researchers should not only address policy-relevant issues but should also focus on “integrated, coordinated studies rather than individualized, unconnected studies” (El-Khawas, 2000) served as a grounding principle for this analysis and should also be a guide to all future researchers examining higher education and policy, not just in Africa, but around the world.

### References

- Anyanwu, G.A. & Iloeje, I.C. (2000). Graduate's employment survey: A tracer study of the graduates of the faculty of arts and agriculture at the University of Nigeria. Nsukka, Nigeria: AAU Research Report.
- Djangmah, J.S. (1999). The challenges of vocationalism: A follow up of Ghanaian universities. Legon, Ghana: AAU research report.
- El-Khawas, E. (2000). Patterns of communication and miscommunication between research and policy. In S. Schwarz & U. Teichler (Eds.), *The Institutional Basis of Higher Education Research. Experiences and Perspectives* (pp. 45–56). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Kajage, E. (2000). Faculty of commerce and management graduates and their employers: A tracer study. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Faculty of Commerce and Management, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Karugu, A. (2000). Higher education and work: Survey of graduates of Kenyatta University. Nairobi, Kenya: AAU research report.
- Kimani, G. (2001). A tracer study of University of Nairobi graduates. Nairobi, Kenya: AAU research report.
- Mayanja, M.K. et al. (1999). A comparative study of Makerere University graduates from the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. Kampala, Uganda: AAU research report.
- Mugabushaka, A.M. (2002). Self employment among graduates in Ghana and Nigeria. In U. Teichler, H. Schomburg, & A.M. Mugabushaka (Eds.), *Higher Edu-*

- cation and Graduate Employment in Africa: A Comparative Empirical Study in Selected Countries* (pp. 77–89). Kassel, Germany: unpublished manuscript.
- Nkrumah, N. (1985). *Africa must Unite*. London: Panaf.
- Nyerere, J. K. (1968). The role of the universities. In J. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Oxford University Press.
- Omoifo, C.N. et al. (1999). Education and achievement in the early career of the University of Benin graduates. Benin, Nigeria: AAU research report.
- Omotosho, J. (2000). Higher education and work: A survey of the alumni of the University of Ilorin who graduated between 1985 and 1994. Ilorin, Nigeria: AAU research report.
- Psacharopoulos, G. (1985). Returns to higher education: A further international update and implications. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 20, 583–604.
- Rathegeber, E. (1991). Women in higher education in Africa: Access and choices. In G.K. Kelly & S. Slaughter (Eds.), *Women's Higher Education in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 47–62). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Saint, W. (1992). *Universities in Africa. Strategies for Stabilization and Revitalization*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Sanyal, B. (1987). *Higher Education and Employment. An International Comparative Analysis*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Sawyer, A. (2000). Improving higher education research at African universities: The study programme on higher education management in Africa. In S. Schwarz & U. Teichler (Eds.), *The Institutional Basis of Higher Education Research: Experiences and Perspectives* (pp. 193–199). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Schomburg, H. (1995). Standard instrument for graduate and employer surveys. Eschborn, Germany: GTZ Educational Report 68.
- Teichler, U. (1999). Research on the relationships between higher education and the world of work: Past achievements, problems and new challenges. *Higher Education*, 38, 169–190.
- Teichler, U. (2002). The relationship between higher education and the world of work: Challenge for quality assessment in higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 14, 4–44.
- Teichler, U., Schomburg, H., & Mugabushaka, A.M. (Eds.). (2002). *Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Africa: A Comparative Empirical Study in Selected Countries*. Kassel, Germany: unpublished manuscript.
- Toure, S. (1998). Strategies for improving relevance of higher education: The experience of Côte d'Ivoire. In UNESCO (Ed.). *Higher Education in Africa: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects* (pp. 163–175). Paris: UNESCO.
- Ugwuonah, G.E. & Omeje, K.C. (2002). Higher education and demands of manpower development in the Nigerian manufacturing sector: An empirical study of Enugu and Anambra States. Enugu, Nigeria: AAU research report.

- World Bank (1994). *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Yesufu, T.M. (Ed.). (1973). *Creating the African University. Emerging Issues in the 1970s*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press.
- Zembere, S.N. & Chinyama, M.P.M. (2000). Higher education and work: Survey of graduates of the University of Malawi who graduated between 1987 and 1995. Lilongwe, Malawi: AAU research report.

---

## Financing Higher Education: Old Challenges and New Messages

Maureen Woodhall<sup>1</sup>

---

### Abstract

Two recently released documents—the World Bank’s 2002 policy paper, *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*, and the UK Government’s 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*—emphasize challenges facing higher education, including ‘old’ challenges of financing expansion while increasing equity, quality and sustainability in times of financial stringency. Both papers propose wider cost sharing to address these challenges. This article examines these proposals, noting some similarities in their messages. It summarizes international experience of tuition fees and financial support for students, including student loans, and describes current developments in Mozambique; it examines equity effects of cost sharing, and draws lessons for all higher education systems facing these old and new challenges.

### Résumé

Deux documents publiés récemment—la politique de la Banque mondiale (2002) et le livre blanc du gouvernement du Royaume-Uni (2003) : il s’agit respectivement de *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* et *The Future of Higher Education*—mettent l’accent sur les défis de l’enseignement supérieur. Ces deux publications rappellent en même temps les « anciens » défis de financement relatifs au développement de l’éducation en termes d’équité, de qualité, de planification et de rigueur. Les deux documents proposent un éventail de partage des charges pour faire face à tous ces défis. La présente communication étudie ces propositions et note plusieurs similitudes entre les deux documents. Elle offre une présentation succincte de l’expérience de prise en charge des étudiants au niveau international et décrit les développements en cours au Mozambique ainsi que l’extension des charges partagées et formule des recommandations pour tous les systèmes d’enseignement supérieur confrontés aux défis anciens et nouveaux en même temps.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maureen Woodhall is Emeritus Reader in Education Finance, Institute of Education, University of London; Visiting Fellow, Sussex Institute, University of Sussex; and Honorary Fellow, Department of Education, University of Wales Aberystwyth, UK; E-mail: maureen@woodhall.me.uk



## Financing Higher Education: Old Challenges and New Messages

### *Introduction: Old and New Challenges for Higher Education*

In October 2002, the World Bank published a new policy paper on tertiary education: *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (World Bank, 2002). In January 2003, the British Government's Department for Education and Skills (DFES) published its long awaited White Paper entitled *The Future of Higher Education* (DFES, 2003), which proposes reforms for higher education in England.<sup>2</sup> The World Bank prefers the term 'tertiary', rather than 'higher' education, to emphasize the existence of institutional diversification. For consistency, this article, like the British White Paper, uses the term 'higher education,' but this in no way implies adherence to a model of traditional, undifferentiated higher education institutions (HEIs).

Both of these important papers present an analysis of how higher education can best respond to new challenges. For example, the World Bank believes that tertiary education is facing "unprecedented challenges, arising from the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution" (World Bank, 2002, p. 1). These challenges represent both opportunities and threats. On the one hand, improved communication technology "has all but removed the space and time barriers to information access and exchange;" on the other, "technological transformation carries the real danger of a growing digital divide between and within nations" (ibid., p. xvii). The World Bank policy paper provides information and insights about successful reforms and effective policy implementation. In addition, the paper seeks to engage client countries and the international community in a dialogue on the role of tertiary education, the justification for continuing public support and investment, the evolving relationship between tertiary education institutions, the market place and the state, and ways to design and implement reforms so that tertiary education can promote knowledge-driven economic growth (ibid., p. 3).

Similarly, the British White Paper argues that the "challenge from other countries is growing. Higher education is under pressure, and at risk of decline....tackling these challenges needs a long-term strategy for investment and reform" (DFES, 2003, p. 4–5). The White Paper lists a number of "challenges" including an "investment backlog in teaching and research facilities,

---

2 The DFES is responsible for higher education in England. Since devolution in 1999 significant differences have developed between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in policies on the finance of higher education, particularly on tuition fees and student support. Some of the proposals in the White Paper will apply to England, but others will apply to the UK as a whole.

estimated at £8 billion”, and the fact that “universities are struggling to employ the best academics” and that “many of our economic competitors invest more in higher education” (DFES, 2003, p. 4). The strategy for reforming higher education set out in the White Paper includes increased levels of public funding for higher education, a new approach to fees and student support and incentives both to strengthen links between higher education and business and to promote private financial contributions to higher education, including endowment funds. The aim of this White Paper is to “lay the foundation for the reforms which will transform the future of the sector” (ibid., p. 21).

There is a striking similarity of language in parts of these documents: both emphasize the ‘challenges’ facing higher (tertiary) education, while stressing the importance of ‘knowledge’ in a global economy. The World Bank report includes both words in its title, while the White Paper argues “The challenges are clear... Our competitors see—as we should—that the developing knowledge economy means the need for more, better trained people in the workforce... higher education is becoming a global business” (DFES, 2003, p. 13), and sets out its vision of a sector which “recognises and values universities as creators of knowledge and understanding and as engines for applying that new knowledge for the benefit of all” (DFES, 2003, p. 21).

Both documents emphasize the ‘new’ challenges facing higher education and the need for comprehensive reforms to meet these challenges. Despite the emphasis on ‘new’ challenges, however, both devote considerable space to what the World Bank report calls ‘Old Challenges’: the need to expand tertiary education coverage in a sustainable way, persisting inequalities of access and outcomes, problems of quality and relevance, and change-resistant governance structures, and rigid management practices. Similarly, the White Paper has chapters devoted to expanding higher education to meet our needs, as well as to issues of fair access, academic freedoms, and funding. The underlying focus of both documents concerns how to expand access to higher (tertiary) education in order to meet rising economic demand for high level knowledge and skills while increasing equity and developing financial sustainability. These are the continuing, ‘unresolved’ challenges facing both developing and transition economies (the focus of the World Bank report) and industrialized countries (the British White Paper compares higher education in the UK with other OECD countries).

Each document presents ‘new’ messages and approaches to address both ‘old’ and ‘new’ challenges. Recommendations in both papers cover research, teaching, and learning, as well as issues of institutional governance and management, structure, quality, relevance, and finance. This article cannot hope to cover all these important areas of concern for higher education. Instead, the

main focus of the article will be to examine a crucial issue addressed by both the World Bank and the British White Paper: how higher education should be financed, in order to achieve expansion, equity, and sustainability. In particular, this paper will ask what the scope is for cost sharing and how this can be widened without jeopardizing equity. The need for a new system of financing higher education in Britain—with increased contributions from students, but with an improved system of student support—is one of the key messages of the White Paper. Finance issues do not feature quite so prominently in the World Bank's 2002 report as in its 1994 report, *Higher Education: Lessons of Experience*, but the need for financial reform and the importance of cost sharing are strong underlying themes throughout the most recent paper. The 2002 report refers to a “growing recognition that the cost of tertiary education must be shared in a more equitable way,” stressing that “availability of financial aid for low-income, minority and other disadvantaged students is a determining factor in equity” (World Bank, 2002, p. 94).

Many governments are currently trying to meet the ‘old’ challenges of expansion, equity, and sustainability by introducing and strengthening strategies for cost sharing. Some of these strategies include: encouraging the growth of private institutions; introducing or increasing fees or user charges in public institutions; designing or improving systems of student support, including grants, scholarships, and student loans; seeking new sources of private funding, including contributions from business, commerce, and industry and donations or endowments from individuals or philanthropic foundations; and encouraging HEIs to be more ‘entrepreneurial’ in marketing and selling their services and seeking contracts for research and consultancy. Fierce debates have been and are still currently being waged on the extent and feasibility of cost sharing in many countries, including OECD countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA; in transition economies such as Hungary and the Czech Republic; and in developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In many countries, government and higher education leadership are increasingly emphasizing that wider cost sharing is inevitable. Bruce Johnstone (1986, 2002) has clearly demonstrated that the trend towards wider cost-sharing is a worldwide phenomenon and that the combined pressures of financial austerity and increasing private and social demand for access and equity mean that cost sharing has become a global imperative.

This paper will summarize recent international experiences with designing, implementing, and reforming systems of cost sharing. In particular, the focus will be on the role of tuition fees and student support and financial aid (particularly grants, scholarships, and student loans). This paper will also touch briefly on the role of financial incentives—including targeted funding of HEIs

and competitive funds—to promote innovation, quality improvement, and/or more equitable access for disadvantaged groups. The main geographical focus is Africa, but this paper draws on world-wide experience from both developed countries, including Australia and the UK, and developing countries, including countries in Asia and Latin America, as well as Africa. The aim is to summarize lessons from this experience, to see what ‘new’ messages are emerging regarding the design and implementation of systems for financing HEIs and students, in order to address both the ‘old’ challenge of sharing costs efficiently and equitably while expanding access, maintaining or improving quality, and achieving financial sustainability.

The paper draws on a wide range of international research, studies, and experience, including a special issue of *The Welsh Journal of Education* published in July 2002, entitled *Paying for Learning: The Debate on Student Fees, Grants and Loans in International Perspective* (Woodhall, 2002). This special issue, edited by the author, sought to contribute an international perspective to the public debate on financing higher education in the UK, which culminated in the White Paper of 2003. It included a global analysis of the “challenges of financial austerity” (Johnstone, 2002), a survey of alternative objectives of national student loan schemes (Ziderman, 2002), and reviews of recent experience in Australia, South Africa, and the UK (including Wales and Scotland, as well as England).

In addition, this paper utilizes recent publications of the International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project,<sup>3</sup> directed by Professor Bruce Johnstone at the State University of New York at Buffalo, including papers presented at an international conference in Tanzania in 2002 on *Financing Higher Education in Eastern and Southern Africa: Diversifying Revenue and Expanding Accessibility*.<sup>4</sup> Also useful in the preparation of this paper were summaries of international experience prepared for a session of the World Bank’s Human Development Week (Woodhall, 1997) and for the new book *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook* (Woodhall, 2003). In addition, a series of international fora on student loans organized by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) between 1990 and 1992 (Woodhall, 1990; 1991 a, b; 1994), and the author’s

---

3 See <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance> for details of this project, and a wealth of papers reporting its results.

4 The conference proceedings will be published in 2003. See also Johnstone, Bruce (2002) *Financing Higher Education in Eastern and Southern Africa: Diversifying Revenue and Expanding Accessibility, Conference Report* (available on the website of the International Comparative Higher Education Project; for details, see note 3).

experience as a consultant for the World Bank and for the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of Mozambique also underscored the preparation of this paper.

This article is in six parts. Following this introduction, part two highlights some interesting parallels and similarities between the recent World Bank report and the British White Paper, and summarizes some of their main messages and proposals for reform. Part three reviews experience in several countries which have introduced or increased tuition fees. Part four presents lessons and conclusions on student support. Part five looks at the practical implications of some of these messages in the context of recent experiences in Mozambique. The final section, part six, presents a brief summary of the 'new' messages on financing higher education that are emerging from international experiences.

#### ***The World Bank Report and the British White Paper: Some Common Themes and Messages***

The introduction has already noted interesting similarities between the two reports, particularly in terms of language and purpose. In addition to their common insistence on the need for reform to meet old and new challenges, both stress the importance of higher education and the need for institutional diversity. As noted above, the World Bank prefers the term 'tertiary' rather than 'higher' education to emphasize its argument that traditional universities should be only one component of a "comprehensive, diversified and well-articulated tertiary education system" (World Bank, 2002, p. xxiv), with an increasing role for new types of institutions, including not only short-duration technical institutes, community colleges, polytechnics, distance education centers, and open universities; but even newer actors in the 'borderless' tertiary education market, including virtual, franchise, and corporate universities, media companies, libraries and museums, and 'education brokers' (ibid., p. 32–34).

The White Paper keeps the term 'higher education,' but also argues for increased diversity of mission. "There is already a great deal of diversity within the sector. But it needs to be acknowledged and celebrated, with institutions both openly identifying and playing to their strengths" (DFES, 2003, p. 20). Scarce resources must be allocated so as to "produce a focus on comparative advantage: individual institutions focus on what they do best, while the sector as a whole achieves...[a] much wider range of objectives" (ibid., p. 20). Later, it stresses "we do not believe that expansion should mean 'more of the same'... we do not favour expansion on the template of the traditional three years honours degree" (ibid., p. 60). It emphasizes the important role of non-university institutions (a sector known in the UK as 'further' rather than 'higher' education), recognizes that "different 'mixed economy' institutions and federal arrange-

ments are developing, where the traditional boundaries are no longer relevant or desirable” (ibid., p.63) and proposes partnerships between different types of institutions; more opportunities for part-time and flexible study, including e-learning; and “a funding regime which enables each institution to choose its mission...to make sure that our system recognises and celebrates different missions properly” (ibid., p. 20).

Another striking similarity between the World Bank document and the White Paper is their desire to overcome what they acknowledge (if slightly half-heartedly) to be past mistakes. The World Bank admits “there is a perception that the Bank has not been fully responsive to the growing demand by clients for tertiary education interventions and that, especially in the poorest countries, lending for the sub-sector has not matched the importance of tertiary education systems for economic and social development. The Bank is commonly viewed as supporting only basic education; systematically advocating the reallocation of public expenditures from tertiary to basic education; promoting cost recovery and private sector expansion; and discouraging low-income countries from considering advanced human capital” (World Bank, 2002, p. xviii). To correct this perception, the World Bank’s new document examines the contribution of tertiary education to economic and social development, concluding that tertiary education contributes to poverty reduction, through “knowledge-driven economic growth strategies,” “redistribution and empowerment” by opening better employment and income opportunities to underprivileged students, and support for the rest of the education system (ibid., p. xx). Indeed, the report states, “It is doubtful that any developing country could make significant progress toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals...without a strong tertiary education system” (ibid., p. xx) and emphasizes a growing “recognition of the need for a balanced and comprehensive view of education as a holistic system that includes not only the human capital contribution of tertiary education but also its critical humanistic and social capital building dimensions and its roles as an important global public good” (ibid., p. xix).

Similarly, the British government is at pains to correct a perception that it has failed to recognize the importance of higher education. The White Paper admits that the government is “reversing years of underinvestment” (DFES, 2003, p. 5). On institutional diversity, it states, “the Government accepts that it has been partly responsible for the failure to have an honest recognition of universities’ different roles” (ibid., p. 20). Like the World Bank document, the White Paper lists the benefits of higher education, not only in terms of equipping the labor force with appropriate and relevant skills, stimulating innovation and supporting productivity, but also acting as “the necessary storehouse



of expertise in science and technology and the arts and humanities which defines our civilisation and culture” (ibid., p. 21).

Such statements in both documents reflect a welcome shift towards a greater recognition of the importance and value of higher education. The World Bank report builds on previous studies, including not only its own paper *Higher Education: Lessons of Experience* (World Bank, 1994), but also the report of the World Bank/UNESCO Task Force on Higher Education and Society: *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (World Bank, 2000), which declared that “as knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education” (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000, p. 9). The Foreword to the World Bank’s report on tertiary education, by Mamphela Ramphele, co-chair of the Task Force and now Managing Director (Human Development) at the World Bank, refers to the Task Force Report and defines tertiary education as “more than the capstone of the traditional education pyramid, it is a critical pillar of human development worldwide” (World Bank, 2002, p. ix).

The World Bank and the British government both use their recent publications to give a strong positive message about the value and benefits of higher education. Each report, however, tempers their enthusiasm with the equally powerful message that while systems and institutions are currently changing, they will need to change even more in the future, to cope with new challenges. The World Bank report’s Overview and Summary even begins with a quotation from Charles Darwin: “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change” (World Bank, 2002, p. 1).

Both documents advocate a change in the role of the state, encouraging a shift towards greater use of incentives to guide institutions, rather than central control. The World Bank argues that “instead of relying on the traditional state control model to impose reforms, countries are increasingly choosing to bring about change by guiding and encouraging tertiary education institutions, whether public or private, in a non-controlling, flexible manner. This can be achieved in three complementary ways: by establishing a coherent policy framework; by creating an enabling regulatory environment; by offering appropriate financial incentives” (ibid., p. 83).

The World Bank document gives many examples of such mechanisms, including development of long-term strategic plans for the sub-sector, quality assurance systems, and financial incentives. Funding options discussed in the report include formula funding, the use of matching funds designed to encourage financial diversification, and competitive funds—awarded on the basis of proposals submitted by institutions and with transparent procedures and criteria—to support quality improvement or stimulate innovation. There is a strong



emphasis on institutional autonomy. The World Bank believes that institutional autonomy is a “key element in the successful transformation of public tertiary institutions” (ibid., p. 89).

The British White Paper, which represents an attempt to provide an ‘enabling environment’ and ‘appropriate financial incentives,’ also gives strong emphasis to institutional autonomy. The chapter on financing is called “Freedoms and funding,” and argues that “higher education institutions need real freedom—including the freedom to raise their own funding, independent of government—if they are to flourish. They are already free and autonomous institutions...but they do not always use the freedoms they have to the full; as well as giving the sector new freedoms... we want to empower them to use the ones they have to their fullest potential, so that they can be dynamic and self-determining institutions” (DFES, 2003, p. 77). Its proposals include reducing bureaucracy and burdens on universities, increasing university endowments as the route to real funding freedom in the long term, supporting institutions that wish to build endowments, and giving universities the freedom to set their own tuition fee, between £0 and £3,000 a year (ibid., p. 76).

The White Paper also proposes extending the use of targeted funding to institutions, as a way of supporting policy reform through financial incentives. A financial incentive to HEIs to increase the participation rates of disadvantaged students was introduced a few years ago and will now be extended. The funding formulae used by the Higher Education Funding Councils (there are separate councils for England, Scotland, and Wales) gives additional funding to universities taking a high proportion of students from disadvantaged homes. This is officially called a ‘widening participation allocation’ but is widely known as the ‘postcode premium,’ because postcodes, which are part of every postal address in the UK, are used to identify students coming from disadvantaged areas. The White Paper explains the justification for this policy: “There is a cost to reaching out to students from less traditional backgrounds and offering them additional support once they are studying to make sure they fulfil their potential” (DFES, 2003, p. 74), and the extra funding is intended to compensate institutions for these extra costs. The White Paper admits, however, that postcode analysis is a crude measure of disadvantage and proposes reforming the financial premium so that it reflects factors such as family income, parental levels of education, and average results of the school attended by a student. The value of the premium will also be increased, starting in 2003–4, from about 5% to about 20% additional funding for each student from a disadvantaged background. It remains to be seen exactly how the premium will be calculated and what its effects will be. ‘Positive discrimination,’ or ‘affirmative action’ as it is called in the US, is still very controversial in the UK, as in other

countries. Critics argue that it will encourage negative discrimination against pupils from private schools, rather than genuinely encouraging widening participation, but it will certainly represent a powerful financial incentive to universities to increase participation of disadvantaged students.

Several of the changes proposed in both documents involve increased cost sharing, but with a strong system of student support to promote equity and guarantee access for the underprivileged. The World Bank emphasizes the importance of cost sharing, both as a way of financing expansion that is sustainable and to avoid a regressive system of finance that benefits the privileged. It recognizes, however, that “Countries that have introduced or raised user fees at the tertiary level are at risk of experiencing an increase in access disparities in the absence of effective and well targeted financial aid mechanisms” (World Bank, 2002, p. 56). Its new message, therefore, is: “Increased cost-sharing in public universities and further expansion of private tertiary education cannot be implemented equitably without the parallel development of scholarship and loan programs that can guarantee the necessary financial support to deserving low income students” (ibid., p. 94).

Similarly, the UK government introduced means-tested tuition fees of £1,000 a year in 1997, exempting students from low-income families. At the same time, they also abolished grants for student maintenance (living expenses), making students entirely dependent on repayable loans. Now, however, the White Paper proposes the reintroduction of maintenance grants of up to £1,000 a year for students from low-income families, together with increased cost recovery through tuition and fees, with universities able to charge up to £3,000 a year, (variable between courses) on the grounds that “graduates on average earn much more than those without degrees, and are far more likely to be in employment” (DFES, 2003, p. 9). But, the White Paper adds: “We will not compromise on fair access and will take steps to ensure young people are not deterred by up-front fees” (ibid., p. 9). Payment will, therefore, be through a new Graduate Contribution Scheme, to be introduced on an income-contingent repayment basis (with payments through the income tax system) in 2006. Furthermore, universities will not be allowed to charge higher fees (known popularly as ‘top-up fees’, because they supplement public funding) unless they have already developed ‘Access Agreements’ or action plans to safeguard and promote equitable access. These agreements will be monitored by an independent Access Regulator, whose task will be to ensure that the Access Agreements are “robust and challenging” (ibid., p. 75).

The strong emphasis on equity in both documents means that there is now a very powerful message about the importance of financial aid and student support. This cannot be described as a ‘new’ message, however. Many earlier World

Bank reports (1986 and 1994, for example) stressed the need for financial aid to ensure that low-income students are not denied access to higher education. The White Paper argues that in the UK “our access difficulties occur despite having a level of public spending on financial aid to students (including student loans) as a percentage of total public expenditure on higher education that is the highest in the OECD” (DFES, 2003, p. 18). What is ‘new’ about the message on student aid in these documents is partly a matter of emphasis—insistence on the need for targeted financial aid to ensure equitable access is explicit and frequently emphasized—and partly a recognition of the need for targeted scholarships or grants awarded to low-income students, as well as loans, in a well designed system of student support.

The next sections of this article summarize the international experience with tuition fees and student aid—advocated in both the World Bank report and the British White Paper—to see how far the messages put forward in these documents are already being put into practice and what lessons can be drawn on their feasibility.

### ***Tuition Fees***

Tuition fees or other charges (including for registration, examinations, food and accommodation, etc.) are the main source of income for private institutions. The widespread growth of private HEIs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as in many transition economies in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, inevitably means increased reliance on fees as a means of financing HEIs. In addition, many countries have recently introduced or increased tuition fees in public universities. They may not always be called tuition fees, however. In the UK, the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 provoked bitter controversy, and in Scotland, one of the first acts of the newly devolved Scottish Parliament was to abolish ‘up-front’ fees (payable by students in higher education) and introduce a Graduate Endowment Fund, to which all graduates must pay a contribution after completing a course of higher education.

The use of the term ‘contribution’ was thought to be more politically acceptable than ‘tuition fee’ and follows the example of Australia, which introduced the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), in 1989. The Australian HECS, an annual charge that can be paid either as an ‘up-front’ fee, or deferred until after graduation, is discussed in more detail below. Although some critics believe that contributions to a graduate endowment fund or HECS are just tuition fees masquerading under another name, the British White Paper follows the examples of Australia and the Scottish Parliament and proposes, from 2006, to abolish ‘up-front’ fees in England and introduce a Graduate

Contribution Scheme, to which graduates (not students) will contribute—through the income tax system, on an income-contingent basis—up to £3,000 per year of their higher education course. These contributions, to be set by universities, will vary between courses and are often described as ‘top-up’ fees. To counter any objection that such contributions will discriminate against those starting higher education after 2006, the White Paper suggests that those graduates “who had their higher education free, and have reaped enormous benefits from it” should be asked to “give something back” by contributing to HEIs on a voluntary basis (DFES, 2003, p. 81) and that such contributions will benefit from tax concessions.

At the time this article was written, legislation to enact the proposed changes to higher education funding in Britain, including ‘top-up’ fees, had not yet been introduced or debated in Parliament. When the debate does take place (scheduled for Autumn 2003) there is likely to be strong opposition. Such a scheme, with variable fees that are paid as an income-contingent graduate contribution rather than as an ‘up-front’ payment, has long been advocated by many economists in the UK, however (see Barr, 2001, who pointed to the success of the Australian model). When HECS was first introduced in Australia, students had to pay a contribution equal to about 20% of the average costs of tuition, which could either be paid as an ‘up-front’ fee, with a discount of 25%, or be deferred until after graduation, when it is collected through the income tax system. This is, in effect, an income-contingent student loan, with repayments collected by means of a supplement to income tax (initially 2–4% of income, now 3–6% of income), rather than a true ‘graduate tax.’ Although there was initially some opposition, HECS was very quickly accepted in Australia as a fair way of increasing private contributions to the costs of higher education.

A recent analysis of HECS by Chapman and Ryan (2002) describes its history and provides important new evidence on the effects of HECS. Chapman was one of the original architects of the scheme, so the article draws on extensive knowledge of the political background and theoretical underpinnings of HECS and provides an analysis of new data on the effects of HECS on participation in Australian higher education. The conclusions are very positive: “First, HECS has raised and continues to raise considerable revenue. This has been used to help finance a large expansion in Australian higher education. Second, there have apparently been no adverse consequences for the participation of relatively disadvantaged prospective students. Indeed, the participation of young people has expanded for members of all socio-economic groups” (Chapman and Ryan, 2002, p. 78).

The authors are so enthusiastic about income-contingent loans in general, and HECS in particular, that they believe their findings “strongly promote the case for other countries to adopt similar arrangements” (ibid., p. 78.) They mention several African countries (including Ghana, Namibia, Ethiopia, and Rwanda) that are actively considering such plans and conclude that “Income contingency seems to be here to stay” (ibid., p. 78). There is, however, an important caveat to Chapman and Ryan’s argument about income-contingent payment of contributions or loans. They emphasize that the income-contingent loan approach requires that a government is able to do at least two things efficiently: (i) record graduate incomes accurately over time, and (ii) collect income taxes efficiently. Many developing countries would not meet these requirements, and a paper by Johnstone and Silassie (2001) questions whether income-contingent loans and collection of graduate contributions, in place of tuition fees, is really feasible in developing countries such as Ethiopia.

Apart from the possibility that the word ‘contribution’ is more popular than ‘fees’ and the way the contributions are collected, there are other interesting lessons from the Australian experience of introducing HECS. First, the Australian government devoted considerable efforts to explaining the new system, how it works, and its justification. This seems to have been successful in reducing opposition, both from students and from the general public. Secondly, the money generated by ‘up-front’ fees and graduate contributions was earmarked for expansion of higher education. In many countries, students and HEIs fear that if tuition fees are introduced or increased, the money generated will replace, rather than supplement, public contributions, resulting in no increase in resources for higher education. The British government seems to have learned this lesson. The White Paper declares that “Students paying larger contributions will expect to see the income generated going into improved teaching and facilities. Universities will only be able to do this if they have available to them the extra cash from the contributions they set. The Government will, therefore, provide income to universities equal to the contributions they have set. The Government will then receive the payment back from students over time” (DFES, 2003, p. 87). As noted above, these proposals have not yet received legislative backing, and the precise details of the new British system have not yet been decided. Many other countries have introduced tuition fees or other charges for public higher education, including Chile, Mexico, China, Mongolia, and Nepal. Tuition fees have had a mixed record in Africa, with several countries, including Malawi, introducing fees but later abolishing them. In other cases collecting tuition fees has been successful. The *Task Force on Higher Education and Society* describes how the University of Makerere in Uganda “moved from a situation where none of its students paid fees to one

where more than 70 percent do” (Task Force, 2000, p. 54). Russia and many countries in Eastern and Central Europe have a so-called ‘dual track’ system, under which students who pass university entrance examinations with high marks receive free or highly subsidized higher education (these are sometimes described as ‘quota’ students), while those with lower marks can enter as ‘non-quota’ students and pay fees.

Several problems can be identified on the basis of these experiences. First, there may be strong resentment among students when students pay different fees for the same course or program. There are several instances where foreign (overseas) students pay much higher fees than home students (as in Australia and the UK) or where students from outside a state pay higher fees than state residents (as in public state universities in the US). The logic of such differentials is clear, even if their acceptability is sometimes questioned. It may be much more difficult to justify the charging of very different fee levels to two categories of domestic student, as in the case of ‘quota’ and ‘non-quota’ students in China and Russia. It was this difficulty that led the Vietnamese government to abandon the charging of higher fees for ‘non-quota’ students in the 1990s, although students who are sponsored by their employers can still be admitted as ‘non-quota’ students and pay higher fees.

Another problem concerns equity. Those who gain higher marks in university entrance examinations tend to be those who went to the most privileged secondary schools, who often come from high income families. Inequitable distribution of secondary school opportunities is compounded if these students receive free higher education or pay very low fees, while those who were disadvantaged at the secondary school level must pay higher fees. The World Bank’s recent report notes that “in several formerly socialist countries in Eastern Europe, including Russia, the introduction of tuition fees without accompanying student financial aid mechanisms has had a negative effect on equity” (World Bank, 2002, p. 73). Such experiences, replicated in other countries, show that the introduction or increase in fees or other cost recovery mechanisms must be linked with effective student support. This is the subject of the next section.

### ***Student Support***

In recent years there has been huge interest in different forms of financial support for students, with fierce debates about the relative merits of grants, scholarships, or bursaries (awarded on grounds of academic merit or financial need) and loans, and equally fierce arguments about income-contingent loans (repaid as a fixed percentage of a graduate’s income) versus ‘mortgage-type’ loans (repaid over a fixed period of time). Much of the early debate was based on

assertion and prejudice rather than research, but in recent years there has been considerable research on the effects of different types of student support (Barr, 2001; Chapman and Ryan, 2002; Woodhall, 1992 and 1997; Ziderman and Albrecht, 1995; Ziderman, 2002).

There has been particular interest in, and a growing willingness to introduce, student loans. There are many reasons for this. Rising enrolments, combined with financial stringency, convinced many governments that student support based entirely on grants was proving increasingly costly to the taxpayer, and ultimately unsustainable. This was one argument used by the British government to justify the introduction in 1990 of the first student loans in the UK. It also argued, however, that higher education is a profitable investment for the individual, offering private rates of return that are often well in excess of the social rate of return. The recent White Paper provides further evidence of the private returns to higher education: "Graduates...earn, on average, around 50 percent more than non-graduates...are half as likely to be unemployed... even though the number of graduates has risen significantly over the last twenty years, the gap between graduate and average earnings hasn't narrowed at all. If anything, it has increased" (DFES, 2003, p. 59). On grounds of equity, therefore, as well as efficiency and financial sustainability, governments in countries including Thailand and South Africa, as well as Australia and Britain, argued that repayable loans are fair, since graduates who enjoy better job prospects and higher lifetime incomes as a result of higher education should not be subsidized by less fortunate taxpayers.

Student loan schemes now exist in about sixty countries. Although many have faced serious problems of inefficient recovery and default, others have proved more successful, and several countries, including Jamaica, Kenya, and Venezuela, have reformed their loan systems under World Bank projects, making them more efficient. Reforms have included:

- Increasing interest rates, so that graduates pay a positive real interest rate, rather than a rate below inflation or even zero interest, as in some countries;
- Improving criteria for selection of loan recipients and for targeting subsidies, through the development of simple but effective tests of family income, to identify the most needy students;
- Improving mechanisms for storing and processing data, including installation of computerized systems with specially developed software;
- Privatizing collection of loan repayments and improving collection mechanisms.



The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) organized a series of international forums to review experience with student loans (Woodhall, 1990, 1991a and b, 1992, 1993). These showed that there are at least six requirements for effective design and management of a student loan scheme:

- Efficient institutional management, including adequate systems for selection of borrowers, disbursement of loans, record-keeping, data storage and processing;
- Sound financial management, including setting appropriate interest rates to maintain the capital value of the loan fund, and cover administrative costs;
- Effective and transparent criteria and mechanisms for determining eligibility for loans, for targeting of subsidies and deferral or forgiveness of loan repayments;
- Adequate legal frameworks to ensure that loan recovery is legally enforceable;
- Effective loan collection machinery, using either commercial banks, the income tax system (as in Australia and the UK), national insurance mechanisms (as in Ghana and Singapore), or collection by employers (as in South Africa) to ensure high rates of repayment and minimize default;
- Widespread information and publicity campaigns to ensure understanding and acceptance of the terms for borrowing and repayment of loans.

The last point is often neglected. As noted earlier, one of the reasons for the success of HECS in Australia, according to Chapman and Ryan (2002), was strong political will on the part of government, accompanied by effective publicity campaigns to explain to students and the wider public the principles and justification of charges. Both these factors are also cited by R. Jackson (2002) Chief Executive Officer of South Africa's National Student Financial Assistance Scheme (NSFAS), to explain the success of NSFAS, which provides a combination of loans and bursaries for disadvantaged students.

NSFAS was first established in 1991 as a small scheme to assist black disadvantaged students in Apartheid South Africa. Since the democratic election of a government committed to political, social, and educational transformation and the eradication of racial, class, and gender imbalances and inequities, NSFAS has grown into a national scheme which has helped over 600,000 black students of academic ability but poor family background finance their tertiary education. NSFAS is funded mainly by government contributions and donors, but an increasing share of its financing comes from loan repayments by former students,

now graduates, able to repay their loans. Students from poor families still face severe financial and educational barriers to entry and successful progression through higher education in South Africa, but NSFAS is helping to overcome these barriers for some of the most disadvantaged students. Jackson argues that “NSFAS must become sustainable so that future generations of students can gain the same benefits from the scheme as current and previous borrowers. There are three keys to NSFAS being and remaining sustainable: firstly, the ongoing capitalization of the scheme; secondly, innovative, efficient and resilient administrative systems; and, thirdly, the recovery of the loan portion of the award from students and the recycling of these funds back into the scheme in order to assist future generations of students” (Jackson, 2002, p. 92)

Although the South African loan scheme works well, there are skeptics who doubt whether it could be replicated elsewhere in Africa. Nevertheless, there was great interest in student loans in the Conference on Cost sharing in Eastern and Southern Africa organized jointly in March 2002 by the University of Dar es Salaam and the International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project.<sup>5</sup> As a follow-up to that conference, the International Project hopes to work with the Scholarships and Training Awards Committee of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to identify minimum criteria for successful loan programs in the African context and to undertake further technical analysis on the design of loan program components.

Despite the growth of student loan programs, there is mounting evidence that loans are not sufficient, by themselves, to ensure equitable access. In the UK, where grants were abolished in 1998, independent committees in Scotland and Wales<sup>6</sup> found evidence that some potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds were discouraged from enrolling in higher education by the fear of debt. Both the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly of Wales responded by introducing means-tested grants for students from the poorest families studying in Scotland or Wales (Richards, 2002; Rees, 2002). The fact that the British Government now intends to reintroduce means-tested grants for students from low-income families in English universities, starting in 2004, shows that this lesson has had a clear impact on UK government policy.

The fact is that student financial aid has many different objectives, including equity (encouraging access for poor students) and efficiency (increasing the feasibility of cost recovery). Policy makers need to be clear about their priorities and objectives when designing student aid programs. Ziderman (2002)

---

5 See Note 4.

6 See Independent Committee of Inquiry into Student Finance (2000) and Independent Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding in Wales (IGSHFW) (2001).

analyzes alternative objectives of student loan schemes. Such an analysis could usefully be extended to other types of student aid, including scholarships, bursaries (awarded on the basis of academic merit or financial need), indirect aid, in the form of subsidized food or accommodation, and subsidized employment opportunities for students, such as 'work-study' in the USA. More evidence is needed on the effects of alternative systems, but a clear lesson that is emerging from several countries is that mixed systems are often more flexible and effective than a system relying solely on grants or loans.

### **Putting the Messages into Practice: The Example of Mozambique**

One country that is putting into practice many of the lessons and messages summarized in this article is Mozambique. The World Bank report argues for a strategic approach to tertiary education reform, based on a coherent policy framework, a comprehensive and system-wide development approach, and a long-term vision for the development of tertiary education. The Minister of Education in Mozambique appointed a Task Force in 1999 to prepare a Strategic Plan for Higher Education. A new Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology was created in 2000, and, after an extensive process of national and provincial consultations, including debates with stakeholders, including employers, academic staff, students, and representatives of civil society, as well as politicians and policy makers, a Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Mozambique, 2000–2010 was approved by Parliament (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Mozambique, 2000).

This Strategic Plan, based on statements of mission, vision, and guiding principles that stressed equitable access, quality and relevance, responsiveness, sustainability, efficiency, and institutional autonomy combined with accountability, covers all HEIs in the country (including five public and five private HEIs). It aims to develop and support a diversified, flexible, integrated, and cost effective higher education system, to meet high level labor force needs for the socio-economic development of the country.<sup>7</sup> Following approval of the Strategic Plan and using it as the guiding framework, the Government of Mozambique has recently started to implement a World Bank Higher Education Project, designed to enhance internal efficiency and expand the output of graduates, improve equitable access (based on gender, location, and socio-economic factors), and improve the quality and relevance of higher education.

The project includes system-wide capacity building, to assist the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology in developing regulatory, man-

---

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the historical development and current situation of higher education in Mozambique see Mario, Fry, Levey and Chilundo (2003).

agement, and co-ordination capacity. These improvements will provide the kind of 'enabling environment' which the 2002 World Bank report recommends. In addition to strengthening the existing public universities and the support for new types of HEIs or programs, including distance education, the project will support two new activities that will put into practice some of the messages described in this article. One is a National Scholarship Fund, which will design, introduce, and operate, on a pilot basis, a publicly financed scholarship scheme to provide financial assistance and advisory services to students from three Mozambique provinces previously under-represented in higher education. The program will cover costs of tuition (including fees and books), travel, subsistence, and lodging for students from disadvantaged groups, and students attending both public and private HEIs will be eligible. Design and operation of the Scholarship Fund will draw on the experience of an existing small scale program in one province, the Nisomé Scholarship Fund (Nisomé means 'let's study' in the local language). Experience from this program showed that:

- A scholarship program that aims to increase access for students in under-represented provinces should be administered at provincial, rather than central level, to ensure that it responds to local needs;
- Providing funds directly to students, to cover fees and living expenses for their chosen course, may be more effective, in promoting responsiveness to labor market and social demand, than allocating the money to HEIs;
- Academic support and guidance for students, as well as money, is needed to improve student access and performance and prevent drop-out;
- Governance mechanisms and structures must be designed to promote accountability and responsiveness to provincial priorities;
- Well trained, committed and experienced staff are essential for the success of the program.

Another interesting component of the project is the Capacity Building and Innovation Fund, which supports innovation in both public and private HEIs through a competitive fund. HEIs will submit proposals for activities designed to improve access and quality; these proposals will be evaluated by a national committee, on the basis of well-defined and transparent criteria. There are several examples of competitive funds supported by other World Bank projects in Argentina, Chile, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Such funds provide financial incentives to HEIs to develop innovative proposals to improve quality, responsiveness, or access, by investing in staff training or equipment to support curriculum reform, for example, or by developing new courses to respond to labor

market needs or remedial programs to reduce drop-out rates. A “demand-driven” competitive fund increases institutional autonomy, by allocating funds in response to institutional proposals, rather than on the basis of governmental funding formulae, while stringent monitoring, on the basis of agreed performance indicators, ensures accountability.

An interesting feature of the Mozambique program is that it is open to private, as well as public HEIs. Private HEIs will be required to repay, on favorable terms, money allocated under the Innovation Fund. These funds will, in turn, be allocated to the National Scholarship Fund, thus helping to improve its sustainability.

The experience of Mozambique is just one example of a number of innovative approaches, in Africa and other regions, designed to help meet the challenges of expanding access, improving equity, ensuring financial sustainability, and promoting institutional autonomy and accountability. It is too soon to evaluate the effects, as the project started only in 2002. It is presented here as one example of the myriad attempts to put into practice the messages summarized in this article and to apply lessons from international experience.

### Conclusions

The ‘new’ messages outlined in this document include several that are actually far from new. For many years, researchers and policy analysts have emphasized the important contribution of higher education to economic and social development. They have also recommended strategic and comprehensive planning, institutional diversity, autonomy and accountability, and financially sustainable financing of higher education, including well-designed systems of student support and financial aid to increase access and improve equity. What is ‘new’ in the documents reviewed in this article, is, first, an increased emphasis on messages such as the need to combine strategies on cost recovery with student aid and the value of targeted scholarships or grants to supplement student loans. Secondly, there is concern about practical implementation issues as well as theoretical justifications for cost recovery or other so-called ‘solutions’. Finally, there is recognition that policies on cost sharing, including fees and student support, should be part of a long-term strategic planning approach to higher education, rather than piecemeal responses to financial austerity.

Several lessons and messages emerge, both from the documents reviewed in part two and in the international experience summarized in parts three to five. These include:

- Higher (tertiary education) is vital for economic and social development and contributes to economic growth through creation and transmission of knowledge and building of human and social capital;
- Governments and higher education institutions need to adopt a long-term strategic planning approach for tertiary education, based on a clear vision and diversity of institutional mission, programs, and modes of delivery;
- Higher education needs secure and sustainable financing to meet economic and social demand for expansion while preserving or enhancing quality. This requires some form of cost-sharing, since governments cannot do it alone, and those who benefit from higher incomes and better job opportunities, as a result of higher education, should contribute to its cost;
- Policies on cost recovery, including tuition fees, other charges, and deferred payment schemes all need to be developed in conjunction with well-designed programs of student support and financial aid;
- Introduction or increases in fees and student charges need to be carefully monitored, to assess their impact on access and equity;
- Student loans have a positive role to play in systems of student support, but they need to be well-designed and administered, and should be combined with well-targeted grants, scholarships, and other subsidies to ensure that the most disadvantaged potential students are not discouraged by fear of debt. Income contingent repayment of loans has advantages over 'mortgage-type' loans but requires accurate measurement of graduates' income and efficient recovery mechanisms;
- There is a world-wide trend towards greater institutional autonomy for higher education institutions, rather than detailed government control. Using financial incentives in the funding of institutions can encourage diversity, flexibility, responsiveness, and innovation but must be combined with careful monitoring to ensure accountability and consistency with national policy priorities.

The reports reviewed above argue that higher education faces numerous challenges—both old and new—but the international experiences described here show that there is a wealth of ideas for tackling these challenges and that governments and institutions are ready to innovate and introduce reforms. The fact that this new journal, devoted to higher education in Africa, has just been launched is another, very welcome, indication of the eagerness of the higher education community to respond to these challenges. Ideally, this summary of

lessons and messages from international experience will also contribute to the search for effective solutions to problems of cost sharing.

### References

- Barr, N. (2001). *The Welfare State as Piggy Bank: Information, Risk, Uncertainty and the Role of the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, B. and Ryan, C. (2002, July). Income-contingent financing of student charges for higher education: Assessing the Australian innovation. *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 64–81.
- Department for Education and Skills (DFES) (UK) (2003). *The Future of Higher Education*. London: The Stationery Office, Cm 5735.
- Independent Committee of Inquiry into Student Finance (2000). *Student Finance, Fairness for the Future* (The Cubie Report). Edinburgh: Independent Committee of Inquiry into Student Finance.
- Independent Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding in Wales (IIGSHFW) (2001). *Investing in Learners: Coherence, Clarity and Equity for Student Support in Wales*. Cardiff: IIGSHFW.
- Jackson, R. (2002, July). The National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS): How and why it works. *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 82–94.
- Johnstone, D. B. (1986). *Sharing the Costs of Higher Education: Student Financial Assistance in the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Sweden, and the United States*. New York: The College Board.
- Johnstone, D. B. (2002, July). Challenges of financial austerity: Imperatives and limitations of revenue diversification in higher education. *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 18–36.
- Johnstone, D. B. with Silassie A. A. (2001). *The Applicability for Developing Countries of Income Contingent Loans or Graduate Taxes, with Special Consideration of an Australian HECS-Type Income Contingent Loan Program for Ethiopia*. Available on the International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project website: <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/>
- Mario, M., Fry, P., Levey, L., and Chilundo, A. (2003). *Higher Education in Mozambique: A Case Study*. Oxford: James Currey (in association with Partnership for Higher Education in Africa).
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Mozambique. (2000). *Strategic Plan of Higher Education in Mozambique, 2000–2010*. Maputo, Republic of Mozambique Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.
- Rees, T. (2002, July). The independent investigation group on student hardship and funding in Wales: Reflections from the chair. *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 10–17.
- Richards, K. (2002, July). Reforming higher education student finance in the UK: The impact of recent changes and proposals for the future *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 48–63.



- The Task Force on Higher Education and Society. (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*. Washington, DC: The World Bank (a joint World Bank-UNESCO project).
- Woodhall, M. (1990). *Student Loans in Higher Education (1) Western Europe and USA*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Woodhall, M. (1991a). *Student Loans in Higher Education (2) Asia*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Woodhall, M. (1991b). *Student Loans in Higher Education (3) English-speaking Africa*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Woodhall, M. (Guest Ed.). (1992). Student loans in developing countries: Feasibility, experience and prospects for reform. *Higher Education*, 23 (4), 347–356.
- Woodhall, M. (1993). *Student Loans in Higher Education (4) Latin America and the Caribbean*. Paris: International Institute for Higher Educational Planning.
- Woodhall, M. (1997). The reform of higher education finance in developing countries: Some implementation issues.” Paper presented at Human Development Week Washington, DC: World Bank (processed).
- Woodhall, M. (Guest Ed.). (2002, July). Paying for learning: The debate on student fees, grants and loans in international perspective. *The Welsh Journal of Education*, 11(1), 1–9.
- Woodhall, M. (2003). Financing and economics of education in Africa. In Philip Altbach and Damtew Teferra (Eds.), *African Higher Education: An International Handbook and Reference Guide*.
- World Bank. (1994). *Higher Education; the Lessons of Experience*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- World Bank. (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Ziderman, A. and Albrecht, D. (1995). *Financing Universities in Developing Countries*. London and Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.
- Ziderman, A. (2002, July). Alternative objectives of national student loan schemes: implications for design, evaluation and policy. *The Welsh Journal of Education (Special International Issue)*, 11(1), 37–47.

---

# Restore, Reform but do not Transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa

Amina Mama<sup>1</sup>

---

## Abstract

This paper uses gender analysis to reflect on the emergence and development of higher education in Africa. The available statistical picture indicates that despite the absence of formal exclusions, women's entry into higher educational institutions—as students and as employees—has remained slow and uneven, suggesting the need to look beyond the numbers. The overall pattern of exclusion and marginalization is true for both administrative and academic tracks but is at its most extreme for senior academic and research positions. The persistence of extreme gender inequality is most easily and often attributed to external social and familial factors. Here, however, it is argued that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, despite institutional and managerial claims of administrative neutrality, the institutional and intellectual cultures of African institutions are, in fact, permeated with sexual and gender dynamics.

## Résumé

Ce papier utilise l'analyse sur le genre pour montrer l'urgence du développement de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique. Les statistiques existantes montrent que malgré l'absence d'exclusions formelles, l'insertion de la femme dans les institutions de l'enseignement supérieur—comme étudiants ou comme employés—est encore lente et inégale, d'où l'a nécessité de voir au-delà des chiffres. Toute forme d'exclusion et de marginalisation existe dans l'administration et dans le cursus universitaire mais c'est pire à un niveau supérieur universitaires et en position de chercheurs. Cette persistance d'une extrême inégalité du genre est pour la plupart du temps facilement et souvent attribuée aux facteurs socio familiaux externes. Il est cependant démontré ici, qu'il y a suffisamment de preuve pour dire que malgré les demandes institutionnelles et directoriales pour la neutralité dans l'administration, la culture institutionnelle et intellectuelle des institutions africaines est en fait, filtrer à travers une dynamique sexuelle et du genre.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chair in Gender Studies, African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

### Introduction

Why is African tertiary education attracting new attention within the current global scenario, and what are the gender implications of this new attention? Observers often point to the rapid economic and technological developments that are seen as heralding the arrival of 'the knowledge society'. Those concerned with development note that poorer nations and other historically marginalised groups of people—most obviously Africa and her people—are unlikely to benefit from globalization, unless something is done to redress the parlous state of the higher education sector. Yet the longstanding global patterns of division and inequality look set to persist within a sector that has been severely depleted by contemporary macro-economic policies of reform and structural adjustment.

In previously colonised contexts, public universities have always been highly regarded as key vehicles for the pursuit of all of the national and continental development aspirations intrinsic to political, economic, and intellectual decolonization. In terms of the 'core business', this meant the production of both knowledge and people equipped with the intellectual capacities needed to pursue national and regional advancement. African governments have not formally excluded women from participation in this project, as the colonialists did. They have tended to treat the attainment of nation-statehood as a collective restoration of conventional masculinity, however, which has precluded full and equal participation of women in the national project. Access to education, commonly regarded as a major route to upward mobility and status, has remained deeply inequitable.

It needs to be said that, despite the broader patterns of gender inequality persisting in the tertiary sector, public higher education also remains the main route to career advancement for women in Africa. Their constrained access, therefore, poses a constraint to the pursuit of more equitable and just modes of political, economic, and social development. Moreover, it is broadly accepted that rectifying gender injustice requires a degree of intellectual specialization, as can be indexed by the proliferation of gender studies within African universities. The interconnections between gender and all other social divisions are now increasingly understood to require competent analysis and theorisation, as well as carefully designed practical and policy interventions, and these constitute the intellectual focus of most African gender studies units (Boswell, 2003).

From independence onward, the developmental significance of African universities ensured their initial establishment and proliferation and generated an impressive increase in the availability of higher education (HE) in most of the African continent (Ajayi et al., 1996; Sawyerr, 2002). Since the develop-

ment crisis of the 1980s set in, however, Africa's capacity to supply HE has been severely diminished, and the availability of resources for this expanding sector has been curtailed. The World Bank was a key player among the architects of the structural adjustment programmes that contributed to the qualitative deterioration of African Universities during the 1980s, against widespread campus resistance and expressions of concern from the African intelligentsia. African governments found themselves caught between the directives of international financial institutions and popular demands but increasingly indebted to the former, and they demanded reductions in public expenditure.

At the same time, university communities grew increasingly critical of undemocratic and corrupt regimes throughout the 'lost decade' of the 1980s, and these criticisms did little to endear them to the regimes of the day. Overall, academics found themselves increasingly unable to sustain themselves professionally and either emigrated or turned to other pursuits and survival strategies. As observers have consistently pointed out over the years, the resulting externalisation and depletion of African intellectual capacity has had major implications for the capacity of universities to generate the much needed cadres of skilled professionals, with long term implications for regional development, as well as regional integrity and autonomy. The lack of intellectual capacity across Africa has now become a key feature of the development crisis and its perpetuation.

The arrival of the 21st century has seen a change of heart even within the powerful international financial institutions that only a decade or so ago considered HE a luxury African could ill afford. The World Bank recently acknowledged that tertiary education:

...is a critical pillar of human development worldwide. In today's life-long learning framework, tertiary education provides not only the high level skills necessary for every labor market, but also the training essential for teachers, doctors, nurses, civil servants, engineers, humanists, entrepreneurs, scientists, social scientists, and myriad personnel. It is these trained individuals who develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies, support civil society, teach children, lead effective governments, and make important decisions which affect entire societies.

Ramphele, 2002, p. x

The fact that World Bank now acknowledges something that Africans have always understood about the value of higher education signals the targeting of African universities as key sites for a new round of intervention in the name of globalization. While the meaning of globalization continues to be deeply contested, much as development has always been, there is little doubt that the

interventions of particular agencies are designed to advance their particular agendas. While there are many stakeholders involved in higher education (international financial agencies, aid agencies, U.S. Foundations, African governments, and African regional organizations and educational associations, to name only the most visible), it would seem self-evident that the World Bank's agenda for African higher education must surely owe more to the "Washington consensus" of the day, than to the visions and aspirations of millions of disenfranchised and disempowered Africans.

Whatever the agenda, it is a fundamental fact that Africa continues to suffer from gross under-provision of higher education in comparison to higher education in developing countries, not to mention in developed nations such as Japan, North America and Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> This disparity exists despite the public commitment which saw the gross rate of enrollment (GRE) across most of Africa grow sharply at independence, as more public universities were established in almost all countries. Sawyerr (2000) cites rough estimates that show a growth in GRE from an estimated 181,000 in 1975, to over 600,000 in 1980. After a plateau during the 1980s, gross enrollment more than doubled once again, reaching 1.75 million by 1995. Despite this spectacular increase both in the number of institutions and in the number of students enrolled in them, the African continent still has the lowest regional GRE in the world. These insufficient levels of educational provision look even worse when examined in conjunction with the fact that Africa also suffers from dire shortages of locally grounded development capacity—or person-power—in almost all sectors. Furthermore, the quality of the education being provided has been compromised by the shrinking availability of public resources. In effect, the continent faces the emergence of a 'knowledge society' severely short of highly-trained personnel and with the key institutions that might produce this personnel in a perilous condition.

The nature of the intellectual and institutional capacity required to rise to the challenges of Africa's ongoing problems is a far more controversial issue; one that cannot be fully explored here. The ongoing debates on the continent clearly reflect a consensual understanding of HE institutions' continuing to be key sites for the production of intellectual capacity that is both socially responsible and relevant to regional development agendas. The agenda of gender equality should also be included within this understanding of the requisite capacities. It is in the contemporary development context that higher education is such an important site for the production of both the personnel and the knowledge required to pursue gender equality in African countries.

---

2 Japan with the same population as Nigeria has almost as many universities as the entire African continent.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are, by and large, obligated to honor the existing national, regional, and international policy commitments to gender equality that their governments have signed. Local commitments to gender equity require first that nations take steps to ensure that they are not themselves reproducing the problem of gender inequality and injustice within their own institutional systems, policies, and procedures. Secondly, higher education institutions are expected to produce gender-competent graduates, who are able to understand and uphold constitutional and international commitments in their various spheres of work. Thirdly, universities in particular—as key sites for research and knowledge production—are might be expected to generate equitable knowledge. Such knowledge equity requires research and scholarship that does not passively reproduce the gender biases of mainstream epistemologies, methodologies, and disciplinary rubrics. Today, it is clear that the institutional, pedagogical, and epistemological demands of gender equality require much deeper levels of specialization than might initially have been anticipated. They require gender-competent theory, research, and analysis that are fully cognizant of African realities, extend across the disciplines, and offer resources for addressing the challenge of supporting the pursuit of equitable development, from the micro-politics of individual identities to the macro-politics of global economic policies and strategic interests.

The above section serves to outline the historical antecedents of Africa's universities from a gender perspective. The section that follows presents a review of the statistical picture and the evidence that is available for constructing a gender profile of African public universities. The third part examines the institutional cultures of public universities and how these cultures present their own challenges to the attainment of gender equality in African universities.

### **Inequitable Legacies**

Prior to the establishment of modern universities, adult learning took place in three main kinds of institutions, all of which were deeply patriarchal. The first century Islamic academies of Karawayn in Fez and Al Ahzar in Cairo, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Timbuktu, and other pre-colonial centres of advanced learning, were all-male Islamic establishments, which excluded women. Secondly, there were 'indigenous' or 'traditional' institutions of social and cultural reproduction, including age groups associations, patrilineage and matrilineage associations, initiation schools, religious schools. These were not only gender segregated, but were also explicitly concerned with the reproduction of traditional norms for masculinity and femininity. Thirdly, colonial colleges were established in the countries that were to become Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and South Africa. These colleges were also largely male preserves, dedicated

to the production of good colonial subjects intended to inherit the exclusively masculine mantle of colonial leadership and further the existing imperial interests dominating the African political and economic landscapes.

None of these educational models can be described solely as antecedents of African universities, however, because elements of them still exist, within and alongside today's African universities. For example, elements of the earlier Islamic higher educational traditions continue in contemporary Islamic universities (e.g., Al Azhar in Cairo, Usman 'Dan Fodio in Sokoto). In the same vein, Africa's educated youth has grown increasingly familiar with contemporary sexual norms and cultures, however informally, during their formative years spent on the campuses, even while traditional rites of passage are still observed in many places. The 'African' universities established after independence did not mark a radical departure from the colonial modes of organizational and intellectual life already prevailing in the West.

When Edward Blyden and Leo Africanus Horton called for the establishment of *African* universities on the eve of the twentieth century, they were fully aware that the production of a committed and independently minded African intelligentsia would prove crucial to the continents' emergence from centuries of slavery and colonial exploitation. From a gender perspective, it is worth noting that it is unlikely that Blyden and Horton envisaged these new African universities as places that would be equally accessible to women. At the time, the Western academies that offered models to African nationalists were themselves proving resistant to the inclusion of women, as the testimonies of many eminent European women thinkers confirms.<sup>3</sup> Colonial primary and secondary schooling was already heavily gendered, with women's capacities being channelled almost exclusively into imported bourgeois notions of femininity centred on domesticity and wifedom. A major legacy of the colonial period was that it left very few women either qualified or socially equipped to enter either the formal economy or the universities, which were as masculine in their composition as they were masculinising in their educational philosophy. At that time, the dominant discourse centred around the production of *manpower*, first for colonial service, and then for the independent African states.

For Africans, the idea of an African university has long been imbued with a multiplicity of aspirations that can be grouped under the shifting rubrics of Pan-Africanism, nationalism, and developmentalism. In other words, the currency of the university in Africa was directly linked to aspirations of nationalism and nation-statehood. Universities the world over have always been public

---

3 E.g., Virginia Woolf in England, Jessica Bernard in the USA. See also Dyhouse's (2001) paper on social mobility and HE in England.



or publicly oriented institutions, but this connection to the public is even more significant in Africa. African universities were established in direct response to enormous and growing popular demands that they have never been able to fully accommodate (Ajayi et al., 1996; Sawyerr, 2002; Manuh, 2002). Independent Africa's universities initially accommodated people from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds, offering men as well as women the opportunity to further their education beyond the mission schools, colonial colleges, and barracks of the colonial era.

African women have proved to be particularly strong supporters and consumers of African higher education. They, generally, faced a more restricted set of curriculum options than their male counterparts, as a result of past and present gender divisions of labor as well as the restrictive social roles ascribed to women. For example, very few women were employed in the colonial public service, and those who were often had to relinquish their jobs when they got married (Denzer, 1989). This changed with the generally expanding access to education brought about during the first decades of political independence. For those women who made it beyond secondary school, tertiary education offered a respectable route to professional employment, one that promised a somewhat broader set of options in a heavily male-dominated formal economy, which had only begun to open up to women after independence in most African countries. Women's conventional nurturing roles also meant that they bore substantial responsibility for the raising and schooling of successive generations, often supporting the educational advancement of their own spouses and extended kin networks.

It is in this light that the educational background of the women who emerged as leaders during the 1920s to 1950s is informative. Constance Agatha Cummings-John (nee Horton)<sup>4</sup> attended the Annie Walsh Memorial School, the Methodist Girls' High School and then joined the Freetown Secondary School for Girls when it opened in 1926. She describes the goal of the latter thus:

... its goal was to provide a good academic curriculum for young ladies as well as to teach them the things that the elite believed ladies should excel in, like sewing, embroidery, and music.

Cummings-John, 1995, p. 6.

To pursue her education beyond this level, however, it was necessary for Cummings-John to go abroad, first to Britain and then, in the 1930s and 40s, to

4 Constance Agatha Cummings-John, a descendent of Africanus Horton, was the first African woman to be elected as a councilor in Freetown City Council in November 1938. This was an event that signalled the entry of West African women into political life. In 1966, she took up office as mayor of Freetown, becoming the first woman to govern a modern capital city on the African continent.

the U.S., where she studied education, colonialism, and home economics at Cornell. She returned home to establish the Eleanor Roosevelt Preparatory School for Girls in Freetown in 1952 and to pursue a political career (Cummings-John, 1995).

Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo in Nigeria, Mabel Dove Danquah in Ghana, and others of their caliber had career trajectories that were similar to that of Constance Cummings-John, in which socially respectable careers as teachers and educators preceded their political involvement in nationalist struggles. For them, as for their male contemporaries, education was not only a pre-requisite for pursuing personal liberation but was also an indispensable facet of national and regional liberation. Attending local universities was not an option for any of the first generation of leaders, male or female, and very few women were able to study abroad.

The history of Uganda's premier public institution is also illustrative. Makerere College only admitted its first women students in 1945 after a long struggle. This 'experiment' was closely monitored and regulated, and the number of women enrolled fluctuated between 1 and 13 in the years leading up to independence. In 1968, there were still only 328 women.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, the National University in the Congo was established in 1954, and, although women were not formally excluded, no women were admitted until 1962; and as late as 1971, women made up only 6.75% of the enrollment at the National University of Côte d'Ivoire (Ajayi et al, 1996, p. 184).

How substantively did women's highly inequitable and constrained access to higher education change with political independence? On the face of it, the expansion of provision of higher education created an historic opportunity to overcome the divisive legacies that had characterised colonialism, including those of Victorian patriarchy. The majority of Africa's universities were established *after* independence, essentially as modernising institutions:<sup>6</sup>

Widespread university education is essentially a post-colonial phenomenon... only 18 out of the 48 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa had universities or colleges before 1960. With the approach of political independence or immediately thereafter, many African countries regarded the establishment of local universities as a major post of the post-colonial national development project. The new universities were to help

5 Nearly thirty years after independence, the total number of women enrolled at Makerere was still only 610 in 1990, and even this number is attributed to the highly controversial affirmative strategy adopted in that year (Kwesiga 2002, p. 207).

6 South Africa is the only country in which an HE system was explicitly designed to maintain mass disenfranchisement, in keeping with the apartheid agenda.

the new nations build up their capacity to manage and develop their resources, alleviate the poverty of the majority of their people, and close the gap between them and the developed world.

Sawyer, 2002, p. 2

Present estimates place the number of universities at 316, and this figure would be much higher if polytechnics, technical and vocational colleges, and other tertiary institutions were to be considered. The figures on university expansion are even more impressive when placed in the context of Africa's extremely difficult political and economic circumstances, notably in those countries that have suffered the effects of war and conflict, or prolonged military dictatorship.

The fact that financial support for HE has been constrained by increasingly stringent loan conditionalities since the 1980s—the 'lost decade' in which structural adjustment largely over-rode African aspirations with regard to development—only underlines Africa's almost relentless commitment to the provision and pursuit of higher education. The deteriorated circumstances of African HEIs in the present global context have given renewed credence to old questions about the mission and vision of African HEIs. Meanwhile, even the significantly expanded provision that exists today falls far short of demand, has remained male-dominated, and looks set to become more rather than less exclusive, as I shall argue below.

### **The Numerical Profile: Enrollment, Throughput, and Employment**

Today, over three decades after independence, one key source suggests that only 3% of Africa's professoriate are women and that women make up only 25% of those enrolled in African universities (Ajayi et al., 1996).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the gender profile suggests that the majority of the women who work in African universities are not academics and researchers, but rather the providers of secretarial, cleaning, catering, student welfare, and other administrative and support services. The detailed statistical picture is likely to be far more complicated and diverse than these global figures indicate. Proper analysis is hampered by the fact that the available statistical picture for Africa's tertiary institutions is largely incomplete.

### ***Gender and Enrollment in Public Universities***

Data disaggregated by gender is hard to come by. Kwesiga's 2002 book, perhaps the most substantive source available on women's access to higher education in Africa to date, does not present any overall data that might assist in constructing an empirical gender profile of African universities, or the specific

7 Excluding North-of-the-Saharan countries and South Africa.

situation with regard to enrollment. The gender-disaggregated gross enrollment data presented below (Table) has been extracted from a recently compiled publication (Teferra & Altbach, 2003) and should be interpreted with great caution, because the diverse sources involved mean that it is not possible to draw meaningful comparisons across countries.

**Table:** Women's Enrollment in African Universities

Country	Source and Date of Data	% Women enrolled
Angola	Unspecified	40
CAR*	2000–2001	9
Congo	Mbemba (2003)	24
Egypt	Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) (1999)	46
Ethiopia	EMIS—MOE: Education Statistics (1999)	15.6
Ghana	Manuh (2002)—University of Ghana	35
Kenya	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Statistics Section (2000)	30
Libya	Secretariat of Education and Scientific Research (2000)	51
Madagascar	UNESCO (2000)	46
Malawi	Unspecified	25
Mali	Global Education Database, UNESCO, USAID (1999)	19
Morocco	Unspecified (1998)	43
Nigeria	Unspecified	35
Senegal	Unspecified (1995)	47
Sierra Leone	Ministry of Education (2000)	18.7
Swaziland	VC's report to Congregation (2001)	51.9
Uganda	Academic Registrars Office Makerere (2000)	34
Zambia	UNESCO Statistical Year book (1999)	33
Average	N = 18 countries	33.5

\* Central African Republic

Range = 9% (CAR)–51% (Swaziland)

Highest: Over 50%: Swaziland, Libya (51%, 51.9%)

40–50%: Angola, Egypt, Madagascar, Senegal, Morocco

30–40%: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia

20–30%: Congo, Malawi

10–20%: Ethiopia, Mali, Sierra Leone

Lowest: 0–10%: CAR

This evidence is hard to interpret without further research, but it does indicate a very wide range in women's enrollment in African public universities. Some of the poorest and least equitable nations have female enrollment rates that compare favorably with those of the richest and apparently most equitable countries in the affluent West. African countries displaying relatively high women's enrollment rates (above 40%) appear to have little else in common, as they include nations as different from one another as Angola, Egypt, Madagascar, Libya, Senegal, Swaziland, and Morocco.

Nonetheless, it is clear that women's enrollment remains far short of equity in the majority of African public universities.<sup>8</sup> Analysts are constrained by the dearth of reliable and comparable data and tend to focus their attention on disparities in primary and secondary enrollment rates rather than on tertiary education (e.g., Assie-Lumumba, 1993; Eholie, 1993; Namuddu, 1995). Ajayi et al. (1996) point to the incremental gains that are recorded at primary and secondary levels, erroneously predicting that parity would be attained by the year 2000. As a result, this research offers little to enhance our understanding of women's experiences within 'the African experience' that is the subject of their book, preferring to attribute the gender differentials to the higher 'drop-out' rate of women. There is little statistical evidence to support the assumption that women, once in, are more prone to 'drop-out'. Furthermore, the term places the entire responsibility for their departure on those who 'drop out', rather than on the HEIs. It implies that the reasons for leaving are to be found wholly in the personal lives of women, rather than in the institutions themselves, so eliding the possibility that there might be gender dynamics within tertiary institutions that operate to create an environment that may, in fact, 'push-out' women students.

Before going into the internal dynamics of HEIs, however, it is worth considering whether the tertiary gender deficit does, in fact, arise because the pool of women with sufficient secondary qualifications is still too small to allow for equity at the tertiary level, as so much of the research seems to assume. Given the massive overall shortfall of HE provision, it seems quite unlikely. It is, presumably, in response to this disparity that the new University for Development Studies in Ghana proposes to eliminate the gender gap simply by admitting all the women who meet the minimum entrance requirements (Sawyer, 2002, p. 18). This new admissions practice would mark a radical departure from the current norms, and it would offer a unique opportunity to explore

---

8 The exceptions deserve special attention, given that the extraneous reasons and conditions for high female enrollment are far from clear, and the impact of numerical gender parity on the institutional culture has not been documented either.

how true equality of access would contribute to gender equality in tertiary education.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, the fact remains that there are a great many qualified women (as well as men) who never gain entry to tertiary education. This strongly suggests that gender disparity might be partly sustained at the gateways of public universities, through the apparently neutral admissions systems that determine who among those who qualify actually are admitted. As long as university entrance procedures are not designed to ameliorate the deficits that accrue at the secondary level, they will inevitably reproduce them. Even if evidence of greater drop-out existed, technically, it would be perfectly feasible to design an affirmative strategy that would see enough women admitted to mitigate the effects of 'drop-out' and ensure equitable graduation rates.

In the few instances where affirmative action strategies have actually been designed and implemented they seem to have produced results. When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government assumed the reigns of government, Makerere University introduced an affirmative action strategy, which allocated a 1.5 points bonus to all eligible women who apply for admission to the public institution. Kwesiga (2002, p. 98) shows that this admission innovation increased women's enrollment from 20% to 33%. In contrast, women's enrollment rates have remained low in teacher training facilities and even more so in technical colleges, where a similar strategy has not been deployed. Kwesiga argues that without the 1.5 rule, women's enrollment would still be in the hundreds, not in the thousands.

Certainly women's enrollment jumped significantly when the policy was implemented in 1990, but in the absence of proper research to evaluate the strategy, it is not possible to establish how far the marked increase in female enrollment since 1990 is due exclusively to the 1.5 rule, as opposed to any of the other substantial changes that have swept Ugandan society since the NRM came to power. These changes have included affirmative action in the political sphere, which has heightened mobilization of women in Ugandan civil society (Tripp, 2000). More importantly, Makerere University has undergone major changes at all levels as a result of the reform process. Cautionary observers have drawn attention to the inadequate housing provisions for women students and the 'security' issues around the introduction of evening classes to accommodate the large numbers of private students being admitted to cover costs under the new financial arrangements. Among these security issues is the reported increase in incidences of gender-based violence (Bennett, 2002; Sawyerr, 2002, p. 48). Nonetheless, the immediate, measurable positive effects of affir-

9 This is a private institution.

mative strategies on both enrollment and graduation rates for women at Makerere University are highly suggestive.<sup>10</sup>

Another angle on the enrollment question can be found in the preliminary evidence coming from the gender profiles of fee-paying private institutions, some of which are showing higher women's enrollment than public universities.<sup>11</sup> While the various factors creating this situation are yet to be explored, it does challenge—or at least complicate—the widely-held assumption that women's under-representation is partly or wholly an effect of women's economic disadvantage and their disproportionate representation among Africa's poor. The relatively high enrollment rates among women suggests that significant numbers of the women who are excluded from public universities will find ways of paying for tertiary education. The quality and kind of training offered by private institutions is clearly different from what might be expected of a public university, however, given that most are religious or profit-making corporate concerns, which are correspondingly limited in their course offerings.

Regardless, enrolling women is only the first hurdle in a much longer process toward gender equity, and it may well be where the greatest gains have been made, simply because access has been the main focus of advocacy efforts to date. But what do women achieve once they get into the university? What proportion of those who enter come out with degrees, or continue into post-graduate studies or academic careers?

Throughput data, which could present the statistical profile from entry to graduation, is even harder to come by than enrollment data. A comparison between enrollment rates and graduation rates in the two countries for which data was available shows that for Egypt, the enrollment rate of 46% is accompanied by a graduation rate of 47%. In Ethiopia, a women's enrollment rate of 15.64% is accompanied by a graduation rate of 14.1%. These two cases suggest a high throughput rate and offer no evidence of women having a significantly higher 'drop out' rate than their male counterparts.

Once women have found their way into the system, then, gender differentiation manifests qualitatively, not least in terms of the gender distinctions within and across the various courses of study. There is great variation between coun-

---

10 An example worth further study is that of Libya, where women's enrollment has more than doubled, rising from 21% in the 1980 to 51% in 1999. Exactly how this was achieved is not indicated in my source (Teferra & Altbach, 2003).

11 The Sawyerr, 2002 data on selected institutions in countries suggests that some of the burgeoning private institutions may be showing higher female enrollment than has typified public institutions in the same countries, although the extent to which this is true, and the reasons for it, are yet to be investigated.



tries, but, generally, women tend to be better represented in arts, humanities, and social sciences and less represented in certain branches of the natural sciences.

With regard to science, it is worth noting that African governments have generally promoted science over arts and humanities, not least because of the presumed link between science and modernization and the assumption that science will help Africa 'catch-up' with Western industrial capitalist contexts.<sup>12</sup> Ghana and Nigeria for example, have long maintained a policy commitment to the 60:40 ratio, favouring science over the arts and humanities. It is within this context that gender advocacy has tended to focus on women's under-representation in science, perhaps to the detriment of the general picture of under-representation. Women's under-enrollment in science courses is only one facet (or symptom) of an overall under-representation in universities and their concentration in low status fields of study. The general under-representation of women in the social sciences, commerce, and law, as well as in the arts and humanities, also persists in many African nations.<sup>13</sup> The gender-balance in science classes may be significant, but the implications of this need to be revisited in contexts where laboratories have long ceased to function as a result of financial constraints, and where most women still have severely constrained access to higher education of any description. The emergence of more African women equipped to excel as writers, artists, and social theorists would also be a welcome development.

It is also worth noting that women are very well-represented in at least one major arena of science—the health sciences. This does not eliminate a gender gap, however, because, even within medicine, most women are more likely to be studying nursing, while the men prepare to become doctors, surgeons, and research scientists. Very little corresponding attention has been directed towards getting more men into traditionally 'feminine' fields such as nursing, teaching or home economics.

### ***Women's Employment in Public Universities***

When it comes to employment within Africa's public universities, the statistical information is hard to come by and even harder to trust. It is clear from

---

12 The masculinist nature of the modernization approach to development has been challenged by African women intellectuals since the early 1970s, and was a key reason behind the formation of the Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD/AFARD) in 1977.

13 FAWE's research tends to highlight this aspect. A recent article notes that women form 21.5% of Kenya's university students, and 20% of science students, figures that appear to have provided the rationale for the on-going calls for better representation of girls in science, and indeed a new Ministerial initiative on girls in science (Women's e-news, Feb 18, 2003).

simple observation, however, that the gender gaps are generally wider than those in student enrollment and that there is an overall picture of gross under-representation of women in the employment profile of public universities.<sup>14</sup> This gender disparity is most severe at senior academic and administrative levels.

Whatever there is, suggests that many women are employed in junior administrative and support capacities, but there continues to be gross under-representation of women among senior administrative and academic staff, and this disparity becomes more pronounced as one moves up the ranks. The available figures for the proportion of women hired as academic staff range from as low as 6.1% for Ethiopia,<sup>15</sup> to as high as 19.7% in Uganda, with Nigeria (12.4%) and Sierra Leone (17.6%) falling in between (Teferra & Altbach, 2003). Very small overall numbers of women make it into senior administrative and or academic/managerial positions.

In sum, rank-related gender inequalities remain pronounced in African universities, where they have critical effects across the society. Furthermore despite the proliferation of institutions and the substantial increase in gross enrollment, since independence, the African continent is still faced with some of the world's worst HE capacity deficits. As such, African countries struggling to overcome the persistent reliance of African governments on the importation of high-cost 'technical experts' and consultants reported elsewhere, can ill afford to exclude the potential of women.<sup>16</sup>

The question that remains to be addressed is this: Are there gender dynamics in HEIs themselves, which reproduce gender inequality? Recent scholarship suggests strongly that universities do not necessarily present the gender neutral organizational climate that tends to be assumed in HE. There is evidence to suggest that they may, on the contrary, operate in ways that reproduce gender inequality and injustice, instead of challenging it.

### **Beyond the Numerical Profiles**

The ongoing efforts directed at pursuing gender equality in African higher education have been the subject of much recent discussion, both in the extensive panel discussions at the Women's World's Congress held in Kampala in July

---

14 The picture is different for vocational and training schools in traditionally feminine areas such as nursing and teaching.

15 It is curious that this figure is presented alongside a very similar figure for the number of expatriates employed in the same university.

16 Mkandawire and Soludo (1996) use the figure of 100,000 technical experts being imported in a single year at a cost of 4 billion US dollars.

2002, and in several recent papers. While there are some who would suggest that African women academics have been complacent in this regard, this perspective is belied by the evidence and analysis presented in recent discussions of gender advocacy efforts (e.g., Bennett, 2002).

There is now a substantial literature on the 'gender gap'. Much of this goes further than documentation to advocate a series of affirmative action strategies designed to bridge the gap (e.g., Namuddu, 1995). It is also becoming clear, however, that gender cannot be effectively treated in isolation from other divisions. Bennett points to a complex postcolonial reality in which:

While questions of male-female ratios tend to dominate broad-based research on gender and African higher education, ... context-specific studies illuminate the "gender-gap" as a narrative shot through with the complications of rural/urban divides, competition for location within elites established by colonial and/or post-"democratic" pockets of huge privilege, and the demands of markets whose priorities respond to Northern economic trajectories and interests.

Bennett, 2002, p. 39

In other words, even with regard to simple access, the situation is one that requires a sophisticated theorisation of gender that can rise to the challenge of deepening our understanding of the complex dynamics of postcolonial inequality and injustice, and the mutual interconnectedness of myriad social divisions. This social complexity plays out in all aspects of campus life, affecting students, academic staff, and administrative staff in diverse ways. It is this complexity that makes gender transformation a highly complicated matter.

Returning briefly to the analysis of affirmative action strategies, it is worth recalling that the 'add-women-in' approach is premised on the liberal assumption that institutions are basically egalitarian in their functioning and that the gender gap is a residual effect of past inequalities of various kinds. This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that bringing more women in will automatically redress the balance and produce gender equality. Important considerations that remain, however, are whether this assumption holds true, and, if so, under what conditions.

There is now a substantial body of work on the workings of gender and sexuality in modern organizational life.<sup>17</sup> This research shows how ostensibly neutral formal procedures for selection, recruitment, and promotion often have gendered outcomes that are seldom acknowledged, because of the hegemonic assumption that institutions are essentially rational and egalitarian in their functioning. This body of work indicates that more substantial gains have been

---

<sup>17</sup> For example see Gherhardi, 1995 and Hearn, 1991.

made in the socially accountable public sector than in the profit-oriented private sector. The fact that contemporary models for higher education reform are currently being drawn from the financial and corporate models that privilege the abstract notion of 'the market' over social accountability should, therefore, give cause for concern (Bertleson, 1998).

The present situation is one in which women have been able to gain entry to African public universities in incrementally increasing numbers, only to meet a series of unforeseen and sometimes-traumatising challenges within the institutions themselves (see e.g., Sall, 2000; Bennett, 2002). It is to these that one must look in order to theorise on the persisting shortfall of women at higher levels of study and employment.

### *Students*

The prevailing sexual culture in African HEIs has not been comprehensively researched or analyzed from a gender perspective. There is enough anecdotal and qualitative evidence, however, to suggest that HEIs are significant institutional sites for the production and reproduction of contemporary gender identities (masculinity and femininity) and sexual practices. For example, in the context of unquestioned heteronormativity, it is widely assumed that women will find their future spouses on the university campus. Marital 'success' is widely understood to be conditional on women not 'over-qualifying' themselves on the academic front, however, as high academic performance is commonly viewed as 'unattractive' to prospective male partners. More insidiously, recorded instances of peer harassment and abuse appear to target explicitly women scholars who are deemed to be 'uppity' and might refuse to engage in sexual relations with their peers, as the notorious and tragic death of Levina Mukasa at the University of Dar es Salaam illustrates (Yahya-Othman 2000).

Faculty-student relations are also imbued with gender dynamics that often include sexual overtones. Attention has been drawn to the commonality of sexual transactions between female students and male faculty and the associated tensions. The rise of what Pereira (2002) refers to as 'sexual corruption' is something that has been observed on a number of campuses, and seems likely to be exacerbated by the withdrawal of subsidies and growing student poverty. Existing work in this area has attempted to use the Western rubric of 'sexual harassment', with limited efficacy, given the profound contextual differences between North American and African campuses. These differences include economic, institutional, and cultural circumstances, not to mention differentials in the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> As is noted in Bennett, 2002.

Southern Africa offers some of the more extreme illustrations of the negative and often violent sexual dynamics on campuses (i.e., exhibiting some of the highest HIV infection rates in the world). In some cases, male students have been known to take to the streets to protest against 'discrimination' in terms of what they regard as women student's 'sexual advantage', namely that they can and do engage in sexual transactions with male lecturers. The 'one-student, one blanket' protests also indicate that male students resent the non-availability of female students resulting from the 'unequal competition' being enjoyed by male lecturers engaging in multiple relationships with female students (Bennett, 2002).

More generally, in contexts where sexual transactions are a pervasive feature of academic life, women who do succeed are unlikely to be perceived as having done so on the basis of merit or hard work and may be treated with derision and disbelief. As economic conditions have deteriorated and subsidies have been withdrawn from various campus services, it has become increasingly common for women students to find themselves cooking, washing, and at times providing the food, soap, and other necessities for their male peers.

This preliminary evidence suggests that sexual and gender dynamics are not only key features of student academic life but that they operate in ways that are very likely to jeopardise women's academic career prospects.

### ***Faculty***

The experiences of women faculty have remained largely un-researched, with a few notable exceptions. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the hierarchies of power are sexualized in ways that reflect conservative gender ideologies, notably the unequal gender division of labor between the domestic and professional spheres. Those women that do make it into leadership positions are commonly employed in positions that relate to student welfare, human resources, and other aspects of administrative and support work deemed to benefit from a 'feminine touch', because of the resonance with women's conventional domestic and nurturing roles within the family. It is probably worth investigating whether the small pool of highly qualified women are systematically finding themselves channelled into general administrative tracks, instead of continuing in an academic track to become 'great thinkers' or accomplished researchers; or if, perhaps, women do not at times find it expedient to substitute administrative competence for academic excellence.

The under-representation of women as intellectual leaders has long-term implications simply because it is senior academic staff who are responsible not just for training successive generations of students and would-be academics—many of whom are young women these days—but also for the very production

of knowledge through research and publication. The dearth of women who are respected as accomplished thinkers, researchers, and writers presents one of the most intractable aspects of gender inequality in higher education systems all over the world. Feminist historians of science have uncovered a number of instances in which women pursuing careers in science have had their contributions appropriated by male colleagues in institutional environments still extremely resistant to the idea of women being scientists at all, let alone brilliant scientists.<sup>19</sup> Clearly Africa is not unique in this respect.

The existing literature further reveals the ways in which women's continued sexual and reproductive responsibilities make it very hard for them to compete on equal terms with men, whose success continues to rely on the exploitative positioning of women on the home front (e.g., Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 2000). In the absence of maternity, child-care, and domestic support provisions and/or a change in gender relations and sexual cultures to allow men to share in both the pleasures and the burdens of time-consuming domestic and parenting responsibilities, women will continue to find it difficult to meet the increasingly complex and competitive demands of academic careers.

Higher education reform processes have, so far, involved reducing the social and administrative expenditure of public universities through outsourcing. The cutting-back and privatization of services that address the social needs and well-being of faculty, most especially of women faculty, is more a reversal than a transformation—with the full burden of the care economy (welfare, health, familial, and other social responsibilities and services) being restored overwhelmingly to women, on the campus and beyond it.

### Conclusions

While international, national, and institutional policy statements reflect greater imperatives towards gender equality, the picture presented here suggests that the demands of academic careers in today's African universities might well undermine the realization of policy commitments towards gender-equitable transformation. Public institutions, where one might have looked for examples that illustrate the implementation of equitable, if not transformative, policies, are busy adopting corporate models of governance, even as corporations now seek new ways of introducing 'collegiality' into management practice and encourage young executives to spend 'quality time' with their families. As a re-

---

19 The best known example being that of Rosalind Franklin, who played a key role in the discovery of the double helix structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), but was deprived of her dues by her Nobel-winning male colleagues.

sult, the introduction of support systems and services that might enable more women to pursue academic careers has become increasingly unlikely.

Women, therefore, continue to carry out much of the informal, invisible, and often feminised work of institutional maintenance and interpersonal services on the campuses. Further, beyond the academy, the multiple burdens of women in Africa have intensified, rather than diminished, as the broader economic reforms of structural adjustment have undermined public services that might have mitigated their exploitation within the care economy. Women in Africa continue to carry the burden of familial, social, and community development responsibilities, a situation which does not seem likely to change, given its reproduction within the very institutions training and educating future citizens and leaders, institutions of higher education.

The purpose of reviewing our understanding of higher education in an African context, and from a gender perspective, is to facilitate the instigation of institutional and intellectual strategies that might more effectively advance the broad goal of gender equality. The material reviewed in this article shows that even the basic data on women's involvement in higher education is incomplete at the institutional level. On the basis of what evidence does exist, it is nonetheless possible to conclude that gross inequalities have persisted, despite the absence of any formal exclusion policies. Beyond this gross overall picture, many analytically interesting nuances also emerge. There appear to be wide national, disciplinary, and institutional variations in the overall picture of gender division and gender differentiation.

Addressing the persistence of institutional inequality so long after the formal exclusion of women was ended requires a deeper level of analysis than is possible on the basis of existing research, much of which is still a) quantitative and b) incomplete. There is an urgent need for more gender-disaggregated data, more refined statistical analysis, and national and institutional case studies, not to mention the design of rigorous and gender competent qualitative, analytical, and biographical methods. Only through this kind of research can we begin to unearth and map the institutional dynamics of inequality and the complicated manner in which these inequalities interconnect with other major social divisions, to augment and/or mitigate the dynamics of gender oppression in the context of globalization and unrelenting poverty.

The absence of a fuller and more detailed empirical picture continues to hamper both the formulation and implementation of effective institutional change strategies and the proper evaluation of the strategies currently being employed. Today, these strategies tend to be affirmative strategies rather than transformative strategies, since they rely on integrating women into mainstream institutions. As such, they fall far short of challenging the inequitable proce-



dures, practices, and rituals that might be exposed more clearly by deeper and better-informed gender analyses, using methods which go beyond the superficial picture revealed by numerical profiling. These deeper levels of analysis utilize qualitative, discursive, and historical methods that enable researchers to address matters of subjectivity and social relations, normative procedures, and practices in the prevailing institutional cultures of African universities. Regardless, it is clear that in the absence of definite strategies that can ensure changes in institutionalized gender dynamics and patriarchal epistemologies, the institutional and intellectual resistance to women's equal participation is likely to continue.

On the intellectual front, which has not been addressed here, existing gender analyses of African research output strongly suggest the need for the theoretical insights of feminist theory to be taken more seriously by mainstream scholars (see e.g., Mama 1996; Imam & Mama 1997; Perreira, 2002b). To date, gender studies has remained a separate field of endeavour largely undertaken by women, which is tolerated but ignored, while the so-called 'core business' of male-dominated teaching and research proceed uncontested in its incompleteness. The efforts directed towards 'gender mainstreaming' have so far focused on institutional matters and, as such, have not even begun to engage with the major and far-reaching challenge of intellectually mainstreaming gender theory and analysis.

Addressing this challenge will require a sustained development and expansion of existing intellectual capacity and competence in gender theory and analysis, within and beyond the field of gender studies. Currently, the intellectually and institutionally transformative potential of gender analysis and studies remains constrained by the resource and capacity considerations discussed above. African universities might find their taking gender studies departments and programs seriously worthwhile, in order to maximize the potential to attract and retain women in academic careers, as well as to generate the intellectual skills and knowledge necessary to support and sustain the gender-equitable transformation of African universities, and beyond. In any case, without serious intellectual and institutional investment, the well-intentioned rhetoric about 'gender mainstreaming' currently being articulated within the higher education reform agenda is unlikely to get very far. Put simply, the numbers of gender competent scholars and the textual resources that would be required to take gender mainstreaming seriously simply do not yet exist in African universities and cannot usefully be imported from Western institutions either.

Turning the limited existing capacity, currently spread rather thinly across the 30 or so rather isolated sites currently engaged in gender studies in African universities, to the service of mainstreaming, is likely to deplete, rather than

strengthen, their potential for generating the requisite intellectual capacities. An alternative interpretation of 'gender mainstreaming' would see African public universities mainstreaming their support for the development and strengthening of gender studies, by making it a part of their core budgetary considerations, instead setting it up to attract short-stay donor funding. At the very least, any serious commitment would see a more sustained development of the specialized intellectual capacities necessary for advancing gender mainstreaming, not to mention the broader challenge of producing gender competent graduates to pursue careers in other spheres of life.

The current context poses new challenges to the agenda of advancing gender equality in African higher educational institutions. It is hard to anticipate the likely consequences of higher education reform for this agenda in the absence of serious research over time. Even though 'gender mainstreaming' features in the reform discourse of some agencies, the reform efforts appear to have been pursued in the absence of an adequate situation analysis with regard to prevailing gender inequalities, and worse, as a cost cutting option.

The preliminary analyses which are available suggest that contemporary trends in higher education financing and governance may well run the risk of curbing the greater access gained by the proliferation of African public universities since independence and could result in new forms of social exclusion and marginalization locally. Diminished governmental financial support for public higher education could ensure the perpetuation of the existing system, which favors external influences over African research and teaching. It is not at all clear how reform efforts will work in favor of marginalized and impoverished social groups, among which African women are still disproportionately represented, as they may actually compound the existing dynamics of inequality and further constrain access unless explicit strategies are designed to counter such effects.

As universities become less accountable to the African public, the gender equality agenda risks being submerged along with other considerations of public good. The signs are that, if hegemonic arguments favoring technocratic, market-driven notions of efficiency and financial diversification prevail, educational philosophies imbued with a sense of regional history and mission, including those espoused by feminist intellectuals, are likely to be mortgaged. In this case, Western and patriarchal intellectual hegemonies and institutional forms are likely to be re-inscribed in African universities as the money comes in, perhaps to the detriment of any sustained gender equality agenda.

## References

- Ajayi, J., Goma, L. & Ampah Johnson, G. (Eds.). (1996). *The African Experience With Higher Education*. Oxford: James Currey; Accra: Association of African Universities.
- Assie-Lumumba, N. (1993). *Higher education in Francophone Africa: Assessment of the potential of traditional universities and alternatives for development*. AFTHR Technical Note 5, Human Resources Division. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Assie-Lumumba, N. (2001). Gender, Access to Learning and Production of Knowledge in Africa. In *Visions of Gender theories and Social Development in Africa: Harnessing Knowledge for Social Justice and Equity*. AAWORD/AFARD. Dakar.
- Bennett, J. (2002). Exploration of a “Gap”: Strategising gender equity in African universities. *Feminist Africa* No 1, 34–65.
- Bertelson, E. (1998). The real transformation: The marketisation of higher education, *Social Dynamics*, 24(2), 130–158.
- De la Rey, C. (1997). *Report on gender and higher education in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Publications.
- Denzer, L. (1989). *Women in government service in colonial Nigeria, 1862–1945*. Boston University African Studies Center, Working Paper 136.
- Denzer, L. (1995). Introduction. In L. Denzer (Ed.), C.A. Cummings-John, *Memoirs of a Krio Leader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Ford Foundation. (2001). *Narrative Report on the Retreat on Higher Education in Africa*. Prepared by G. Hamilton. Durban. 29 May–1 June.
- Gaidzanwa, R. (1997). Gender analysis in the field of education: A Zimbabwean example. In A. Imam, A. Mama, & F. Sow (Eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Gherhardi, S. (1995). *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Cultures*. London/New Delhi: Sage.
- Imam, A., Mama, A. & Sow, F. (1997). *Engendering African Social Sciences*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Kasente, D. (2001, September). Popularising Gender: A Case Study of Makerere. University paper commissioned for FAWE and presented at 10th General Conference of the Association of African Universities. Nairobi.
- Kasente, D. (2002). Institutionalising gender equality in African universities: Women’s and gender studies at Makerere University. *Feminist Africa*, 1, 91–99.
- Kwesiga, J. (2002). *Women’s Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda’s Experience*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Lewis, D. (2002). *African Women’s Studies 1980–2001: A Bibliography*. Cape Town: African Gender Institute. <http://www.gwsafrica.org>.
- Makhubu, L. (1998). *The Right to Higher Education and Equal Opportunity particularly for women*. In *Higher Education in Africa: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects*. Dakar: UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa.

- Makgoba, W. (Ed.). (1991). *African Renaissance: The New Struggle*. Johannesburg & Cape Town: Mafube/ Tafelburgh.
- Mama, A. (1996). *Women's Studies and Studies of Women in Africa During the 1990s*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Mama, A. (2003). Editorial. 'Intellectual politics'. *Feminist Africa*, 1, African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.
- Mamdani, M. (2002). African universities in their local and global contexts. Unpublished talk delivered at Higher Education Partnership Meeting, 18th March, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Manuh, T. (2002). Higher Education, Condition of Scholars and the Future of Development in Africa, Dakar: *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3&4.
- Mbilizi, M. (2001). Gender equity in Malawian higher education. Paper presented at NETSH Workshop on Sexual Harassment, 14–17 July. Available from <http://www.gwsafrica.org>.
- Mlamba, P. (2001). Gender equity programming in higher education. Paper presented at the Forum of African Women Educators meeting in Nairobi, 25 September.
- Namuddu, K. (1995). Gender perspectives in the transformation of Africa; challenges to the African university as a model to society. In *Women and Higher Education in Africa*. Dakar: UNESCO.
- Pereira, C. (2002a). Structured Inequalities: A Gender Analysis of the Nigerian University System. Currently in draft for the Case Studies of Nigerian Universities Project.
- Pereira, C. (2002b). Between knowing and imagining—What space for feminist scholarship on Africa? *Feminist Africa*, 1, 9–35. Available at [www.feministafrica.org](http://www.feministafrica.org)
- Rathberger, E. (2003). Women in Universities and University-Educated Women: The Current Situation in Africa. In D. Teferra & P. Altbach (Eds.), *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Sall, E. (2000). *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Samoff, J. & Carroll, B. (2002). The promise of partnership and continuities of dependence: external support to higher education in Africa. Paper presented at the 45th annual meeting of the African studies Association, Washington DC, 5–8th December.
- Sawyer, A. (2002). Challenges Facing African Universities: Selected Issues. Paper presented at the 45th annual meeting of the African studies Association. Washington, DC. 5–8th December.
- Snyder, M. (1995). *Transforming Development: Women, Poverty and Politics*. Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Tamale, S & Oloka-Onyango, J. (2000). Bitches at the academy: Gender and academic freedom in Africa. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

- Teferra, D. & Altbach, P. (Eds.). (2003). *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Third World Network. (2000). National Machinery Series, 1–12. Accra: Third World Network.
- Yahya-Othman, S. (2000) Tanzania: Engendering academic freedom. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- World Bank. (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

---

## The Public Dimensions of the University in Africa<sup>1</sup>

Ebrima Sall,<sup>2</sup> Yann Lebeau,<sup>3</sup> and Ron Kassimir<sup>4</sup>

---

### Abstract

This paper's principal purpose is to explore the range of ways in which African universities act as public institutions—i.e., how both are shaped by and influence the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are situated. In particular, we consider the multiple dimensions, often resulting in tensions in contexts of poverty and instability, of the African university as an actor in politics, civil society, and the public sphere AND as a key institution in the expectations and the strategies of a range of actors, groups, and constituencies.

### Résumé

L'objet essentiel de ce texte est d'explorer les différentes voies où les universités africaines interviennent en tant qu'institutions publiques. C'est-à-dire, comment sont-elles façonnées et comment agissent-elles sur le contexte social, politique et économique au sein duquel elles évoluent. Nous tenons particulièrement compte, des dimensions multiples, qui résultent souvent des situations de tension dans des contextes de pauvreté et d'instabilité, des universités africaines qui jouent le rôle d'acteurs dans la politique, la société civile et la sphère publique ET qui sont également considérées comme des institutions clés, dans les attentes et les stratégies d'une variété d'acteurs, de groupes et de cibles.

---

1 An earlier version of this article was presented at a workshop for the Social Science Research Council's Program on African Higher Education, which took place in July 2002 at the Education Policy Unit (EPU) at the University of Western Cape (now called the Center for the Study of Higher Education). The program is organized in partnership with the Association of African Universities and is funded by the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The authors wish to thank the workshop participants and EPU staff for their comments.

2 Senior Researcher, The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

3 Research Fellow, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), The Open University, London, UK

4 Program Director for Africa, Social Science Research Council (SSRC), New York, USA

**Introduction: African Universities as Public and Social Institutions**

Higher education (HE) is currently receiving unprecedented attention from international donors, including private foundations as well as multilateral and bilateral agencies, national governments, employers, and citizens the world over. Much of this new emphasis is tied to the notion that knowledge is both the fuel and the glue of the world economy. With knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption imagined at the core of economic transformation, higher education institutions (HEIs) are envisioned as strategic players—the producers and disseminators of knowledge and producers of the “human capital” who will perform these tasks (and, presumably, who will also constitute the principal market for the consumption of knowledge as well).

Given the precarious state of many economies in the developing world and a concern that they will “miss the boat” in benefiting from the knowledge economy, HE in Africa and other parts of the world is being scrutinized as perhaps never before.<sup>5</sup> The idea that the reduction of inequalities, at both global and national levels, is related in no small measure to the state of HEIs and HE systems in the developing world is a remarkable inversion of the global policy positions of less than a generation ago, when HE was more often discussed as an elitist luxury and when national and international investment were focused on primary and secondary education to address issues of growth and inequality (Banya & Elu, 2001).

Over this period of the waning and now waxing of attention to the HE debate in most Sub-Saharan African countries, universities were always present as key sites of public concern and debate. Indeed, the degraded state of most universities in the region, beginning in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, should not be taken to mean that they had become irrelevant to the societies and polities in which there were embedded. Then, as now, two critical dimensions of HEIs have never been far from the public agenda. First, HEIs, especially the major public universities, are often key sites for debate, critique, and mobilization on behalf of political change, especially but not exclusively in the direction of democratization and the resolution of conflicts. Second, in spite of the institutional hemorrhaging of universities, the decline of national economies and, especially, formal labor markets, and the deepening of social inequalities, the social demand for HE among young Africans and their families has never

---

5 Of course, concerns and critiques regarding the state of HE in Africa pre-existed current discussions. What seems new is that now HE is seen by donors and at least some governments as a potential source for the re-generation of African economies rather than as a drain on scarce resources or simply irrelevant.



abated—in fact, enrollment rates have soared and new HEIs (public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit) have been created.

The presence and occasional tension between these two public dimensions is inherent in higher education institutions worldwide. Ruth Jonathan argues that analysts on HE in general must ask: “What is it about [HE] which keeps alive our optimism in its socially transformative power and provides the pre-conditions for any socially transformative project, yet which also pulls in the opposite direction—toward an ethos of individual competition and the reproduction of a hierarchy of social advantage” (Jonathan, 2001, p. 48).

The key points here are that African HE systems have always had their own local and national dynamics and that these are now intersecting with, but are not determined by, the recent global context, which provides both constraints and opportunities for universities and their varied constituencies. While our discussion here draws from what relevant research is available in the African context, our primary concern is to clarify and conceptualize these two public dimensions of HEs. It is not our intention to homogenize the experiences of different countries and HEIs across the continent. Indeed, national and historical differences help in understanding variations in the way tensions in the university, as a public actor and as a social space and resource for a range of social groups, is played out. In what follows, we first look at African universities in civil society and in the public sphere; secondly, we examine the demand for and social value of higher education in Africa; and in the concluding section of this paper, we present what we believe could be components of an agenda for further research on the public dimensions of the university in Africa.

### **African Universities in Civil Society and the Public Sphere**

As an actor in the public sphere, the public university has a dual status. On the one hand, as an institution financed and, to varying degrees, controlled by the state, it is potentially part of the ideological apparatus of the state (thus linking it to the reproductive apparatus of society). On the other hand, it is, potentially, one of those social institutions of civil society that may help in holding the state and the business sector accountable while potentially providing a source of debate on current directions and visions of society’s future. It is in this sense that universities are integrated into the public sphere, defined by Habermas as “a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed” (McCarthy, 1989; also see Habermas, 1989).

The university is also a site for struggles over power and resources. Like other institutions, it has its own internal dynamics and may present a mirror image of the society where it is located, in terms of the diversity of ideological

influences and material interests. At the same time, it is a highly unique social institution. Its role as a base for an important fraction of the intelligentsia, the fact that it produces the teachers or the trainers of teachers for the lower levels of the education system, and its production of most of the cadres later employed in the higher echelons of the public and private sectors are influences specific to the HE sector, and, in Africa, to public universities in particular.

Advancing our understanding of the public dimensions of the university requires a historicizing of the public sphere in Africa and the place of universities within it. In most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, new social spaces<sup>6</sup> began taking shape with the establishment of colonial boundaries and administrations over and above the states and polities that were conquered by the colonial powers. While the context had changed with the coming of independence, a number of limitations remained on the possibility of having a critical public discussion on matters of general interest, and there were important restrictions on academic freedom and the autonomy of universities. Most universities were also caught up in this developmentalism of the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

### *African States and African Universities*

The nature and evolution of SSA economies and political regimes has had a direct impact on the university, not only from the point of view of the types and levels of funding that were available, but also in terms of levels of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The specific roles that HE institutions play in a given society at any moment depends on a range of factors that have to do not only with their nature and status—public or private, autonomous and enjoying a high degree of academic freedom or laboring under strict governmental control, confessional or corporate, virtual or existing with a campus and contact students, etc.—but also with the prevailing global and local environments within which they are located. Universities, as social and political institutions, and the individuals and groups within them, such as the students, faculty, and non-academic staff, have often been involved in struggles for change. They have also been directly affected when there is a shift in regimes or policies.

Until the fairly recent waves of diversification in the HE sector, the university was synonymous with the *public* university, which, in many countries, played a leading role in the formation and in the reproduction of emerging elites and in the integration of different sections of the elite—what Bayart (1989) calls the “reciprocal assimilation of elites,” a process that took place at global, regional, and national levels—whose role in the construction of national public spheres

---

6 These were simultaneously physical spaces, social spaces of production and reproduction, as well as spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1974).

was to become very critical. In its Western origins, in the effects of its teaching and research, and in the worldviews of the elites and the mass of students (both graduates and dropouts), the university became an influential institution of post-colonial<sup>7</sup> SSA societies.

The higher education sector has considerably expanded over the forty years or so of SSA independence. After an initial period of great enthusiasm for HE during which many universities were built, a period of deep crises and adjustment ensued, during which the universities lost much of their earlier prestige and became much less of a national priority.<sup>8</sup> The fortunes of the university have, therefore, been very closely tied to those of the state, which was the main promoter of HE in first few decades after independence.

As African societies were being subjected to structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which were themselves highly problematic as remedial policies, universities came under attack for not adapting to new contexts or for being isolated (the familiar “ivory tower” accusation). Ironically, these criticisms became more severe as graduates entered the jobless ranks, in no small part because of the impact of SAPs on the civil service—once the main employer of university graduates. The often contradictory nature of such criticisms results from inattention to what we have identified as the university’s public roles: 1) as a provider of opportunities and services for individual members of society, the state, civil society organizations, donors, private companies, and other actors; and 2) as an institution of civil society that is part and parcel of the struggle for democracy and for defining and protecting the national identity and interests. Thus, the university is both an actor in evolving social processes, specifically in conditions of transition, and an object that is affected by these broader processes of transition.

This dual identity of academics and academic institutions is best exemplified in the struggle for academic freedom. Restrictions on academic freedom appear in reaction to state and non-state restrictions on the freedom of individual academics and on the autonomy of academic institutions, while being integral in the struggles that shape the public sphere. Academic freedom often comes under attack when it is needed most. In post-conflict transitions, the fear of being seen as a bystander, as not participating in the reconstruction

---

7 The concept ‘post-colonial’ is used here in the purely chronological sense of “after the colonial period.”

8 This corresponded more or less to the two phases of “developmentalism,” what Ali El Kenz calls “the years of development hope” and the years of crises and SAP (El Kenz, 1996; also see Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999).

process, or as being unnecessarily critical is very real and, thus, may limit the post-conflict reconstruction of the public sphere.

### *Academics and Academic Institutions in African Transitions*

Academics are part of the intelligentsia, a term that gained currency in Russia at the beginning of the last century “as a collective term for the intellectual class” (Khan, 1994), and, as such, they often play catalytic roles in political processes. African intellectuals have, at times, taken an active part in the struggles for change. Change was not always conceptualized as a democratic process, however. Some intellectuals also took part in or argued in favor of change through coups and armed struggles. Not surprisingly, many have been victims of political struggles and conflicts, often as specific targets. Different components of the intelligentsia have thus been the ideologues for the state and of social movements for justice, rights, and democracy. A few have competed directly for political power through democratic and other means.

In the colonial period, the political views and aspirations of academics and other intellectuals was typically greeted with mistrust. Many post-colonial governments have inherited such orientations. Denials of academic freedom were widespread. Appointments to important administrative and academic positions were often highly politicized (Ajayi et al., 1996), and university autonomy was restricted in a number of ways. Certain sensitive issues were declared off-limits for research and academic or public debates. The struggle for academic freedom and the autonomy of academic institutions, particularly the universities, was, therefore, part of a larger project of the expansion of human rights, democratic space, and possibilities for rational-critical debates about public affairs involving journalists, musicians, writers, religious leaders, and other members of the intelligentsia (Diouf & Mamdani, 1994; CODESRIA, 1996; Ibrahim, 1997). These struggles became more consequential in the late eighties and nineties, partly as an expression of what had then become a worldwide phenomenon following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The prominent role of intellectuals and of ideas in the debates over and the functioning of democracy in Senegal, for instance, made the philosopher Aminata Diaw call Senegalese democracy, “a democracy of intellectuals”—*la démocratie des lettres* (Diaw, 1993).<sup>9</sup>

In the heyday of developmentalism and monolithic “nation-building,” the possibilities for the emergence of what Calhoun calls “a public sphere adequate to a democratic polity” (Calhoun, 1992, p. 2; also see Habermas, 1989) were structurally limited in many ways. Two such limitations were the weakness of

9 For an illustration of the role played by Senegalese academics in the negotiation over the implementation of HE sectoral adjustment measures in the 1980s and 1990s, see Niane, 2000.

civil society organizations and the limited number of potential participants in scientific or “rational-critical” debates, given the extremely small number of universities and the small size of the intelligentsia. While there was a consensus on the potential for academics and academic institutions to contribute significantly to the development and social transformation process through teaching and research, how to do so was the critical question. Some of the academics shared the view that priority had to be given to taking part, if uncritically, in nation-building and development efforts rather than to the defense of academic freedom or the institutional autonomy of universities. For others, academics and academic institutions were viewed as key elements in the process of defining the priorities and the agenda for development, both through their work and from their own scientific and professional perspectives, rather than merely responding to short-term demands formulated by governments.

There are numerous examples of individual academics taking an active part in struggles for democracy and the respect of human rights, as well as “bread and butter issues” of students and academic staff. The latter set of issues often took on political significance, linking campus-specific issues to broader debates on political priorities and policy options. Student and academic staff unions, such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), in Nigeria, and the teachers unions of Burkina Faso and Senegal, to name only a few examples, have been among the fiercest critics of government attempts to encroach on public liberties. These activist organizations may not limit their activities to partisan political action but may also look to assert themselves in broader roles in the public sphere. For example, while activists at the University of Dar es Salaam were involved in debates about the advantages of doing away with the single party TANU, the university itself was engaged in two major projects—the Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania (REDET) and the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee (TEMCO)—consisting of civic education, training, and monitoring elections.

By the time of the post-adjustment and political liberalization years of the nineties, the size of the academic community (faculty and students) had increased tremendously, and the shortcomings of authoritarian nation building and developmentalism were quite apparent to all. The exponential rise in the numbers of civil society organizations, and the spectacular increase in the numbers of newspapers and community and FM radio stations in the nineties went hand in hand with a major increase in the number of universities. This was significant for the struggles of civil society in at least two ways: 1) the institutional base of the intelligentsia became wider and more diversified, as private academic institutions also increased in numbers; and 2) the numbers of potential contributors to critical public debates became larger. University lecturers

are in some cases routinely called upon to participate in debates on radio and TV and to speak on current affairs in forums organized by NGOs.

These struggles became very intense in the late eighties and early nineties. Student and non-student youth-based movements and teacher unions, along with other civic organizations, took to the streets and challenged the military in Mali, Nigeria, and elsewhere. The struggles were over more than just stipends, salaries, and related “bread and butter” issues—although where these “internal” issues existed, they were very often politicized beyond the bounds of the university. Some student associations had close links with political parties (in office or of the opposition), which increased the potential for confrontation. In Nigeria, for instance, both the ASUU, the academic staff union, and the NANS, the National Association of Students, took part in the wider campaign for democracy, and the Burkinabe student movement was close both to radical sections of the political opposition and, towards the mid-nineties, to the human rights movement. The universities, therefore, naturally became targets for repression. Among the worst cases were those of Lubumbashi, in former Zaire, in 1990, and Yopougon in Cote d’Ivoire in 1991, both of which were raided by security forces with a considerable amount of brutality. In a number of Francophone SSA countries, students and faculty played a role in “sovereign national conferences,” which marked a shift away from single-party or military authoritarianism towards more open and plural political systems.

### ***The Role of the University in Post-Conflict Transition***

Of course, not all political transitions in the region have been characterized by social movements and relatively peaceful political protest. Several feature violent upheavals and the breakdown of state institutions. Universities have been among the many victims of the armed conflicts that have been ravaging SSA, particularly in the nineties. University campuses have been a theater of confrontation and were occasionally occupied by regular armies or rebel factions in a wide range of countries such as D.R.Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Rwanda. In almost all war-torn societies, intellectual capital is one of the casualties of the conflicts. Universities and research institutions have been severely affected, and many intellectuals either have had to go into exile or have lost their lives.

University lecturers and students have also taken part in formulating arguments that were later used to justify armed conflict or even genocide, and in some cases they have been involved in actual fighting.<sup>10</sup> In the processes of

---

10 On Sierra Leone, see Richards, 1996, and Abdullah and Bangura, 1997. On Rwanda, see African Rights, 1994; DesForges, 1999; and OAU, 2000.

reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction, universities are among the public institutions that need to be rebuilt, both physically and in terms of getting their teaching, research, and community service programs restored. Certain universities have taken up projects directly and immediately connected to the transitions in as broad a range of fields as engineering, appropriate technology departments, law, and political science.<sup>11</sup>

More difficult is the rebuilding of intellectual communities that, in the more extreme cases such as Rwanda, Burundi, and, more recently and to a lesser degree, Cote d'Ivoire, are seriously fractured as a result of the deep civil conflicts. They may, at this precise moment, be faced with even more severe resource constraints, given the general scarcity of resources that prevails under such conditions. Indeed, HE might not be a high priority issue in the eyes of donors or transition governments.

At the same time, universities are often solicited for their services in even more pressing ways. Individual academics are drawn into the government bureaucracy or to work for aid agencies and NGOs. Scholars and their institutions may be seen (or at least see themselves) as providers of a social and political vision for a peaceful future. Among the general population (including demobilized combatants), access to higher education may be part of broader social expectations of a return to "normalcy."

How have the universities and their staffs and students been responding to such challenges and demands? The return of teachers and students from exile might not immediately follow the end of the conflict, or, at least, not in numbers that are as large as may be needed. Most university departments in such contexts remain understaffed for extended periods of time. Long after the end of the conflict, the countries may still be seen as unsafe, which often makes it difficult to arrange for external examiners and visiting professors. The university itself is often so consumed by its day-to-day operational problems that it may be marginal to public debates on issues related to reconciliation and reconstruction processes. When academics and researchers are called upon to participate in commissions established to look into major public issues, such as human rights, they take part as individuals rather than as representatives of their institution. Similarly, the limited amount of research that is being carried out by academics is very rarely handled at the departmental or faculty level but rather through individual contracts with donors, and few research projects are collective or contribute to institutional capacity.

11 For instance, the Kigali Institute of Technology in Rwanda is building community cooking stoves that have led to a 60–70% reduction in the extensive use of firewood to cook for the 120,000 detainees following the genocide; it is also involved in solving the problems of sewage disposal in the prisons, while making bio-gas and fertilizer out of the sewage.



Yet, by virtue of their complexity, post-conflict transition processes call for research and serious public debates on almost every aspect of these transitions: understanding what exactly happened—the nature of the crises/conflicts—and why, the challenge of building democratic governance systems that would address some of the issues that led to conflict in the first place, etc. In a number of cases, besides rebuilding halls and laboratories, universities have established centers for conflict and peace studies, with some even attempting to “mainstream” peace studies.<sup>12</sup> Such academic investments often reflect an understanding of the conflict that identifies individual attitudes, including those of academics themselves, as a key part of the explanation for past conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, some universities are playing, or are expected to play, important roles in the reconstruction of the public sphere through the dissemination of research results, the writings of scholars, the training of students, and outreach activities. In certain cases, the intelligentsia has responded quite rapidly and initiated debates both over the Internet and in other fora. In a number of other cases, such as Sierra Leone, such debates took time to get started, however. The role of the local media and of the Internet in conveying the views of academics have been very important in the transitions of the nineties.

### *African Universities, the Knowledge Society, and Global Forces*

While analysis of African higher education’s public roles requires detailed attention to local and national dynamics, these dynamics must also be examined within a global context. The place of African universities in the public sphere is critically shaped by a range of global forces and policy discourses. Much of the recent attention to HE worldwide has taken place in the context of debates about the *knowledge society*. The implications of this term are that knowledge matters for a range of socio-political issues that play out in the public sphere—an informed citizenry, an independent media, a space for public intellectual debate, the forging of social networks that facilitate cooperation and collective action, the forging of a “human rights culture,” etc. We do not need to accept the more utopian versions of the *knowledge society* to take seriously the role that knowledge may play in the constitution of the public sphere.

Key questions calling out for answers include: What kinds of global forces impact upon African universities’ capacities to play a role in the public sphere?

12 See D. Hoffmann, 2002, The academy and conflict in Sierra Leone—An interview with Dr. Joe A.D. Alie, in the SSRC’s Global Security and Cooperation Program’s newsletter, *GSC Quarterly Newsletter*, No 3, Winter 2002.

13 While this is certainly true in some cases (see the debates on the origins of the civil war in Sierra Leone, and on the ideological roots of the genocide in Rwanda), it does not address key structural problems such as the marginalization of large sections of the youth.

How do those forces influence the public university as a social space that intersects with the agendas of staff, students, prospective students, parents, and the local community in which the institution is enmeshed?

One place to start is the political dimension of neo-liberalism. While the economic logic of neo-liberalism has, in practice, often trumped its democratizing designs, universalistic discourses on democracy impact African universities in complex ways. On the one hand, global ideas and infrastructures (e.g., advocacy-oriented NGOs) of “democratization” provide fertile ground and sources of external support for key features of HE’s public role. Values such as university autonomy and academic freedom are seen as both indicators of democratic progress and as necessary components of an open society.<sup>14</sup> These values, ideally, enable the university to be a site of social debate and critique while also empowering it to impart democratic habits to students.

On the other hand, the anti-statism that often accompanies neo-liberal versions of democratization legitimize and encourage the expansion of private, non-governmental institutions that are seen as vital checks on state power. In the case of HE, this means legitimacy for private HE institutions.<sup>15</sup> As indicated above, their presence create a dilemma for public universities as the imperative to compete with non-state providers for resources, students, and status may clash with their efforts to engage the public sphere and address the “public good”—a role which most of their new competitors are not likely to adopt.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, when directed to the HE sector, global democratic discourses sometimes attack universities as bastions of elite privilege. This critique can weaken arguments in favor of public investment in higher education (as opposed to primary or secondary schooling). Alternatively, and as we have seen in the case of post-conflict transitions (although far from limited to these cases), it is often transmuted into an argument for “relevance”—that universities’ research and training missions must directly address developmental needs and

---

14 Within the continent, CODESRIA and its academic freedom program has been a consistent advocate on this issue. See its annual academic freedom reports and Diouf & Mamdani (Eds.), 1994.

15 While we do not discuss them here, non-governmental research institutes and networks have also entered the field of knowledge production once dominated by public universities, and the majority of these exist due to external financial support and linkages to Northern organizations. Since few of them do any training, their main area of competition and/or symbiosis with universities is research. For further analysis, see Ebrima Sall, 2003, forthcoming; Prewitt (Ed.), 1998; and Johnson, 1999.

16 Of course, we should not overstate the degree to which public universities have, in practice, actually played such a role. The point is that private institutions, while clearly having an economic incentive to address the private demands for HE, will have less potential to play an intentional public role.

social inequalities that, in practice, place limits on institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the name of public accountability.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while the political logic of neo-liberalism implies a challenge to the *dirigiste* and authoritarian currents behind the idea of the “developmental university” of a generation ago, elements of this idea have been incorporated into debates of HE relevance and accountability in a democratizing society.<sup>18</sup>

One other component of global academic networks is the African intellectual diaspora, based not only in the North but also in other parts of the continent outside of their homelands (most notably, South Africa).<sup>19</sup> However devastating the “brain drain” may be, discussions of its impact rarely acknowledge that a sizeable proportion of African scholars based elsewhere (as well as other émigrés) maintain significant ties to universities in their country of origin. These ties should not be romanticized. While many (although certainly not all) diasporic Nigerian intellectuals provided moral and other kinds of support to their colleagues and former institutions during the Abacha regime, some (although certainly not all) diasporic Rwandan intellectuals provided ideological and other kinds of ammunition that helped fuel the conflict during that country’s civil war and genocide.<sup>20</sup> The point is, whether for good or ill, these ties often do matter for African universities and for African societies, as diasporic intellectuals may continue to play a role in supporting or opposing current political arrangements in their homelands.

### **The Social Demand and Social Value of Higher Education in Africa**

Despite the relative paucity of hard data on the university’s role in the public sphere, the deeply politicized nature of HE in SSA has obscured our understanding of other dimensions of HE with major public consequences, such as the nature of the social demands on or the social value of university education

17 For a good general discussion of this tension, see Jonathan, 2001.

18 See James Smoot Coleman’s discussion of the African university as an “omnifunctional developmental institution” in Coleman, 1994. This essay was originally published in 1984. Coleman writes that “the dangers of overdevelopment are very real. Not only can the quality of performance of traditional functions be seriously compromised (teaching, research, and the critical function), but the quality of performance of the new developmental functions could be equally compromised through ‘oversell,’ with the resultant disesteem and contempt for universities as an institution” (p. 351).

19 The role of Diasporas in disseminating “university ideas” has been tremendous right from the end of the 19th century. It has impacted upon both the perception of the social value of HE (particularly among urban classes in coastal West Africa) and on the definition of HE landscapes (for example in Nigeria where ideas brought back by early nationalists successfully undermined colonial development plans for HE.)

20 On Rwanda, see the earlier note.

and degrees in Sub-Saharan Africa. The HE choices and expectations of individuals, families, or larger groups also affect the universities' provision of courses and services and more, thus shaping HE fields and, potentially, the role of HE in political transformations. The patterns of student enrollments, their experience of HE and their integration in the labor market are critical for understanding transformations of the roles and functions of universities. They are a vital window on processes of social mobility in Africa and the social significance of university expansion. At the same time, they provide a needed corrective to what is often a misleading homogeneous picture of HE institutionalization in Sub-Saharan Africa.

***From “Ivory Towers” to “Mass Institutions”: Stereotypes and Paradigms about African Universities and Their Students***

Higher education needs to be seen not only in its more obvious economic and political aspects but also as a space of social positions and as a factor in patterns of social mobility.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, there has been a tendency to imagine African universities as “ivory towers” and “citadels of learning” which consider students (at least until recently) as a privileged group (irrespective of their social background) and higher education as a passport to a middle class westernized standard of living and to influential positions. Consequently, the social origins of students or the solidarity networks they mobilize to gain access to HE has often been ignored or assumed to be largely elite-based without empirical evidence to support these beliefs.

As Dubet remarks, students usually become a subject of sociological analysis when they become a “problem” (Dubet, 2000), and the 1980s crises that hit many African countries generated a renewed interest in students' working and living conditions. The withdrawal of welfare policies, such as scholarship schemes, subsidized on-campus accommodation, and other effects on HE during the crisis years, impacted individual private strategies towards higher education. In particular, a significant number of students were diverted from “traditional HE education”<sup>22</sup> prospects, and access to universities was restricted to an even more socially advantaged population. Thus, the adjustment years paradoxically created an avenue for an unprecedented diversification of the post-

21 That such aspects have been relatively ignored partly reflects the late and still marginal interest of sociology in African studies (Copans, 1990) and the poor performance of this discipline within the African social sciences themselves (Hendricks, 2000).

22 What E. Sall (2001) defines as “education dispensed in tertiary education institutions such as the public and private universities, colleges, polytechnics, what the French used to call *Instituts Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT)...” (Sall, 2001, pp. 10-11)

compulsory educational sector that is, often too simplistically, viewed as a massification of HE.

The steady demand for higher education, boosted by universal primary education, expanded secondary education access, and population growth, has never been met by “traditional” higher institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly when examined through transition rates and gross enrollments. Notwithstanding the traditional images of overcrowded residence halls and lecture theaters in African universities, social demand has largely been met by less selective non-traditional institutions, or, in some cases, by fee-paying programs offered by universities alongside their more traditional modes of entry. If the student population has become a “falsely homogeneous category” (Lebeau, 2000), this is more a function of the extension of the HE market now encompassing lower ranked institutions than of a democratization of access to traditional higher education.<sup>23</sup> The crucial importance of the transition period from secondary to tertiary level, therefore, should not be underestimated as a period which tends to last much longer in countries where less than 10% of eligible candidates are actually offered admission to traditional HE institutions and which students try to put to good use (with additional training, work experience, guidance counseling) to “make the right choice.”

### *Understanding the Social Value of Higher Education<sup>24</sup>*

Research on higher education in most African countries has followed two broad streams: one dealing with the place of HE institutions in broader educational systems and the other with faculty attitudes and academic activities. To use Martin Trow’s classification of HE research, they have mainly covered aspects of the “public” and “private” life of universities. While this research is important, we know far less about the social identities of students and their educational strategies, which can provide a micro-perspective on how and why uni-

23 This point is supported by few existing national or regional case studies of educational strategies at the higher level and by recent works done on graduate employment in Africa such as the tracer studies carried out by the Association of African Universities in seven African countries between 1996 and 2000. All these studies tend to stress the importance of the type of institution attended for the professional achievement of graduates.

24 Although this section deliberately focuses on the demand for HE, we believe that the social value of universities extends far beyond the determining factors of students enrollment and experience and encompasses issues related to staff status and careers that we have dealt with in more detail elsewhere. For instance, even with the drastic devaluation of currencies under structural adjustment, and the subsequent relative ‘devaluation’ of the status marked by the unprecedented brain drain of the late 1980s and early 1990s, being a university lecturer or professor still has a prestigious side to it and universities remain a valuable milieu from which more and more governments draw their staff.

versity education is highly valued and pursued. The kinds of capital (social, cultural, and economic) that the HE experience and degree provide (and is expected to provide) depend on political and economic opportunity structures *and* on the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of students.

Take as an example the assumption that the demand for HE correlates with levels of economic development. Upheavals in patterns of social mobility and pupils' educational careers at primary and secondary levels (Lange, 1999; Colclough and Al-Samarrai, 1998) challenge this assumed connection between economic conditions and educational demand. On the basis of comparative sources such as national household surveys, field surveys, and case study findings, research has revealed patterns of enrollment and family strategies demonstrating that economic development, in the sense of achieving growth in national income per capita, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for movement towards a steady demand for education (Colclough, Rose, and Tembon, 1998). Studies in Nigeria have shown similar patterns in higher education demand. The important regional variations in enrollment figures neither reflect exclusively the distribution of institutions or that of incentive policies by local authorities, nor do they strictly replicate the unequal delivery of secondary education. The value attributed by households and communities to higher education may well vary upon national policies on education, but it also reflects both the volatility of patterns of social mobility in uncertain economic environments, as well as cultural factors affecting the expectations of a university degree. A striking illustration of this complexity is offered by the contrast between figures of female students' enrollment and their weak integration into the labor market for workers with advanced qualifications.<sup>25</sup>

If the widening of social participation in HE matters so much from the perspective of knowledge-driven development (World Bank, 2002), then the social and cultural backgrounds of students must be a central focus in the research on students, in order to capture how different social groups view higher education as an investment and to what extent family investment in higher education "pays."<sup>26</sup> In addition, family strategies and social network mobilization are key elements in analyzing access to HE across various social categories. Education's role in the constitution of social capital varies greatly in coun-

25 See Dunne & Sayed (2002) on changing patterns of female access to higher education across the continent.

26 Even if data on the socio-economic origin of students are not systematically gathered, a combination of census and household survey data with limited surveys can help in mapping the unequal institutionalization of HE, and highlight the role of social and educational background in promoting or constraining access to higher education. An example of such quantitative survey is offered by M.K. Mayanja's case study carried of Makerere students (Mayanja, 1998).

tries where a process of massification of HE has occurred, as compared to those countries where secondary education itself remains the privilege of less than 15% of the population.

Questions such as how schooling careers are actually constructed, what role is played by various actors (counsel and guidance departments of secondary schools when available, relatives, churches, brotherhoods, and other social networks) need to be put in a comparative perspective in order to determine how and how much education contributes to social capital and social mobility. Research in Europe has shown that, particularly in periods in which unemployment and its attendant hardships put families under considerable strain, networks of economic dependence on extended families often came into play even at the HE level (Dyhouse, 2001). This is not necessarily the case, however, in places where education's social value is being continuously challenged by other sources of prestige and means of achievement and where the interruption of schooling careers is a constant response to economic hardships of not only "disadvantaged" groups (such as minorities and women) but of the majority, as well.

If access to HE is largely determined by past school trajectories and socio-economic background, a tendency in Africa that has been reinforced by the withdrawal of most states from their support policies for students (scholarships, on-campus social services, etc.), we can begin to understand the differential value of degrees offered in a more and more fragmented market. Two dynamics have been operating in this regard in the last 15 years or so. The first one is a consequence of the economic crisis of the 1980s, and the second can be interpreted as an institutional response to the conditionalities and/or recommendations of international donors and financial institutions.

With the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) adopted in the 1980s, the sudden problem of graduate employability called into question the relevance of the inherited curricula and tertiary degrees which had been left unchanged since HE's inception in many countries across Africa. Also, the cutbacks in support to students, coupled in some cases with the introduction of fees, generated a greater awareness of the unequal "value for money" of degrees by families, who now had to spend more money on university education. These conditions led to the introduction and multiplication of pre-degree and post-graduate, professionally-oriented courses in all public universities. As a consequence, the 60/40 ratio policy in favor of science oriented courses, adopted by most African countries to produce the engineers and scientists required by their projected developmental needs, were bypassed, and new programs leading to banking, management, ICT, and applied social sciences qualifications were introduced, to the detriment of traditional academic disciplines and degrees.



The financial constraints of the 1980s also resulted in a proportion of the urban middle class population, whose children used to complete their studies abroad, now having to envisage having entirely local tertiary training. One of the many side effects of SAPs was the development of private schools in vibrant urban centers such as Nairobi or Abidjan, offering MBA programs to a local petty bourgeoisie suddenly dispossessed of its international access. Such private institutes have continued to mushroom since the late 1980s. The key issue here is not so much whether or not various states made provision for the development of private tertiary education. Instead, a more important consideration is that accreditation was largely sought elsewhere, since the state was no longer considered as a reference point in this respect.

The weakened HE systems in Africa, despite their apparent image of high centralization and rigidity, have allowed universities to respond to the changing nature of their market in the 1980s. The structural adjustment policies have profoundly reshaped the social composition of the population accessing HE. Universities, in many cases public ones, have responded rather successfully to the new demands of a socially diversified student population, often seized as opportunities to compensate for the loss of state support. This dynamic contradicts a common perception of reforms and changes in peripheral HE systems as shaped by changes in the global market of educational services rather than by local needs and demands.

Still, it remains a fact that the global context definitely impacts the delivery of courses and the admission policies in African universities. With knowledge increasingly constituted as a commodity central to economic growth and transformation, higher education institutions are seen as key sites, both through the useable knowledge they generate and the training and skills they impart to labor market entrants. Public policies are pushed toward the diversification of the higher education sector to allow for competition and a division of labor that would respond to the demands of employers and those seeking skills and credentials in the labor market. At the policy level, globalization can be seen as a force that requires both greater attention by the state towards calibrating labor market demands and HE outputs (i.e. manpower policies)<sup>27</sup> and more space for private providers to meet demands and pressure the public sector to be more competitive and cost-effective.<sup>28</sup> The latter goal for a leaner institution (often fuelled by demands from foreign donors) is what partly drives the liber-

---

27 See, for example, the linkages between HE policy and labor market forecasts in South Africa as described in Council on Higher Education, 2002.

28 See the World Bank's recent recommendations in the report *Constructing Knowledge Societies*. (World Bank, 2002).

alizing shifts within public universities; shifts which are often based on models of HE in the global North—the introduction of student fees and cost sharing, the re-orientation of curricula and programs toward the perceived future-oriented needs of the “knowledge economy” and present-oriented labor market demands, the sub-contracting of various functions to private firms, the establishment of for-profit units, and an emphasis on applied knowledge and research and development (R&D) partnerships with the private sector.

Finally, it is important to stress that in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the social value of HE extends beyond the professional prospects it offers to individuals and their families. Examples of a steady demand for HE are found in many places where the qualified job market is already saturated because of lack of economic investment and opportunity resulting from political instability and civil wars.<sup>29</sup> An answer to this apparent contradiction may well be found on the African campuses themselves, in the ways in which students construct their own experiences, in their narratives about their experiences, and in the ways they take advantage of their opportunities. The status of being a student has proved to be an attractive way of living in itself and a relatively secure transition to an individual and urban mode of living, particularly where access to universities remains more or less free of fees (e.g., Senegal and Nigeria). In many of the academically less-demanding (but probably less rewarding) tertiary institutions that have mushroomed in the wake of the liberalization of HE markets, schools provide “the semblance of having a recognized position and status in life” (Dubet, 2000). In some countries of central Africa (e.g., Gabon, Congo), education at the secondary and tertiary levels stands as the main vehicle for inter-city and rural-urban migration, indicating how attractive student status can be beyond the social value and career prospects actually offered by the institutions.

Thus, the increase in student numbers, the diversification in types of institutions and degrees offered, the privatization of on-campus facilities and services, and the changing balance of resident and non-resident students, young and mature students, male and female students, etc., reveals the diversity of

---

29 Student populations tend to rise in immediate post-conflict situations, as if the young people of university-going age want to “catch-up.” Interviews with child combatants and ex-child combatants in Sierra Leone show the strength of their desire to continue their education. (Richards, 1996; Peters and Richards, 1998). The National University of Rwanda (NUR), after being closed from onset of the genocide and political killings on April 7, 1994, re-opened in 1995 with 3,000 students. By the end of 2002, NUR had 7,000 students. Two other HEIs, the Kigali Institute of Technology (KIST), established as an independent institute in 1997, and the Kigali Institute of Education have also begun operations. The Rwandan government plans to establish other specialized universities in various regions of the country.

student experiences (Lebeau, 1997) and is critical for understanding the general frustration that such a desired experience can generate and why studying abroad remains a dream for most African students.

In the few African countries, such as Nigeria, where research into these aspects is already providing some kind of historical perspective, one can see how higher education has gradually reached the status of a social need, “regardless of the actual functional requirements of the economy or of the institution” (Castells, 2001, p. 211) even if enrollment figures are far from the massification of the system as observed in the West. The trends highlighted above are exposing universities as organizations to various kinds of demands and pressures from society. Because the national systems being considered do not have the means (South Africa being, to a certain extent, an exception) to respond to excess demand by “downgrading some elements of the system” (Castells, 2001, p. 211), social segregation tends to be recreated informally within or outside the formal institutional system. One of the dramatic public consequences already observed is the political threat of restive unemployed graduates and of non-entrants excluded from the system by lack of means and/or connections.

The multiple purposes of HE from the perspective of social demand demonstrate that the public importance of HE is not reducible to its political or policy dimensions. The ostensibly private choices and experiences of young Africans in relation to HE are central to the processes of stratification and social reproduction, the formation of social and political identities, and the expectations and often hard realities of future livelihoods. This has been the case from the very inception of HEIs in SSA. Colonial HEIs were unequally distributed and generated various expectations from their internal and external constituencies. Diverse national policies on education then followed the recommendations and conditionalities of international organizations, thus shaping HE landscapes that strongly reflect national trajectories despite some inevitable global tendencies.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Research Agenda**

While the effects of global attention and global influences must be accounted for in a complete understanding of the public role and public consequences of HEIs in Africa, the most immediate need in understanding the complex relationship between HE and society is research “on the ground,” to reveal the ways African universities and societies intersect and mutually shape each other. Such research requires in-depth description and analysis of both the university’s engagement in civil society and the public sphere and the social demand and social value of HE for individuals, families, and social groups. As noted above,

these two dimensions are rarely considered within the same framework. There are understandable reasons for this, as they take very different points of departure in terms of the ways they situate HE within broader social and political contexts.

Further investigation of the *role* of HEIs in civil society and the public sphere is greatly needed but can be vulnerable either to overstating the importance of HE to a range of outcomes (e.g. political transition) or to imposing a normative rather than empirical perspective—that is, to focusing on how and what HEIs ought to be doing as public institutions, rather than what they are doing. Even when observers recognize this basic difference, they often characterize empirical deviations from the ideal as pathological or irrational.

A focus on the private strategies and social demands of actors has the advantage of opening up the university for research by viewing it as a *social space* that shapes, and is shaped by, deep processes of social stratification and reproduction, and by taking individual projects for social mobility at face value and without judgement. Its critical perspective can be vulnerable to turning overly cynical, however, if collective social projects and the role of intellectuals and students in those projects are reduced to struggles and strategies for private advance or privilege.

Overall, these two dimensions are always present but differently configured in specific places whose political economies, social networks, and HE institutional structures and cultures inevitably vary. New and constructive problematics and research clusters on the public importance of African universities can be located in this nexus. Because HE tends to be considered everywhere in Africa as a social need and as a right, while access policies remain highly elitist (at least in comparison to most Northern institutions), public universities in Africa are facing intense social pressures from below, threatening not only their once enviable and inescapable position as a vehicle of elite reproduction, but also their role as catalysts of social and political change. Paradoxically, it is the more “colonial” and elitist of these institutions where resistance to state authoritarianism has been nurtured over the years on a platform of national development and anti-imperialism. Dakar and Ibadan are probably the most striking illustrations of the capacity of university communities to challenge the state monopoly of developmental and patriotic discourses. More recently created institutions, often established to satisfy regional political appetites but often seen as being more responsive to their immediate environment and more accessible in their social recruitment, have hardly been able to resist political pressures and stand as guarantors of the defense of the acceptable shared interests that constitute the public sphere.

New empirical research, based on theoretically informed case studies, are needed to bring together these two dimensions creatively. Over the past ten years a number of SSA countries, despite many specific differences, have come to share 1) the reality of political transition and uncertainty, as well as shifts in social structure and processes, and 2) major modifications and transformations in public universities and HE systems as a whole. Social research on the public dimensions of the university in Africa can shed significant light on the connections between these two transitions, and a comparative perspective will provide real insights while allowing space for case-specific particularities and dynamics. In the end, future research should bring about the emergence of a fresh view on in what ways and for what ends public universities matter for their societies, a view far more complex and potentially richer than the current discussions about higher education and the knowledge economy/society. Such research could itself be a contribution to the public debate by acknowledging the range of stakeholders in African HE and proving a basis for understanding the politics of HE reform.

### References

- Abdullah, I. & Bangura, Y. (Eds.). (1997). Lumpen culture and political violence: The Sierra Leone civil war. Special issue of *Africa Development*, 22, 3–4.
- African Rights. (1994). *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance*. London: African Rights.
- Ajayi, J.F.A., Goma L.K.H., & Johnson, A.G. (1996). *The African Experience with Higher Education*. Accra: AAU, London: James Currey, and Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Banya, K. & Elu, J. (2001). The World Bank and financing of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Higher Education* 42(1), 1–34.
- Bayart, J-F.(1989). *L'Etat en Afrique: La Politique du Ventre*, Paris Fayard; [English edition: *The State in Africa : Politics of The Belly*].
- Calhoun, C. (1992). Introduction: Habermas and the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press
- Castells, M. (2001). Universities as dynamic systems of contradictory functions. In J. Muller, N. Cloete, & S. Badat (Eds.), *Challenges of Globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells* (pp. 206–223). Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- CODESRIA. (1996). *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995*. Dakar: CODESRIA
- Colclough, C. & Al-Samarrai, S. (1998). Achieving schooling for all: Budgetary expenditures on education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. *IDS Working Papers* 77.

- Colclough, C., Rose, P., & Tembon, M. (1998). Gender inequalities in primary schooling: The roles of poverty and adverse cultural practice. *IDS Working Papers* 78.
- Coleman, J. S. (1994). The Idea of the Developmental University. In Coleman, *Nationalism and Development in Africa: Selected Essays*, edited by R.L. Sklar. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Copans, J. (1990). *La Longue Marche de la Modernité Africaine*. Paris: Karthala.
- Council on Higher Education (South Africa). (2002). National and continental human resource development initiatives: Challenges for higher education. Occasional Paper 1.
- DesForges, Alison. (1999). *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. NY and Paris: Human Rights Watch and FIDH.
- Diaw, A. (1993). La démocratie des lettres. In M.C. Diop (Ed.), *Senegal: Trajectoires d'un Etat*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Diouf, M. & Mamdani, M. (Eds.). (1994). *Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA
- Dubet, F. (2000). The sociology of pupils. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 15(1), 93–104.
- Dunne, M. & Sayed, Y. (2002). Transformation and equity: Women and higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 30(1), 50–66.
- Dyhouse, C. (2001). Family patterns of social mobility through higher education in England in the 1930s. *Journal of Social History*, 34, 817–842.
- El-Kenz, A. (1996). Algeria: From development hope to identity violence. In M. Diouf & M. Mamdani (Eds.), *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hendricks, F. (2000). The future of sociology: An African view. *Sociological Research Online*, 4(4), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/4/hendricks.html>.
- Hoffman, D. (2002). The academy and conflict in Sierra Leone: An interview with Dr. Joe A.D. Alie. *GSC Quarterly Newsletter (SSRC)*, 3.
- Ibrahim, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Expanding Democratic Space in Nigeria*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Johnson, E. C. (1999). Nongovernmental think tanks in Sub-Saharan Africa: Surveying the landscape. Paper prepared for a workshop, *Think Tanks as Policy Catalysts in Africa*, March 8–10.
- Jonathan, R. (2001). Higher education transformation and the public good. *Kagisano: CHE Higher Education Discussion Series*, 1, 35–89.
- Khan, A. (1994). Algerian intellectuals: Between identity and modernity. In M. Diouf & M. Mamdani (Eds.): *Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Lange, M-F. (1999). Les acteurs de l'évolution de l'offre et de la demande d'éducation en Afrique. *Cahiers ARES* 1, 49–63.

- Lebeau, Y. (2000). Aspects of the Instrumentalization of the university in Nigeria: students experience and the current significance of the certificate. In Y. Lebeau & M. Ogunsanya (Eds.), *The Dilemma of Post-Colonial Universities*. Ibadan: IFRA/ABB.
- Lebeau, Y. (1997). *Étudiants et campus du Nigeria*. Paris: Karthala.
- Lefebvre, H. (1974). *La Production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos.
- Mayanja, M.K. (1998). The Social Background of Makerere University students and the potential for cost sharing. *Higher Education*, 36, 21–48.
- McCarthy, T. (1989). Introduction. In J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mkandawire, T. & Soludo, C. (1999). *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. Dakar and Ottawa: CODESRIA-IDRC-AWP.
- Niane, B. (2000). Permissivité d'un espace de formation: Le cas de l'Université de Dakar. In Y. Lebeau & M. Ogunsanya (Eds.), *The Dilemma of Post-Colonial Universities*. Ibadan: IFRA.
- OAU. (2000). *Rwanda, the Preventable Genocide: Report of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP) to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events*. Addis Ababa: OAU, July 2000—www.oau-oua.org.
- Peters, K. & Richards, P. (1998). 'Why we fight': Voices of youth combatants in Sierra Leone. *Africa* 68, 183–199.
- Prewitt, K. (Ed.). (1998). Networks in international capacity building: Cases from Sub-Saharan Africa. *SSRC Working Paper Series on Building Intellectual Capacity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Volume 2*.
- Richards, P. (1996). *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford and Portsmouth: IAI-James Curry-Heinemann.
- Sall, E. (2003 forthcoming). The social sciences in Africa: Trends, issues, capacities and constraints. *SSRC Working Paper Series on Building Intellectual Capital for the 21st Century, Volume 8*.
- Sall, E. (2001). Alternative models to traditional higher education: Market demand, networks and private sector challenges. Paper for Yale Center for International and Area Studies, African Studies and Economic Growth Center Conference on *International Higher Education and African Development*, New Haven, October 18–20, 2001.
- World Bank. (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.



---

## Academic Freedom in the Neo-Liberal Order: Governments, Globalization, Governance, and Gender

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza<sup>1</sup>

---

### Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the meanings and challenges of academic freedom for African universities and intellectuals as they confront old and new pressures from globalization, governments, and the general public. It is argued that as the “development” university of the 1960s and 1970s shifted to the “market” university of the 1980s and 1990s, threats to academic freedom became less political and more economic. The essay begins by discussing various definitions of academic freedom in Western and African contexts, then proceeds to explore the role of governments, the impact of globalization, the dynamics of internal governance, and finally the gender dimensions of academic freedom.

### Résumé

Ce texte cherche à circonscrire la signification et les défis que pose la liberté académique pour les universitaires et les intellectuels africains. Ces derniers subissent des pressions de tout genre et de tout âge nées de la mondialisation, des gouvernements ou de l'autorité publique. L'argument de taille qui est mis en avant ici consiste à reconsidérer la nature de ces pressions: sachant que la notion d'université de « développement » des années 1960 et 1970 a cédé la place à la notion d'université de « marché » au cours des années 1980 et 1990, les menaces qui pèsent sur la liberté académique sont devenues moins politiques et plus économiques. Le texte débute sur une revue critique de plusieurs définitions de la liberté académique selon qu'elles sont produites dans des contextes occidentaux et africains. Dans un deuxième temps, on assiste à une analyse du rôle des gouvernements, de l'impact

---

1 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza is professor of African studies and history at the Pennsylvania State University. Until recently he was professor of history and African studies and director of the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the winner of the 1994 Noma Award for his book *A Modern Economic History of Africa* and the 1998 Special Commendation of the Noma Award for *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*.

de la mondialisation et de la gouvernance locale, et la dimension genre dans la liberté académique.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the need for redefining and defending academic freedom is as great as ever as universities and academics everywhere confront old and new pressures from globalization, governments, and the general public around questions of relevance and accountability, governance and gender, canon and curricula, and the composition and culture of scholarly communities. The contexts and content of the challenges to academic freedom of course differ between countries, but they all center around the challenges of institutional autonomy, ideological controls, internal governance, and intellectual authority. The forces that seek to erode academic freedom, so vital for the health of the intellectual enterprise, emanate from the state, capital, civil society, and the academy itself and are spawned by complex transformations brought about by capitalist globalization and the consequent decomposition of the welfare state in the North and the developmentalist state in the South. The rising political ecologies of intolerance and intervention by states and cultural actors into university affairs, coupled with the curtailing of their fiscal responsibilities for higher education, threaten academic freedom, as well. This essay will argue that as the “development” university of the 1960s and 1970s shifted to the “market” university of the 1980s and 1990s the constitution of threats to academic freedom became less political and more economic.

The essay is divided into five parts: The first discusses Western and African definitions of academic freedom; the second explores the role of African governments; the third focuses on the impact of globalization; the fourth examines the dynamics of internal governance; and the fifth looks at the gender dimensions of academic freedom. Governments often set the parameters of academic freedom through fiscal, administrative, and ideological controls. Globalization, as a project and process of neoliberalism, which in Africa has primarily been articulated through structural adjustment programs (SAPs), has accelerated the corporatization of university management, commercialization of learning, and commodification of knowledge (Zezeza, 2003). These interventions have reinforced internal transformations in the structures of university governance and the cultures of scholarly discourse. It cannot be overemphasized that gender needs to feature prominently in analyses of academic freedom. Because of all the structured inscriptions and divisions that permeate and polarize African universities as social and scholarly spaces, including class and ethnicity, gender remains the most salient source of contestation in terms of university access and composition, on the one hand, and as a pedagogical and

research construct on the other. All these issues—the roles of governments, globalization, internal governance, and gender—are critical for a comprehensive analysis and understanding of academic freedom as a multi-pronged challenge and agenda for African universities and intellectuals.

### **The Definitions of Academic Freedom**

Like most values or virtues, academic freedom is simpler to defend in its breach than to define. Defenses and definitions of academic freedom are as much conceptual as they are contextual, subject to intellectual, institutional, and ideological transformations within the wider society and the academy itself.<sup>2</sup> In many Western traditions academic freedom tends to be defined negatively, in terms of institutional autonomy from external intervention especially by the state and individual autonomy of professors from university boards and administrators (in deciding who, what, and how to teach and do research), while in African traditions the emphasis is on both the negative and positive rights, on institutional autonomy and social responsibility. Academic freedom is more than a set of institutional practices; it is also an ideology used by academics to stake claims for and against friends and foes within and outside the academy.

Pragmatic and philosophical defenses of academic freedom have come under attack. For example, the link between tenure and academic freedom increasingly looks frayed in the new ruthless economy of free-market competitiveness and downsizing, in which feeling and looking comfortable has become, in the memorable phrase of Stephen Trachtenberg (1996, p. 24), “the eighth deadly sin, far worse than the other seven.” Richard Chait (1997) advises academe to devise more employment options beyond tenure to contractually guarantee academic freedom, advice that apparently seems to resonate more with younger than older faculty (Power, 1997). The “philosophical grounds on which the concept of academic freedom has traditionally rested,” argues Luis Menand (1993, p. 12), “are now regarded by many academics with skepticism.” Relying on a singular notion of truth, previous interpretations of academic freedom have, in the words of William Tierney (1993, p.144), “privileged some individuals and silenced others.” To critics, the university has never been an apolitical free-market of ideas, where objective facts or truth are traded by impartial scholars, for knowledge is socially

---

2 Philip Altbach (2001) notes that there is considerable confusion about the proper definition of academic freedom; his own attempt to offer a classification of different historical and contemporary regimes of academic freedom – the latter for example distinguishing between countries with “severe restrictions,” “significant limitations and periodic crisis,” “tension in the context of academic freedom,” “academic freedom with limits,” “re-emergence of academic freedom,” and “the industrialized countries”– shows the difficulties of defining academic freedom coherently.

constructed and the university is inscribed with and reproduces all the unequal power relations around class, gender, race, ethnicity, and other social markers that exist among the wider society.

For Richard Rorty (1994, p. 53) the philosophical propositions said to be presuppositional for academic freedom “turn out to be rhetorical ornaments of practice, rather than foundations of practice.” He tells us that “if we stop trying to give epistemological justifications for academic freedom, and instead give socio-political justifications, we shall be both more honest and more clear-headed” (Rorty, 1994, p. 55). Stanley Fish suggests that the ideology of academic freedom rests on morally thin grounds in that it presumes the equivalence of truth claims, a position based on “the principle of ‘what’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander,’” which leads “to a forced inability to make distinctions that would be perfectly clear to any well-informed teenager—distinctions between lynchings and set-asides, between a Shakespeare sonnet and hard-core pornography, between (in Supreme Court John Paul Steven’s words) a welcome mat and a no-entry sign” (Fish, 1999, p. B4). In his view, the debate about academic freedom is never between the inclusive and exclusive university but between competing structures of exclusion.<sup>3</sup> A clear example of this can be seen in the contradictory history and effects of speech codes.<sup>4</sup> Henry Louis Gates finds it paradoxical that “the rubric of ‘free speech,’ in the 1960s, an empowering rubric of campus radicals, has today been ceded to their conservative opponents as an ironic instrument of requital” (Gates, 1994, p. 15). While sensitive to issues raised in the arguments for hate speech bans, he believes that speech codes kill critique, are paternalistic, and reduce serious public debate to “the level of symbolic, gestural politics.” Social inequity cannot be silenced out of existence.

Understandably, defenders of academic freedom, as Walter Metzger (1993, p. 1), observes, “tend to be disquieted by attempts to define its limits: efforts to

3 For a brief history of academic freedom in the United States and its legal foundations, see Standler (2000, p. 1) who argues that contrary to conventional wisdom, academic freedom, despite its apparent desirability, is not a legal right derived from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but “an amorphous quasi-legal concept that is neither precisely defined nor convincingly justified from legal principles.” He contends that it refers to two different concepts, individual academic freedom, which “protects an individual professor” and institutional academic freedom, which “protects universities from interference by government, a right that applies to the community of scholars, not to individual faculty” (Standler, 2000, p.3) (emphasis in the original). He concludes, “academic freedom in the U.S. is a matter of internal policy at colleges and universities...not a constitutional right belonging to professors” (Standler, 2000, p. 22) (emphasis in the original).

4 The issue becomes even more murky when you factor in faith statements required in some private religious institutions of higher learning, see McMutrie (2002).

pound boundary markers into this fragile terrain have been known to produce slippery slopes.” Yet squeamishness about drawing lines, he suggests, has prevented them from informing “the cartography of the law with mappings informed by their own traditions” (Metzger, 1993, p. 2). Philip Devine (1996) believes academic freedom should not be confused and conflated with free speech. After all, academics that adopt controversial positions are often siding with some groups in the larger society against others. Frequently, debates about free speech on North American campuses serve as a cover for broader issues concerning equity or affirmative action, diversification, and curriculum reform. A 1994 controversy in Ontario, Canada, is an example of this phenomena.

Ostensibly responding to well-publicized incidents of sexual harassment on campuses and demands for educational and employment equity by women and minorities, the Ontario government’s “Framework Regarding Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination in Ontario Universities,” which called for “zero tolerance,” was as misconceived, misguided and cynical as the Trent University faculty document “Free Inquiry and Expression,” defending “the right to offend” (Sangster and Zeleza, 1994). As someone who participated in the debates at Trent where I was the university’s sole black faculty member, it became quite clear to me that an academic freedom that defends exclusion, as the “Free Inquiry” manifesto does, no matter how lofty the rhetoric, while ignoring power differentials and social inequalities, and imposes or rationalizes structural obstacles to access and equity for historically marginalized groups of people is not worthy of support.

In recent years two dominant contexts have emerged that constrain academic freedom. First, the triumphalist ideology of the market has penetrated academe, so that legal doctrines for “the market are applied to the classroom or the admissions process without nuanced consideration of how the operations and purposes of higher education are different, and how that difference benefits society” (Byrne, 2001, p. B13). Second, there are the oppressive imperatives of the security state following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington, whose effects are most marked in the U.S. itself. The new homeland security regime in the United States promises to have a profound impact on institutional and individual autonomy in the academy. A special report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2003, p. A12–A25) observes that stringent controls have been imposed on the freedom of movement of foreign students and scholars, controls that have turned many campus international studies offices into data monitoring and tracking agencies for the government. The security services have also stepped up their work on campuses for recruitment and surveillance, inciting fear and anger among academics. Even libraries are not immune as they are expected to monitor and report, if

requested, the reading habits of their patrons. Finally, campuses are now competing for the suddenly bountiful funding available to support research on terrorism, especially bioterrorism, in an opportunistic frenzy of patriotism.<sup>5</sup>

These are chilling developments that seriously threaten academic freedom in the American academy. Those who lived through the McCarthy era in the 1950s see disconcerting parallels (Monastersky, 2003). For those of us who have worked on both sides of the Atlantic, the climate on many American campuses seems eerily reminiscent of the climate on some repressive African campuses. While this generation of American academics is learning that academic freedom is firmly tied to the unpredictable vagaries of state power, this lesson is already deeply etched in the collective memories of generations of African academics. To many African academics, it has always made sense to see issues of academic freedom beyond the gated confines of the university or the nexus of academe-state relations, for they understand, even if they may not like it, that the university as a social arena and a state apparatus is inscribed by complex internal and external political practices, as is the process of knowledge production (Diouf & Mamdani, 1994; CODESRIA, 1996; Federici, et al., 2001).<sup>6</sup> For scholarly communities reared under colonial and postcolonial despotisms, civil liberties and the rights to education and self-determination are highly prized, and struggles for them have exacted high political and personal costs. These issues have tended to be tied more to the question of institutional autonomy and social responsibility, however, than strictly to internal institutional policing of speech as such. They know through painful experience that opposition to academic freedom is essentially pragmatic and political, so the real challenge is not to rehash or refine old philosophical arguments for tenure or free speech but to rebuild new supportive political constituencies within and outside the academy. This is not to imply that African discourses of academic freedom have not indulged in the intellectual delights of trying to draw lines of Solomonic clarity in the gray area between offensive speech and harmful action, rights and responsibilities, freedoms and duties. On the contrary, these questions have, indeed, been hotly debated.

The reason why the question of academic freedom and social responsibility dominates African discourses lies in the acute politicization of African social

5 Also see the articles by Johnson (2003), Grant (2003), and Stange (2003).

6 There are of course distinctive national discourses on academic freedom as discussed for countries like Nigeria (Mustapha, 1996), Cote d'Ivoire (Dégni-Ségui, 1996), Algeria (El Kenzi, 1996), and Kenya (Mutunga and Kiai, 1996) in CODESRIA (1996). In South Africa, the discourse is centered on the deformities of apartheid, the contradictions of the liberal tradition, and the challenges of Africanizing South Africa, i.e., relations between academic freedom and developmentalism, see Du Toit (2001) and Higgins (2000).

formations, a product of long histories of struggle against the barbarities of the slave trade, colonialism, and postcolonial misrule. The powerful pull of such memories and the strong organic links of academics to the cultures and communities of civil society, and their class affinities to the ruling elite, is what makes them see themselves either in the “magisterial” role of a revolutionary vanguard or a “ministerial” one of facilitating progressive change, to use Joseph Ki-Zerbo’s (1994) interesting metaphors. Rarely do they perceive themselves solely as academics. Intellectualism for intellectualism’s sake is often regarded as a sign of petty-bourgeois self-indulgence or decadence. The pauperizing effects of structural adjustment have merely reinforced the material and political imperatives of struggles for academic freedom. It is this valorization of the “public intellectual” that gives African academic debates about social responsibility their poignancy and urgency.

It is not surprising, then, that among the major international declarations on academic freedom that have been adopted in various regions of the world in the last two decades, the Kampala Declaration adopted by African intellectuals in 1990, is perhaps the most forthright on linking “Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility,” to invoke its very title. Part of the Preamble states: “The struggle for intellectual freedom is an integral part of the struggle of our people for democracy and human rights. Just as popular forces are waging a struggle for democracy and human rights, so are African academics, intellectuals, students and other members of the intelligentsia deeply involved in their own struggles for intellectual and academic freedom” (Diouf & Mamdani, 1994, p. 349). Particularly noteworthy is the reference to both intellectual and academic freedom. The title of the declaration in fact talks of “intellectual” rather than “academic” freedom. The CODESRIA discourse—the preoccupation with the productivity of connections between academic freedom and social responsibility, the problematic of university-society relations—has spread all the way to the corridors of UNESCO, whose 1998 World Conference on Higher Education vigorously debated *Autonomy, Social Responsibility and Academic Freedom* (UNESCO, 1998).

### **The Role of Governments**

The state is central to all discussions of academic freedom in Africa for, until the recent wave of privatization, most African universities were founded, financed, and controlled by the developmentalist postcolonial state. The colonial state, despite its civilizational pretensions, did little to promote university education until the twilight years of colonial rule, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when a few regional universities were belatedly and hurriedly set up to produce skilled professional elites to serve a maturing colonial capitalism and



save it from the dangerous agitation of the nationalist masses. Dominated by expatriates and created in the curricular image of the metropolitan universities, the colonial universities were too small and isolated to have much of an epistemic or cultural presence. That was to change after independence, as the number and size of universities exploded and their expectations as engines of modernization expanded. According to some estimates, from the approximately forty-two universities before the 1960s (mostly concentrated in North Africa and South Africa), there were more than 400 by the end of the 1990s, catering to nearly 3.5 million students compared to the few tens of thousands that were forty years earlier (Ejiaga & Zeleza 2003, p. 183–6).

This historic achievement could not hide the fact that the universities were, in Thandika Mkandawire's (1996, p. 2) memorable phrase, "born in chains." One set of chains was institutional, and the other intellectual. Institutionally, the universities were held on a tight leash by the state, which saw them simultaneously as cathedrals of cultural authenticity and local assembly plants of western modernity. They were assigned a technocratic mission: to churn out the personnel for development and nation-building. It was a powerful, seductive project, which was initially accepted by many African academics, not simply because the universities were fiscally dependent on the state or that the postcolonial leviathan could whip them into submission, but also because they, too, were intoxicated by the immense possibilities of independence, whatever their preferred ideological fix, and they fervently believed in their own nationalist calling to rewrite Africa in the corpus of their respective disciplines, reinscribing it in the western epistemological order.

The honeymoon between the intellectuals and political class did not last, however. It was dissipated by the deepening recessions of development and democracy, as evidence mounted that the postcolonial state was unable to realize the dreams of Uhuru as fast as the giddy aspirations of the masses demanded and the grand assurances of the political class dictated. The erosion of their autonomy, manifested most intrusively in the banning of some disciplines such as political science and sociology in Rwanda and Senegal after the 1968 student riots or law in Mozambique, also alarmed the intellectuals (Sall, 2001a, p. 2). The embattled political leviathan sought to subject academic institutions and critical social thought to its monopolistic will to power enacted through the one-party state that distrusted all pluralisms, whether articulated in the names of class, ethnicity, or culture. The mystification of the nation as one—one race, one language, one culture—reflected not only a homage to the imagined imperatives of developmentalism, but also to the Eurocentric fictions of national identity, and suppressed Africa's own multi-ethnic, multicultural, and even multi-racial realities and possibilities.

Criticisms of the state by academics were framed in increasingly anti-nationalist and anti-developmental terms, although this did not entail a wholesale crusade against the progressive mission of African nationalism and the imperatives of development. The fallout between academics and the state reflected the growing divergence in their respective missions. As the technocratic agenda assigned to the universities was increasingly achieved or became irrelevant, given the small size of most African countries and economies and as economic growth slowed down from the mid-1970s, the university lost its importance in the eyes of the state. State divestment from university education found a theoretical rationale in tendentious rate-of-return studies, which argued that higher education offered lower private and social returns than primary education, so that public interest in universities was substantially lower than in primary schools.

The nationalization of the university labor market from the 1970s, as the inter-territorial universities were dissolved into national universities, simply enabled the state to tighten its hold over the universities. Subsequent expansion and Africanization of staff and curricula did not halt the slide towards the parochialization and politicization of African universities, nor was it always translated into the development of an organic intelligentsia, that is intellectuals who were seen as critical to the articulation of the state project. The imposition of draconian structural adjustment programs forced or facilitated states to reduce their fiscal responsibilities to the universities. The effect was expansion of privatized programs in public universities and the expansion of private universities. In many cases, privatization simply substituted dependency on the feckless state for dependency on the fickle market and foreign donors, none of which promoted intellectual autonomy and commitment to basic research.

By the 1980s, therefore, many of Africa's repressive and strapped structural adjustment states were suspicious and dismissive of their own intellectuals, often seeing them as purveyors of "foreign ideology," which left little room for the latter to occupy public space or to engage in critical discourse openly (Mkandawire, 2003). The tendency established by the dynamic generation of nationalist leaders mutated into cruel parody when invoked by aging dictators or juvenile soldiers and reduced intellectual work to sycophancy. Much African academic research appeared "irrelevant" to the state functionaries, because it was not "applied" research, or because African intellectuals were adversarial, especially those who expected imminent revolution, or because they blindly followed western research themes that did not address local conditions. Governments preached the populist language of "relevance," while intellectuals held onto the elitist language of "excellence," which seemed to confirm for their opponents that African intellectuals suffered from "colonial mentality" or

“intellectual elitism” and was used to justify state assaults against the universities and critical intellectuals.

Yet the same governments became increasingly subservient to foreign policy advice and conditionalities. Indeed, the growing reliance on foreign expatriates for development models and research, bankrolled by the international financial institutions and donor agencies, enabled African governments to ignore their own intellectuals and to lower the short-term costs of intellectual repression. This led to the ironic situation whereby these governments could only access their own intellectuals through donor-contracted reports, as these indigenous intellectuals sought pecuniary and political salvation in consultancies. The transformation of African intellectuals into “paid native informants” for foreign donors was a tragic testimony to the collapse of the nationalist project.

Thus, African intellectuals found themselves fighting against intolerant hegemonies on two fronts: institutionally, against the authoritarian state, and intellectually, against domineering western paradigms. One consequence was the disastrous brain “drain” or “haemorrhage” from the universities to other sectors at home or institutions abroad. The most creative ones founded independent research centers. The establishment of an intellectually vibrant and autonomous academic NGO sector was one of the most exciting developments on the African intellectual scene that emerged in response to growing state control of universities and declining fiscal support. The crisis in which the African intellectual community found itself generated intense self-scrutiny and criticism. Some even turned to the existential and epistemological despair of postmodernism and viciously attacked African intellectuals for having blindly campaigned for the dangerous enlightenment “metanarratives” of nationalism and development. In Achille Mbembe’s (2001a, 2001b) nihilistic critique, the postcolony is a space marked by unusual banality, violence, and corruption; that indeed, Africa is a conflicted sign, text, archive, or library, to use his postmodernist terminology, marked by absences, whose classical borderlines—symbolic, cultural, structural, and territorial—are vanishing and whose redemption and actualization lies in its absorption into the universal. This cynical dismissal echoed the Afro-pessimist condemnation of Africa in western circles.

Others, however, found new fervor in the possibilities of African renewal unleashed by the wave of democratization that swept across the continent from the late 1980s. Indeed, universities became hotbeds of the struggles for democracy that began to rock one African country after another. Strikes and other protests by both students and faculty increased. The state responded with both the sticks of repression and the carrots of reform or cooptation. Many governments tried to buy time by turning to international scabs, development experts

provided by bilateral and multilateral aid donors. According to some estimates, by the mid-1980s, there were as many as 80,000 foreign experts working in the Sub-Saharan region alone, excluding North Africa. None of these measures were sufficient to stem the rising tide of opposition to authoritarian rule. By the end of the 1990s, many African countries had introduced political reforms and were at various stages of democratic transition, although there were some notable reversals. The struggles for democracy in Africa represented the latest moment of accelerated change in a long history of struggles for freedom, an exceptionally complex moment often driven by unpredictable events and new social movements and visions and anchored in the specific histories and conditions of each country. National, regional, and international forces converged unevenly and inconsistently across Africa at this time, and economic and political crises reinforced each other, altering the terrain of state-civil society relationships, the structures of governance, and the claims of citizenship. Representing the pluralization of associational life and the expansion of political space, democratization promised to free African intellectuals from the imposed stupor of state authoritarianism and the stifling preoccupation with the state as the chief agent of social transformation.

Political liberalization brought relief to universities and academics in many countries as state controls and censorship were relaxed. The shift in state policy from control of the universities to supervision; from concern with process, questions of provision, access and equity, to concern with product, questions of appropriateness of outputs to meet market demand, simultaneously facilitated and was facilitated by the expansion of private universities. More specifically, the growth of private universities was engendered by a combination of four factors: to cover the fiscal and provisioning vacuum left by the SAP(ed) state; to meet the excess in social demand for higher education; the need for differentiated education and demand for better education by certain groups; and the influence of market ideology on higher education (Thaver, 2002). The effects soon became evident. Ebrima Sall, a former head of the Academic Freedom Project at CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) observed: "In the last 10 years or so, African academics have seen their fields of research expand as governments have embarked on the road to democracy. Their lives are at risk now in only a few countries, such as Burundi, and censorship is fading" (Sall, 2001b, p. 26). But what they may have gained in political freedoms, they lost in economic viability. In other words, political pressures increasingly gave way to economic constraints, as the state steadily withdrew both its administrative repression and fiscal responsibility from the universities.

Nevertheless, political threats against universities and academics remained in several countries, most vividly and violently through the waging of war perpetrated both by crumbling states and insurgent private militias. Indeed, the privatization of war and security that was occurring in society at large across the world (Keen, 2002) was manifesting itself in what Sam Zia-Zarifi (2001, p. 31) calls “the ‘privatization’ of assaults on academic freedom. Militant opposition groups are increasingly willing and able to attack academics who call for reason.” He gives examples from Spain to Colombia. In Africa, there is the particularly tragic case of Algeria, where, in the 1990s, progressive secular intellectuals were targeted by both Islamic extremists and the state, thus demonstrating the complex interpenetration of the repressive capacities and propensities of both the state and civil society (El Kenzi, 1996). Elsewhere on the continent, many universities were physically destroyed during the wars that raged in the 1990s from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Congo in Central Africa to Somalia in Eastern Africa and Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. In a few others, such as Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Egypt, old style political repression remained.

In Ethiopia, the hopes that accompanied the overthrow of the Derg dictatorship and the end of the civil war in 1991, and the installation of new government were soon dashed. The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) did not live up to its billing that it was guided by the principles of democracy, development, and minority rights. Assaults against academic freedom continued and, in fact, intensified. First, lethal force was used to suppress student activism. Ethiopian students have a long history of struggle, which resurfaced in January 1993, when a student protest against a planned referendum on Eritrean independence at Addis Ababa University (AAU) was violently attacked by security forces. Student repression increased during the 1998–2000 border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and escalated thereafter, especially against disaffected Oromo students, culminating in the strike of April 2001, when students demanded academic freedom and during which 40 students were killed, 400 wounded, and 3,000 arrested. Throughout 2002, student demonstrations at the country’s four regional universities and private colleges were met with arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture, killings, and expulsions.

Second, there was unrelenting repression of the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA), which had a membership of 80,000 out of an estimated 120,000 teachers in more than 6,000 schools. ETA leaders were imprisoned, and one was assassinated. The government created a new association, under the same name as ETA, in 1993, and pressured teachers to join. Although the old “ETA” was not destroyed, its proscription on university campuses deprived faculty of a collective protective voice. Third, independent thought was stifled through

the denial of university autonomy and government control of activities on campuses. The arbitrary dismissal of some 40 professors in 1993, the use of two-year contracts in faculty employment, absence of tenure, arrest of human rights activists, and the government's repeated failure to grant the university autonomy through a charter (which it enjoyed when it was created in 1950 until the 1974 revolution), and its control of all leadership positions eroded academic freedom. International protest against this regime of academic terror and human rights abuse became muted after September 11, 2001, as Ethiopia became "a partner and a 'frontline state' in the U.S. war on terrorism" (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 42).<sup>7</sup>

In Zimbabwe, the state has been equally ruthless in its dealings with academics and students. Once a beacon of national liberation in Southern Africa, Robert Mugabe's bankrupt and beleaguered regime resorted, by the late 1980s, to a reign of terror to silence its critics and launched a disastrous program of land seizures from the white settlers to shore up its tattered revolutionary promises. The universities could escape neither the tightening noose of state repression nor the stiffening muscles of civil resistance. The struggles for institutional autonomy and academic freedom became intertwined with struggles for democracy in the wider society. Besides the bread and butter issues of subsistence, both faculty and students fought for their rights to free association and expression. In the late 1990s, as political tensions in the country rose and the government-appointed university administrations sought to curtail academic freedom on campuses, student and faculty protests escalated.

The Association of University Teachers at the University of Zimbabwe fought vigorously against a draconian code of conduct, first imposed in 1995, which set severe restrictions and penalties on faculty and staff conduct and banned political activism. In September 1998, four months after the university had been closed, six prominent academics resigned from the university council (packed with administration or government appointees) in protest, and in 2002, and again in early 2003, the faculty (whose total membership of 700, down from the official establishment of 1,200 was itself a reflection of the deteriorating conditions of service) went on strike and the university was closed indefinitely. In the meantime, student protests grew, led by the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), which was formed in the late 1980s. In 2001, 30 students were suspended, others arrested and tortured, and two killed by members of the security forces, resulting in new waves of protests. Undaunted, the

---

<sup>7</sup> Also see these news reports from Human Rights Watch: July 29, 1998; May 10, 2001; May 19, 2001; May 22, 2002; June 11, 2002; and January 24, 2003.

protests continued into 2003, and ZINASU even petitioned the United Nations to intervene to ensure their rights to education and other chartered human rights.<sup>8</sup>

If not as murderous as in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, state repression against activist intellectuals in Egypt continued to have a chilling effect on academic freedom. The most celebrated case at the turn of the new century involved Saadeddin Ibrahim, a sociology professor at the American University in Cairo and one of the country's leading advocates for political reform and democratic rights. In June 2000, the Egyptian government closed down the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, which Ibrahim had founded in 1988 and directed, and arrested him and 27 of his co-workers at the Center on trumped-up charges of conspiracy to bribe public television officials, accepting foreign funds without official authorization, disseminating false and harmful information about Egypt, and defrauding European Union funds. All indications are that the arrests were intended to silence the critical monitoring of the 2000 parliamentary elections by the Center and other civil society organizations. The numerous irregularities, both before and during the trial, including the manner of detention, the conduct of interrogations, lack of access for defense lawyers to any of the prosecution documents, and the failure of the presiding judge to respond to any of the key issues raised by the latter lends credence to the fact that the charges were politically motivated.

In May 2001, the Supreme State Security Court sentenced Ibrahim to seven years in prison and six co-defendants to prison terms ranging from two to five years, while imposing suspended one-year sentences on the twenty-one others who were released (Human Rights Watch, 2002b). Upon appeal, the Court of Cassation threw out the conviction twice; by the beginning of 2003 the defendants were awaiting a third trial, as required by Egyptian law, on the same charges by the Court of Cassation itself. It is worth noting that, a month before the arrests, the state of emergency, in force almost continuously since 1967, was extended, and the verdicts came on the heels of a new law of associations, under which non-governmental organizations could be dissolved by administrative order and without recourse in a court of law, and the authorities could interfere in their internal affairs.<sup>9</sup>

Continued state assaults against academic freedom are by no means confined to Africa or even to the South more generally. On the country, "in many

8 See the press reports in *Zimbabwe Independent* (1998, 1999); the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (March 1, March 29, and April 5, 2002); by Mudzengi (2000), Makamure (2002), Makiwa (2002), and Mavhungu (2003); and from the Network for Education and Academic Rights, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, and 2003d.

9 See the following news reports from Human Rights Watch, August 3, 2000a, 2000b; August 10, 2000; May 21, 2001; July 31, 2002; and December 3, 2002.



parts of the world,” to quote John Akker (2002, p. 1), the first executive director of the UNESCO-sponsored Network for Education and Academic Rights (NEAR) established in 2001, “being a college or university academic or student is not a safe thing to be... The chilling fact is that killings, imprisonment, abuse, and harassment for those in education are on the increase and becoming a way of life in many countries.” The annual reports on academic freedom by Human Rights Watch confirm this assessment and paint a depressing picture of growing assaults against academic freedom worldwide. The report for 2000 notes that “academics were disproportionately represented among the world’s political prisoners, and universities were favored targets of repression. Researchers, scholars, teachers, and students in dozens of countries continued to be harassed, censored, dismissed, imprisoned, and, in the worst cases, tortured or killed for openly expressing their views or addressing controversial questions” (Human Rights Watch, 2000, p. 1).

The 2001 report comments: “The pursuit and dissemination of knowledge remained disproportionately dangerous activities as educators and their students were frequent targets of violence and repression sponsored or countenanced by regimes bent on stifling critical analysis and dissent. In the worst cases, these governments used intimidation, physical abuse, and imprisonment to punish campus-based critics, and, by example, to repress civil society. More commonly, governments pursued the same ends by silencing academics and censoring their teaching, research, and publication on important subjects” (Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 1). The 2002 report further observes the alarming effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on New York and Washington, in the wake of which “several academics in the United States and Canada came under official or public pressure for questioning various aspects of their governments’ past or projected policies... The right to education and academic freedom suffered numerous violations around the globe. Oppressive governments punished academics for exercising their right and responsibility to question and criticize their societies” (Human Rights Watch, 2002a, p. 1).<sup>10</sup>

### **The Impact of Globalization**

In my book, *Rethinking Africa’s Globalization*, I have argued that six trends—what I call the six Cs’—characterize the impact of contemporary capitalist globalization on higher education: corporatization of management (the adoption of business models for the organization and administration of universi-

---

<sup>10</sup> *Index on Censorship* records the growing threats to civil liberties across the world by governments hiding behind the banner of national security, see Philip Knightly (2002) and Michael Ignatieff (2001).

ties); collectivization of access (growing massification of higher education, continuing education or lifelong learning, and accountability to outside stakeholders); commercialization of learning (expansion of private universities, privatized programs in public universities, and vocational training); commodification of knowledge (increased production, sponsorship, and dissemination of research by commercial enterprises, applied research, and intellectual property norms); computerization of education (incorporation of new information technologies into the knowledge activities of teaching, research, and publication); and connectivity of institutions (rising emphasis on institutional cooperation and coordination within and across countries) (Zezeza, 2003, ch. 3). The implications of these transformations on academic freedom are not only complex and contradictory but are also quite varied in different regions and countries.

Corporatization in universities reinforces a market ideology and the practices of bureaucratic authoritarianism, which curtail the cultures of collegiality and general education on the one hand, while it encourages managerial efficiency, accountability and relevance, on the other hand. These effects can help contain deeply entrenched patterns of discretionary decision-making and exclusion of historically under-represented groups.

The growing massification and flexibilities of higher education facilitate the diversification of programs and people on campuses as previously excluded social classes and groups, including women, gain access, while growing interventions by external stakeholders threaten to erode traditional notions and values of university autonomy, academic freedom, liberal education, and quality.

Similarly, while the commercialization of learning makes universities more responsive to both the needs of the economy and national competitiveness and promotes skills training and development, the enterprise culture undermines some of the broader social purposes of higher education like promoting social justice, public criticism, humanistic development, and democratic citizenship. Moreover, the marketization of universities imposes enormous strains on faculty, who are required to work longer hours due to funding cuts. The faculty becomes increasingly divided between an elite professoriate in the marketable disciplines (with all the privileges of academia including higher salaries and benefits), and the less-illustrious faculty in the marginalized disciplines (including a growing mass of part-time, poorly paid academics).

The same can be said about the commodification of knowledge production, which often enables universities and academics to attract much-needed resources for research and teaching from industry, philanthropic institutions, and individuals as streams of public funding decrease or dry up. But, the price can be high, not only in terms of undue interference by donors but also in the applica-

tion of proprietary principles to academic research and removing it from the domain of public circulation and discourse.

Proponents and critics of information technology tend to focus on online education and debate about its costs and profitability as well as its pedagogical benefits. To its supporters, the new technologies offer limitless possibilities to expand, democratize, and globalize university education, while the skeptics question whether the primary motive behind the craze for online education lies in the universities' educational interests or vendor companies' aggressive marketing—in profit rather than pedagogy.

As for institutional connectivity, its bane and benefits lie in the details, in the mode of collaboration, whether it is based on what Michael Gibbons (2001) calls a model of static competition, in which institutions compete to achieve incremental efficiency gains out of their existing configuration of resources, thus leaving prevailing national and international stratifications intact; or on a model of dynamic competition, in which institutions seek the long-term benefits of problem-based collaboration in research and teaching and, in the process, transform themselves and the existing hierarchies.

Clearly, globalization as a process and project seeking to impose neo-liberal discipline on tertiary institutions affects all aspects of the university enterprise, including teaching, research, and service, which, inevitably, has a profound impact on academic freedom. While the benefits of globalization on academic freedom should not be underestimated, it seems to me that a market-driven higher education system undermines academic freedom in five major ways: in terms of student access and solidarity, disciplinary differentiation and devaluation, integrity of research and publishing, management and security of tenure, and permeability and dilution of institutional traditions.

The more education is regarded as an economic investment for individuals rather than a public good, the more its costs and returns are calculated according to market principles, which has led in many countries to reduction or removal of state subsidies and steep rises in student fees to reflect the “real” costs of tertiary education. According to Mala Singh, “access has become more difficult for women, minority ethnic groups and the rural poor in a context that prioritizes a ‘user pays’ mindset. The line between public and private provision has become blurred often within the same institution, bringing ambiguity to the role and responsibility of higher education in the broader transformation of society” (Singh, 2001, p. 26).

As fees rise or become more differentiated across programs, learning increasingly becomes a market transaction and a consumer mentality takes hold among the high-fee paying students, thereby weakening their collective capacity to protect their rights and the quality of their education. Writing on the

impact of privatization in East Africa, Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha reports of growing conflicts at the public universities “between government- and privately-sponsored students. The former feel that the latter are not qualified to join universities and may therefore water down university standards, while at the same time causing unnecessary congestion at the hitherto revered institutions” (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2002, p. 16). Indeed, there is a general perception that the quality of the so-called “parallel programs” (for privately-sponsored students) is low, as Obong Oula (2002) contends is the case of Makerere University in Uganda, where, despite its widely acclaimed fiscal rejuvenation, academic standards and the quality of scholarship have apparently declined because of inherent flows in the neo-liberal model which emphasizes managerial efficiency and quantitative measurements at the expense of qualitative aspects of education and faculty input. The hardships of students in the new dispensation cannot be underestimated as Dinah Mwinzi (2002) shows in the case of two Kenyan universities where impoverished students engage in time-consuming and sometimes illegal income generating activities at the expense of their studies.<sup>11</sup>

As learning becomes increasingly valued for its instrumentality, more emphasis is put on the technical and professional fields at the expense of the humanities and the basic sciences, on applied research over basic research. In Africa, the private sector has tended “to select and support marketable and easy to manage disciplines and avoid expensive but nationally strategic programs such as engineering, medicine, technology, veterinary, the physical sciences, and agriculture” (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2002, p. 11).<sup>12</sup> This differentiation based on disciplinary marketability places faculty in the “unprofitable” disciplines at a grave disadvantage in institutional battles for resources, undermining their ability to undertake research and articulate a public voice. In Africa’s mushrooming privatized universities or programs, faculty, who are sometimes paid by how many courses or hours they teach, do so much teaching that they have little time left for research, which undermines their individual and institutional contribution to scholarship and public discourse. According to Oketch and Amutabi (2002), faculty in the new, wealthier private universities conduct even less research than in the old cash-strapped public universities.

The devaluation of the humanities is also evident in the North. It is not fortuitous that, notwithstanding all the fulminations about the so-called “cul-

---

11 In Nigeria, Obasi and Eboh (2002) contend, the issue is not so much student poverty and their ability to pay but willingness to pay, for the vast majority of students are from middle class backgrounds and seem to spend far more on social entertainment than direct educational costs.

12 Also see Bloom, (2001) commenting on the report by the World Bank and UNESCO (2000) on the challenges of education in the developing world in the new millennium.

tural wars” and the self-aggrandizing posturing of the “posts”—poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism—voices from the humanities and the arts have been largely absent from public discourse addressing the fundamental questions of human existence—from war and violence, human rights, and the implications of the demographic transformations of states, nations, and regions, to the ethical and cultural implications of the defining technologies of our times (information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and environmental technology), to the construction, reconstruction and intersections of identities (social, religious, linguistic) at various scales from the local to the global. In a world of repetitive cable television news what passes for public discourse is often nothing but mindless chatter by pompous, opinionated, and ignorant pundits.

It has long been recognized among African academics that donor-funded research, including research sponsored by foundations of impeccable liberal credentials, often comes with thick strings attached that can compromise the choices and integrity of their research (Zeleza, 1997). The growth of commercially-financed research is raising new concerns. In Africa, the impact of corporate sponsorship on academic research is rather limited, as Mbuk Ebong’s (2002) study of university-industry linkages in Nigeria clearly shows. The story is quite different in the developed countries. Not only is “the constant search for funding time-consuming and inefficient,” argues Gillian Evans, corporate-sponsors often seek to “retain control of the direction of the research and even impose a new set of staff relationships.... The sponsor can also control intellectual property rights and even the right to publish the projected results. It can prevent the scientist from sharing research at an international conference and can even stop his or her work if the funder doesn’t like the way it is going. The old expectation was that scientific expertise was global in its reach and exchange.... Today, the corporations are buying up this expertise, leaving very few voices to challenge what they are telling the world” (Evans, 2001, p. 17). Stories abound of the research programs of entire centers or departments being mortgaged to corporations.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of powerful transnational academic publishers, who set exorbitant journal subscription prices that, effectively, bar access to information to all but those in rich institutions, is also a significant part of the intellectual property rights regime and corporate stranglehold on academic freedom. Resistance against such practices that undermine academic freedom is mounting. There are reported protests against blatant commercialization: Some universi-

---

13 See, for examples, stories from the University of Toronto (Turk, 2001) and the University of California at Berkeley (Elliot 2001).

ties have adopted conflict-of-interest guidelines; in September 2001 editors of the International Council of Medical Journal Editors adopted new rules concerning the ethics of clinical trial performance and reporting to prevent the publication and legitimation of dubious studies sponsored by pharmaceutical companies (Kellogg, 2001; Brainard, 2001; Blumenstyk, 2000); and reportedly “more than 22,000 scientists from 161 countries launched a boycott of science publication editors and started campaigning for a ‘public science library’” (Lefort, 2001, p. 24).

Business management models have given university administrators more executive powers, which has exacerbated management-faculty tensions and reduced the capacity of faculty to influence the running of their institutions. “The logic of managerial production,” argues Oula (2002, p. 25) “renders irrelevant or unvalued the notion of higher education as a place for dissent and unpopular ideas, for creativity and the life of the mind, for caring and relationships. These are seen as inefficiencies that will likely be wasteful or unaffordable.” In fact, tenure is increasingly under threat where formal tenure systems are instituted. In the United States, for example, tenure, once regarded as indispensable to the academic profession and the pursuit of academic freedom, is now widely perceived by hostile state legislators and the general public as an indefensible sinecure of lifelong employment, an entitlement that is as outdated and dangerous as the other “entitlements” being dismantled in the post-Fordist era of flexible production and merciless free-market competition.

Universities have responded by swelling the ranks of untenured adjunct faculty, whose proportion rose from 35% to 43% in all of faculty employees between 1987 and 1999 (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2002, p. 32). To adjuncts, crowded in introductory level courses, academic freedom is a myth. “Adjuncts are getting dumped for things tenure-track scholars do with impunity—teaching controversial material, fighting grade changes, organizing unions.... All an institution has to do is not renew their contracts. No explanations required; no grievance procedures provided. Adjuncts just disappear” (Schneider, 1999, p. A18). Advocates of academic freedom warn that a dearth of academic freedom for almost half the professoriate threatens it for the other half. Indeed, all is not well for the tenured half either; their academic freedom is often imperiled by the presence of speech codes and the absence of faculty unions on many campuses (Zezeza, 1997).

The intrusion of business practices in academia is paralleled by the appropriation of some academic functions by business. This is to suggest that knowledge production is no longer a monopoly of universities; it has spread to numerous private and public sectors, including business, government agencies, and civil society organizations “that seek social legitimation through recognizable

competence” (Gibbons, 2001, p.5). Academics increasingly enjoy mobility between universities and other research sites outside universities, which offer them unprecedented opportunities to form networks, partnerships, and alliances that can not only enhance their research capacities but also protect them from the iniquitous tendencies of the academy. There can be little doubt that the proliferation of independent research centers and NGOs has saved many African academics from the penury and repression of their structurally adjusted universities. This institutional permeability also makes it harder to define academic freedom, however, to set its parameters in ways that are consistent with and strengthen, rather than weaken, university traditions of academic freedom. Part of the widespread confusion over the meaning and implications of academic freedom arises from transformations and proliferation of sites of knowledge production spawned by the new cultural and political economies of knowledge production.

### **The Dynamics of Internal Governance**

It would clearly be inadequate to attribute the constraints and assaults against academic freedom solely to external agencies such as governments or globalization. Not only is there no great wall separating the academy from the state and society, all the contradictions and conflicts of the outside world are reproduced in the academy, sometimes with an investment of passion that only academics are able of mustering. Struggles for academic freedom are also directed against the authoritarian tendencies and practices embedded in the institutions of higher learning themselves. The challenges against academic freedom transcend administrative practices, encompassing the epistemic frames of knowledge production and what Neville Alexander (2001) calls the “language of tuition.” This suggests that the struggle for academic freedom in African institutions of higher learning has linguistic and epistemological dimensions that are as important and perhaps even more fundamental for the future of the African academy and its contribution to the much-touted African renaissance than the administrative constraints.

The notion that the university is itself a major culprit in the assault on academic freedom has often been expressed by those who find themselves at the bottom of the slippery slope of academia, whether for generational, gender, ethnic, racial, religious, intellectual or ideological reasons. This is abundantly clear in the renowned text, *Academic Freedom in Africa* (Diouf & Mamdani, 1994), which grew out of the 1990 CODESRIA Conference on the same topic and offers a searing critique of oppressive practices in African universities. The late Nigerian political scientist, Claude Ake (1994) has written that state authoritarianism in Africa should not be exaggerated, for the coercive capacities of the postcolonial state are weakened by the limited ideological hege-



mony enjoyed by the political class. Academics themselves shoulder some of the blame for the erosion of academic freedom. Besotted by opportunism, careerism, parochialism, factionalism, and ideological intolerance, academics have often weakened their collective defense against state assaults, and by defining academic freedom in narrow and elitist terms, as a professional right unencumbered by social responsibility, they often forfeit popular support. Thus, the road to academic freedom must begin with honest self-criticism among the academics themselves, of their practices and values. For Ake, academic freedom without internal institutional democratization is inadequate.

African universities have been characterized by authoritarianism, partly as a reflection of prevailing state authoritarianism itself and the fact that in many cases senior university administrators are state appointees, who, in turn, appoint unit heads down the administrative hierarchy. University governance has often been characterized by a discretionary and top-down administrative structure, poor communication, and strained relations between administration and teaching faculty. When combined with the meager funding at many universities, the proximity of faculty housing on or near campus, and the politicization of campus life, the result is internal bitterness, tension, resentment, and divisiveness that can be quite disruptive (Mathieu, 1996).

From the 1980s, while funding constraints indeed became severe, the financial plight of many universities was often compounded by top-level corruption and mismanagement. As resources once meant for teaching and research were frittered away in the conspicuous consumption of the university administrative elite, with their chauffeur-driven cars and special allowances, or filtered through a maze of patron-client networks that rewarded sycophants and marginalized independent-minded scholars, buildings decayed, libraries and laboratory facilities deteriorated, and the culture of learning and knowledge production degenerated. In the worst cases, the patronage system determined the allocation of positions and appointments, departmental budgets and individual salaries, promotions and rewards, teaching loads and research facilities, sabbaticals and conference travel, housing and allowances, and routine services including conflict-free scheduling, computerized class rosters, grade sheets, and transcript compilation (Nelson, 1996; Domatob, 1996; Peil, 1996; Kirkaldy, 1996). Numerous studies have pointed out that many universities were remiss even in areas that constitute their core mission of teaching, research, and public service. Strategic planning, data management, curricular reform, and staff development suffered from neglect. In a situation where funding levels were erratic, state intervention a constant threat, and independence and innovation frowned upon, strategic planning was often seen as an exercise

in futility. Needless to say, academic freedom could not flourish under such circumstances.

A particularly egregious example of academic authoritarianism occurred in Nigeria, where military officers were appointed vice-chancellors of several universities. Not only did these officers lack experience in or commitment to higher education, many were corrupt. They also destroyed traditional democratic structures of university governance and encouraged violence on the campuses, playing different factions of students against one another to maintain control. Military rule facilitated the imposition of structural adjustment on the university sector, resulting in a gradual shift of educational values away from knowledge and learning and the notion of education as an investment to a focus on technical and remedial education. Moreover, the administration of Nigerian universities became increasingly centralized, as power was concentrated in the National Universities Commission (NUC), which controlled major aspects of university management from setting student enrollment targets and courses of study, to academic and staff salaries and the selection of vice-chancellors (Benedict et al., 2000). No wonder Nigerian universities were rocked by waves of strikes by students and faculty.

While these strikes occurred in the context of deepening repression and growing popular resistance, they were often triggered by and specifically directed against various forms of university governance. J.I. Dibia (2002) presents a fascinating account of student protests against authoritarianism on Nigerian campuses, beginning with the protests of 1971, which started when the university administration invited police to handle students complaining about the cafeteria in one hall at the University of Ibadan; followed by the 1978 crisis, provoked by the repressive manner in which the threefold increase in fees was handled (without consultation with students, faculty, and parents); and the 1986 crisis, triggered by the banning of a student march by the highly autocratic administration—even by Nigerian standards of the time—at Ahmadu Bello University. Starting on one campus, the protests would quickly spread to other campuses and soon escalated into national crises.

The anti-structural adjustment protests began in 1988 and were rekindled in 1989 and 1990, as students protested against a World Bank loan for restructuring Nigerian universities. These protests were followed by recurrent struggles for the democratization of the universities and the state in the 1990s. Nigerian academics also have a long tradition of protest against authoritarian governance and for external and internal institutional autonomy. Faculty protests were spearheaded by powerful academic unions that, in the 1970s, concentrated on promoting the rights, needs, and aspirations of the rapidly expanding professoriate, and, in the 1980s, protecting them from the deepening crisis in

the university system (Jega, 1996). Campus and nationwide faculty strikes and other forms of protest increasingly became common. In one university the faculty resigned en masse to protest the unfair dismissal and harassment of some of their colleagues.

Needless to say, student and faculty strikes against authoritarian governance were not restricted to Nigeria. During the five and half years that I taught at Kenyatta University in Kenya in the 1980s, there was a major student strike every academic year, each of which led to closure of the campus for varying lengths of time. Underlying the protests were broad political, economic, and social causes, although they were often triggered by campus complaints against administrative authoritarianism and poor living and learning conditions.<sup>14</sup> Several years after I left, between November 1993 and 1994, about 3,700 faculty at Kenya's then four public universities, including Kenyatta, went on strike when the government refused to register their union despite the apparent liberalization of the political system. The strike was brutally suppressed: faculty members were evicted from university housing and many lost their jobs (Atteh, 1996, p. 38).

The state responded to student and faculty protests with both the sticks of repression and the carrots of reform or cooptation. In 1991, for example, rioting students were shot and killed at the universities of Yaounde in Cameroon and Lubumbashi in the former Zaire, while in Gabon, Togo, Swaziland, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire many students were beaten, arrested, and detained (Domatob, 1996, p. 32). In Nigeria, between 1985 and 1993, more than 100 students were killed, 1,000 were imprisoned, and hundreds more suspended. Soon after, the National Association of Nigerian Students and the Academic Staff Union of Universities were banned.

Striking faculty members were treated no better. In May 1992, when the universities were closed for six months, hundreds of faculty were fired, imprisoned, and evicted from their houses (Atteh, 1996, p. 38). Most tragically, on Nigerian campuses violent student gangs or "cults" terrorized fellow students and faculty, committing acts of rape, murder, and wanton destruction of property. The fact that they targeted student union leaders and radical academics, were well-armed, included among their members children of powerful people, and were treated with leniency by Nigeria's fierce police and autocratic university administrations led many to believe that the cults, which originally started as social clubs, were patronized by the military regime and vice-chancellors

---

<sup>14</sup> For two detailed and interesting studies on student strikes in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, see Christopher Wise (1998) and Cyril Dadieh (1996), respectively.

anxious to destroy student unionism (Babaleye, 1998; Jason, 1998; *Tempo*, 1999).

In the 1990s, universities began undertaking fiscal and administrative reforms. The fiscal reforms—principally involving the introduction of student fees, establishment of demand-driven courses, commercialization of some service units and facilities, and creation of limited liability companies to undertake consultancies, which have rescued some universities from financial penury and were, in many instances, preceded and accompanied by administrative reforms predicated on, at least rhetorically, greater democratization of internal governance, decentralization of decision making, and management planning and efficiency. How far have these reforms gone in promoting academic freedom on African campuses? The jury is still out. In so far as the new enterprise culture strengthened the powers of university managers, as noted before, collegiality was trumped by corporatism, which constrained academic freedom.

The changes are still too soon to make definitive conclusions. Clearly, the situation varies among and within countries. Reports from Nigeria and Kenya indicate that there has been little improvement in those countries, unlike, perhaps, the situations in Uganda, Tanzania, and Mozambique. In 2002, student and faculty protests in Nigeria were regenerated by the decision of the government—now a democratically elected civilian government—to take another World Bank loan for Nigerian universities. The struggle for autonomy and democratic governance was still raging at the beginning of 2003 when faculty went on a nation-wide strike over questions of funding, improved access to educational materials including books and journals, university autonomy and governance, and the reinstatement of 44 faculty members who had been sacked earlier at the University of Ilorin. Specifically, regarding university autonomy, they protested against the government's bill which seemed to reinforce the powers of the NUC over the universities in terms of funding and conditions of service on the one hand, and that of councils and vice-chancellors to hire and fire staff thereby compromising security of tenure of faculty and staff on the other (Komolafe, 2003; *Vanguard*, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).<sup>15</sup>

In Kenya, academic freedom remained an alien practice in the universities as Robi Nimar admonished: "Kenya's public universities are in dire need of putting to practice what they teach—democracy" (Nimar, 2002, p. 1). Follow-

---

15 Asked why he thought the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was fighting against Nigeria taking money from the IMF and World Bank to fund education, the minister of education responded: "I think this is a communist mentality that has been generated over a period of time"! Then he quipped: "Even Russia now take[s] money from IMF. China take money from IMF" (*Vanguard*, 2003a).

ing the victory of the opposition party, the National Rainbow Coalition, in the national elections of December 2002, students and faculty began flexing their collective muscle against internal authoritarian governance. In January 2003, efforts began to revive the un-registered University Academic Staff Union, first formed in 1990, and students at the University of Nairobi forced the administration to reinstate the Student Organization of Nairobi University, which had been banned in 2001. Emboldened by the new dispensation, in early March 2003 students and faculty at Kenyatta University staged a two-day sit-in demanding the resignation of the autocratic Vice-Chancellor and his three deputies. In fact, there seemed to be a rising wave of student riots across the country to the apparent chagrin of the new government (Ramani, 2003; Onyango 2003; Siringi, 2003).

Makerere University in Uganda has become the poster institution for remarkable recovery from the abyss of penury and repression. Everyone, including external donors, seeking academic good news from Africa have invested much in Makerere's success. A report by the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa<sup>16</sup> enthusiastically lists the major transformations that Makerere has undertaken in a context of declining financial support from the state: "Adoption of strategic planning; enlisting the university in support of national goals; implementation of alternative financial strategies; curriculum and academic restructuring; realizing the importance of ICT; emergence of a new management and governance style; increased student access and equity; improvements in the quality of student life; and improvement in staff development and welfare" (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2003a, ch. 4, p. 2)

The administration, we are told, regularly consults with the faculty union (Makerere University Academic Staff Association) and student leaders. But, a lot remains to be done. "While Makerere has moved towards administrative decentralization," the report concedes, "the process is incomplete, with financial decentralization lagging behind the devolution of authority. The governance system of the university has to be further decentralized to give individual departments and faculties the ability to make decisions with financial implications and determine outcomes" (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, ch.5, p. 2). In fact, there are complaints by MUASA that the quality of education has fallen and research remains seriously underfunded. Also, "it is remarkable," the report notes, perhaps sarcastically, "how little attention has been paid to [students] welfare compared to that given to their capacity to pay

---

16 This is an initiative of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, and Rockefeller Foundations, which was launched in May 2000, to provide assistance for the revitalization of higher education in Africa.

and provide the university with income. In addition to the insufficiency of learning facilities (in particular classrooms, laboratories and libraries), student living conditions are particularly egregious” (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, ch. 5, p. 4).

Similarly, while the University of Dar es Salaam has achieved a dramatic turnaround in its financial fortunes thanks to internal reforms and increased donor funding, “some senior staff distrust the administration’s commitment to more democratic governance of university affairs in the new era of ‘transparency and accountability’” (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa 2003b, ch. 2, p. 5). There has been particular disquiet since 1997, when the University Council replaced the elective principle with search committee procedure in the selection of deans, directors and departmental heads. The University of Dar es Salaam Staff Assembly (UDASA) has been campaigning for the reinstatement of the old, more democratic process. Also, the closure of the university by the Vice-Chancellor in 2000, following student demonstrations, shows the persistence of old high-handed tendencies.

Higher education in Mozambique has also undergone remarkable transformations. Although it has experienced recovery from long years of war as well as expansion and growing diversification and differentiation, serious problems remain which can constrain academic freedom. These include, to quote the report of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (2003c, ch. 7, p. 9), “the absence of a conceptual model of administration and institutional management; lack of integration of administration and management into one system; unclear administrative legislation; excessive centralization of decision making, with the rector’s office and the central directorates controlling the units; centralization of financial and material resources at the central level, inhibiting academic units’ abilities to act effectively; inadequate use of information and communication technology as a tool for increased efficiency in administrative and financial management; excessive number of administrative and support staff with education and training levels below the minimum requirements for adequate performance; [and] inadequate communication systems resulting in lack of coordination between management and administration.”

It is tempting to confine the analyses of academic freedom to institutional and ideological constraints posed by the state and the universities themselves. In the African context, the discourse ought to be more expansive, for it is quite evident that the pursuit of academic freedom involves not only struggles against the authoritarian predilections and practices of the state, civil society, and the academy itself, but it is also an epistemological one against paradigms, theories, and methodologies that inferiorize, misrepresent, and oversimplify African experiences, conditions, and realities. A lot of studies have been published

in recent years, including my own *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Zeleza, 1997), on the propensity of all the major social science and humanities disciplines for universalizing western experiences, often highly idealized, into metatheoretical constructs to analyze other societies. The assumed universalism and ethnocentrism of the dominant paradigms, Mama and Imam have argued, circumscribe academic space for African intellectuals who “are forced to take on board these norms and waste time tilting at windmills to find out why we deviate from these patterns instead of finding out what our own patterns and realities are” (Mama & Imam, 1994, p. 86). The result is that the freedom to develop more relevant paradigms for African realities and needs is compromised. African societies are seen in terms of lack, in terms of absences, as caricatures of the West.

These epistemological critiques about academic freedom, of course, differ in their intensity and integrity. The most enlightened ones eschew the Afrocentric fantasies of what Kwame Appiah (1992), calls “nativist handwaving,” sentiments shared by V.Y. Mudimbe (1992, 1994), who has done much to unravel the invention of Africa through the social imaginary of the western epistemological order. According to Archie Mafeje (1994), the struggle for academic freedom in Africa and African studies entails jettisoning Eurocentric theories and paradigms and developing authentic African intellectual discourses, without falling into the trap of an essentializing cultural revivalism that homogenizes Africa’s diverse cultures and histories and poses them in binary opposition to other cultures and histories. Clearly, the challenge is to contest the self-referential universalism of western paradigms without slipping into self-indulgent particularism, to construct a truly global epistemic universalism. This struggle, at the very heart of the academic enterprise as a site of knowledge production, pre-dated the establishment of Africa’s postcolonial universities and may outlive the current material and institutional constraints against academic freedom. The reason for this lies in the languages of tuition, which is the lifeblood of all learning.

### **Language and Academic Freedom**

Outside the ranks of creative writers and socio-linguists, the importance of language for higher education and academic freedom has not received the attention it deserves. Writing in the South African context, which can be extrapolated to many other African countries, Neville Alexander (2001, p. 4) laments: “The extent to which South African intellectuals have chosen to close their eyes to the significance of this question is truly incomprehensible, given the fact that anyone who is endowed with even a modicum of pedagogical imagination knows that there is an indisputable causal link between the mediocrity

of South African intellectual performance, generally speaking, and the language, or languages, of tuition in our educational institutions.”

And he asks rhetorically: “Why am I raising this issue in the context of an academic freedom lecture? The answer is astoundingly simple. If I am unable to express myself fluently in the only legitimate language on any campus in this country, my freedom of speech and a fortiori my academic freedom are literally curtailed... unless we tackle the issue [of mother-tongue education] aggressively, we are dooming countless generations of South Africans, especially black South African youth to a destiny of mediocrity and failure. For, we cannot repeat often enough the paradoxical fact that the only children in South Africa who are beneficiaries of mother-tongue education from the cradle to the university are first-language speakers of English and many first-language speakers of Afrikaans” (Alexander, 2001, p. 5). Language confers symbolic power or cultural capital, and in the language market—a truly invisible hand if ever there was one pervading all social institutions especially education—privileges and exclusions are offered according to one’s possession of linguistic capital; those without it are not only marginalized but also effectively censored.

The hegemony of European languages in African institutions of higher learning and in African intellectual discourse poses a major constraint to the expressive freedom of multitudes of students and even faculty. It is surely a travesty of monumental proportions that, outside of Arab North Africa, the first languages of the majority of Africans are not the languages of public and intellectual discourse. As Ali Mazrui (1994, p. 121) has reminded us, the concept of an African Marxist, economist, physicist, or any other scientist who does not speak a European language, or an academic conference conducted primarily in an African language is, for the time being, “sociologically impossible.” The “linguistic curtain,” as Mahmood Mamdani (1994) calls it, born out of the sharp rupture between the language of the home and the language of the school during colonial times, reproduces and sanctifies the separation of academics from working people, and devalues the relevance of academic work. This might be one reason why African academics have tended to be organic to neither civil society, whose languages they often ignore, nor the state, whose policies they sometimes oppose. More fundamentally, Africa’s linguistic dependence or Eurocentricism excludes ordinary people from the affairs of state and public life, making the pursuit of development and democracy so much more difficult to realize (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998).

### **The Gender Dimensions**

It is evident that the subject of academic freedom is a broad and complex one indeed, encompassing the structure of relations and practices between the uni-



versity and external constituencies and among the universities own internal constituencies. In a fundamental sense, the struggle for academic freedom is, to use Ebrima Sall's (2000, p. ix) apt metaphor, a struggle for citizenship. While the torchbearers of this struggle are many, including young scholars, students, junior faculty, adjunct professors, and academics from ethnic, religious, and other kinds of minorities, it is women—whether or not they are members of the marginalized groups—who bear the brunt of the absence of and struggle for rights and democracy within the academy and the broader society in which the academy is located. Saida Yahya-Othman (2000, p. 34) insists that consideration of academic freedom should include “policies that disempower half the population of a nation; those which restrict their access to higher education; those which do not provide equal opportunities for the pursuance of any field of study; practices which make it impossible for sections of students or academics to conduct their business in peace; those which limit the amount of time that those sections can spend on their work; and so on.”

Women's access to higher education institutions remains unequal. The reasons for this are already well-documented in the literature on this subject. Research shows that access factors include, to use Joy Kwesiga's (2002) classification, family factors (parental attitudes, socio-economic status of the family, family labor), societal factors (family structures, kinship and lineage, custom and culture, the institution of marriage, religion, historical barriers, urban-rural disparities, link between education and employment, economic conditions, and the role of the state), and institutional factors (school facilities, curriculum and subject options, pedagogical materials, influence of teachers, types of educational institutions, and careers guidance and counseling). In 2000, gross enrollment ratios of the entire age-cohort for Sub-Saharan Africa were 84.1% male and 69.4% female (76.8% for both) at the primary level; 29.1% male and 23.3% female (26.2% for both) at the secondary level; and 5.1% male and 2.8% female (3.9% for both) at the higher education level (Kwesiga, 2002, p. 3; Okeke, 2002).

Save for the few women's universities (such as Ahfad University in Sudan and Kiriri Women University of Science and Technology in Kenya), women remain largely under-represented in African institutions of higher learning. While several countries had managed to attain gender parity at the primary and secondary levels by 2000, very few had managed to do so at the tertiary level. The exceptions were Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, and South Africa. In South Africa, female enrollments increased by 44% between 1993 and 1999, from 202,000 in 1993 to 291,000 in 1999, while male enrollments reached a peak of 305,000 in 1995 and declined to 273,000, so that in 1999, women represented 52% of total enrollments, up from 43% in 1993 (Balintulo, 2000,

2002; Cloete and Bunting, 2000). Taking the continent as a whole, females made up 34%, 22%, and 12% of primary, secondary, and tertiary level students, respectively (Meena, 2001, pp. 4–5). To be sure, gradual improvements were recorded in some countries. For example, at Makerere, female admissions increased from 27% in 1990–91 to about 40% in 1999–2000 (Ssebuwufu, 2001, p. 19), while at the University of Dar es Salaam, where an affirmative action program for female students was introduced, it increased from 13% to 24% between 1993–1994 and 1999–2000 (Meena, 2001, pp. 7; Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2003b, ch. 4, pp. 6–7).

The gender gap also manifested itself in fields of study and faculty distribution. Women were concentrated in the humanities and social sciences and were grossly under-represented in the sciences and most of the professional fields. Between 1994 and 1997, female enrollment in the sciences as a percentage of the total female enrollment in the tertiary sector ranged from 6.5% in Chad, 9.1% in Tanzania, 12.6% in Benin, 14% in Zimbabwe, and 16.7% in Uganda, to 32.4% in Tunisia, and 36.8% in South Africa (UNDP, 2000, p. 258). The percentage of female faculty was even lower than that of female students, even in countries that had achieved enrollment gender parity. For example, the number of female faculty in South African universities rose relatively slowly from 30% in 1992 to 35% in 1999, with the bulk of them situated at the rank of lecturer and below. In fact, women outnumbered men at these ranks, while men vastly outnumbered women at the higher ranks, from senior lecturer to full professor (Balintulo, 2000, 2002). At Makerere University women made up 19.2% of faculty in 1998/99, up from 18.6% in 1996/97, but only 5 of the 175 female faculty were at the rank of professor or associate professor (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2003a, ch. 5, p. 5–6). At the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, women made up 11% of the faculty in 1999/2000 (down from 12.5% in 1997/98; only 4 out of the 40 full professors in 1996 were women), while at Abdou Moumouni University in Niger they made up only 9.7% (Meena, 2001, p. 12; Yahya-Othman 2000, p. 39).

Thus, female faculty members were crowded in the lower ranks and in the humanities and “soft” social science disciplines. Women were also visibly under-represented in leadership positions (Otunga and Ojwang, 2002). Despite their rising numbers, they found themselves, as elsewhere, marginalized and excluded in the predominantly masculinist institutional cultures and discursive regimes of higher education. Consequently, “feminism, women-sensitive agendas and the struggle for gender-equality,” argue Tamale and Oloka-Onyango (2000, p. 1), “continue to meet a great deal of resistance and resentment from both within and outside academic life. It is reflected in issues as specific as the choice and structure of a particular curriculum, in the underfunding of gender-

related research, and in the issue of affirmative action in faculty hiring. It extends to the question of academic promotions and the overall administration of the university.”<sup>17</sup> On many African campuses, gender studies—where they have been introduced often after protracted struggles—“have become ghettoized, confined principally to women, and making only a limited impact on the overall struggle against gender bias” (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000, p. 11). Burdened by the patriarchal demands of being the primary caretaker at home (worsened by the disruptions of structural adjustment) on the one hand and the pedagogical requirements of the academy (exacerbated by the marketization of the university) on the other, female academics find themselves severely disadvantaged in advancing their careers and interests in the academy.

Female students and faculty also face various forms of harassment in the academy, including sexual harassment and violence, which constitutes an abuse not only of their academic freedom but also of their fundamental human rights. Isabel Phiri (2000) and Penda Mbow (2000) recount their harrowing stories of harassment from some male students and faculty who disapproved of their research. Phiri, a faculty member at the University of Malawi, presented a paper (co-authored with three female colleagues) on “Violence against women in educational institutions: The case of sexual harassment and rape on Chancellor College Campus” at the university’s annual conference on research and development. Upon hearing of the presentation from a radio interview, a gang of male students, angered at their “tarnished image”, went on a rampage to her home vandalizing her property. Instead of condemning the students, the College Principal castigated Phiri for “irresponsible research” and called her for a disciplinary hearing. Phiri was ostracized by many male colleagues but found support from members of her own department, the Vice-Chancellor, and the general public, who voted her “Woman of the Year” in one of the local dailies. She took pride in bringing a taboo subject out in the open and empowering female students, but the price was high: she left the university and emigrated out of the country for her own psychological and professional well-being.

Penda, a faculty member at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal, presented a paper at a conference on “Women and Aids” in which she had pointed out possible connections between returning migrant workers, wife inheritance, and temporary marriages (*djawaz al muta’a*) in the spread of HIV. She was attacked by minor Muslim extremist factions and some male colleagues and even received death threats. The incident was a poignant reminder of the dan-

---

17 They make reference to the following authors Phiri (1994) on curriculum, Mama and Imam (1994) and Iweriebor (1990) on research, Mbilinyi and Mbughuni (1991) on hiring, and Hamad (1995) on promotions and administration.

gers and importance, especially for women academics, of conducting scientific studies on sensitive topics in societies increasingly dominated by religious or ethno-cultural discourse.

Cultural and political challenges to academic freedom in the field of gender studies have become particularly pronounced on campuses in countries such as Egypt. Nadia Farah argues that religion has become such a dominant cultural paradigm and ideology in Egyptian society and academe that “few academic researchers attempt to challenge issues relating to gender inequalities which are enshrined in the current interpretation of religious texts” (Farah, 1994, p. 272). Constraints on gender research have a much longer history. Hoda Elsadda (2001, p. 2) informs us that “in fact, the first academic freedom crisis to erupt at Cairo University was related to gender. It was triggered by a Ph.D. thesis written in 1913 by writer and philosopher Mansour Fahmi on the position of women in Islamic society.” There can be little doubt, however, that Islamic extremism in Egypt has grown thanks to the country’s deepening development crisis and the penetration of Islamic capital from, and increased labor migration to, the conservative states of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. This influence from more conservative Islamic states has enabled religious extremists to capture intellectual and ideological space in the universities, a situation which has “led to the exposure of prominent women intellectuals to severe attacks when they dared to publish or adopt radical ideas or social sciences in favor of women or even tried to organize women associations (for example, the case of the Arab Women Solidarity Association led by N Al Saadawy) (Sharawy, 2000, p. 103).

Opposition to gender studies and women’s academic freedom is, of course, not confined to religious extremists in the academy. Olutoyin Fashina (2000) reports the widespread hostility from male faculty to the proposal to establish the Center for Gender and Social Policy Studies at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria. The dismissal of feminist research is often articulated through various forms of institutional devaluation that include ridicule and contempt. Fashina (2000, p. 123) tells the story of a woman who had been promoted to a senior lectureship in the Department of Economics based on the research she had carried out mainly on women’s issues. “At the end of the promotion exercise, a ‘concerned’ male colleague had pulled her aside and advised her now to work hard at ‘more serious issues and forget about all those things about women’, for her subsequent promotion.” In another context, when women brought up the issue of maternity leave to the faculty union as an important issue for negotiation with the administration, they were greeted with laughter.

Women in the academy are often confronted with a lot more than laughter or snide remarks, however. Particularly troublesome is the question of sexual

harassment. Anecdotal evidence abounds that it is not unusual for male faculty to prey on female students in exchange for grades, a malady that is known in Cameroon as “sexually transmitted grades” (Ouendjil, 2000; Nyamnjoh and Jua, 2002).<sup>18</sup> Male students pose an even bigger threat. In Tanzania, we are told, “there are indications that sexual harassment on university campuses is on the increase, within the new environment of liberalization, increased competition for services, cost-sharing and economic difficulties” (Yahya-Othman, 2000, pp. 42–43). At the University of Dar es Salaam, male students turned a magazine called *Punch*, which in the 1960s had been used as a forum for informed social criticism of government policies and the university administration, into a weapon of female control and suppression by spreading vitriolic rumors about female students. The university was forced to confront this collective masculinized harassment in 1990, when one female student who had been “punched” committed suicide. Another arsenal in the politics and rhetoric of male control is deployed through hurling charges of prostitution at female students. Female students at Cheikh Anta Diop University went on strike in March 1997 to protest such charges (Mbow, 2000, p. 75). Research on sexual harassment on African campuses is growing even in the face of threats of intimidation, as happened to Phiri at the University of Malawi, whose research showed that 67% of the respondents had been sexually harassed, 12.6% of whom had been raped.

Universities are not alone in facing the problems of sexual harassment. One of the most horrific incidents happened at St. Kizito high school in Kenya, in 1991, during which 19 girls were killed and 71 were reportedly raped by their male colleagues (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango, 2000, p. 13). It is the growing concern about sexual harassment throughout the educational system in many parts of the world that led Human Rights Watch to issue its first report on the subject, *Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools* in 2001. “South Africa was selected for this study,” the reports states, “not only because of the scope of the problem but also because of the opportunities for change there, where educators both in and outside government have shown increasing interest in finding solutions” (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The report makes gruesome reading, indeed. For many girls, subjected to physical and sexual abuse and harassment by both teachers and male students, the school is a site of violence rather than learning, where their bodily integrity is

---

18 Charmaine Pereira (forthcoming) makes a distinction between “sexual harassment” and “sexual corruption”. According to her, the latter occurs when male faculty solicit sex from female students in exchange for favors, and the latter when they accede to sexual advances initiated by female students seeking favors.

assaulted and their right to education aborted. The report urges the state, educational institutions, teacher unions, and other stakeholders to adopt as a matter of urgency a national plan of action on sexual violence and harassment in schools, to address the multiple issues involved.

These are all daunting challenges. It is equally critical to note, however, the numerous struggles being waged episodically and daily, in small and large ways, covertly and overtly, by female academics, students and educators, and their male allies across the continent's schools, colleges, and universities. Successes are being won in expanding the entitlements of academic citizenship and freedom for women as is evident from the growth of feminist curricula, research, organizing, and advocacy. The number of gender studies programs has increased: In 2002, the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town identified 30 such programs, indicating that, according to Amina Mama (2002, p. 3), gender studies "has gained a substantial foothold in African institutions of higher education and learning, and the African university in particular," even if, as Charmaine Pereira (2002) maintains, mainstreaming gender still has ways to go even among institutions as progressive as CODESRIA.<sup>19</sup> Affirmation action programs have been designed and implemented in several countries to promote gender equity in institutions of higher learning, especially for student enrollment rather than faculty employment, although, as with affirmative action programs elsewhere, they have sometimes provoked a backlash (Bennett, 2002a). Also, national and regional research efforts and organizations are emerging to fight sexual harassment. For example, in 1996, the Network of Southern African tertiary Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment (NETSH) was formed and, by 2002, had more than 400 members in the region (Bennett, 2002b).

---

19 For a discussion of the work of some of these programs, see Deborah Kasente (2002) on the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Makerere, which was established in 1991 and now teaches more than 1,000 students and in 2002, hosted the 8th World's Women Congress; Abiola Odejide (2002) for a profile of the Women's Research and Documentation Center at the University of Ibadan also established in 1991. Other important organizations include the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) established in 1977 to promote research networking among women researchers across the continent; the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) established in 1993 by women ministers of education and vice-chancellors specifically to promote educational prospects for girls and women, and the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town to spearhead feminist research.

### Conclusion

With the perils and possibilities of the new century, academics everywhere, including those in Africa, continue to face multiple challenges, both old and new, emanating from society and academe, which they have to negotiate carefully and creatively in order to protect their interests and promote their mission as teachers, researchers, and public service providers. In fact, universities everywhere are undergoing unprecedented change thanks to rapid technological, economic, political, and social transformation in the wider world. As the old stabilities disappear, the question of academic freedom is being reconfigured, for the task becomes one of managing, in the new times, the creative tensions between institutional and individual autonomy, freedom and accountability, rights and obligations, excellence and efficiency. The university's internal and external constituencies are more pluralistic than ever, as are the networks and alliances that universities can forge, which recast questions of social responsibility and public service.

The way these issues are being handled varies, of course, between and among countries, but academic freedom will remain fundamental, as a functional condition, philosophical proposition, and moral imperative to the unfettered pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Academic freedom allows universities to meet their responsibilities to society: speaking truth to power, promoting progress, and cultivating democratic citizenship. University autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility are instruments of the same implement and are essential for the production of the critical social knowledge that facilitates material and ethical advancement. In this context, the notion of social responsibility should not mean acquiescence to authoritarian regimes or repressive civil society institutions and practices. Rather, it requires a commitment to progressive social causes, which, in the case of Africa, remain development, democracy, and self-determination. African intellectuals and institutions of higher learning cannot make meaningful contributions to these historic and humanistic dreams without institutional autonomy and public accountability. The struggle for the university continues.

### References

- Ake, C. (1994). Academic freedom and material base. In M. Diouf & M. Mamdani (Eds.), *Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 17–15). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Akker, J. (2002, May-June). Protecting academic freedom worldwide. *Academe*, 88(3). Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/02mj/02mjels.htm>.

- Alexander, N. (2001) Language policy, symbolic power and the democratic responsibility of the post-apartheid university. D.C.S. Oosthuizen Memorial Lecture delivered at Rhodes University, October 9, 2001. Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from <http://www.scifac.ru.ac.za/freedom.htm>.
- Altbach, P.G. (2001, November). Academic freedom: International realities and challenges. *SRHE International News*, 46, 13–19.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appiah, K.A. (1992). *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Methuen.
- Atteh, S.O. (1996). The crisis in higher education in Africa. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 36–42.
- Babaleye, T. (1998, January). Terror in the universities. *ANB-BIA Supplement, Issue/Edition*, 341.
- Balintulo, M. (2001). Redress and equity in the transformation of South African higher education. Paper presented at the Carter Lectures 2001, “Governance and Higher Education,” University of Florida, Gainesville, 22–25 March.
- Balintulo, M. (2002). The role of the state in the transformation of South African higher education (1994–2002): Equity and redress revisited. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” organized by the Center for African Studies (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Champaign and Dakar, April 25–27.
- Benedict, K., Grown, C., & Morris, S. (2000, June). Initial observations on Nigerian higher education. Chicago: MacArthur Foundation.
- Bennett, J. (2002a). Exploration of a ‘Gap’: Strategizing Gender Equity in African Universities. *Feminist Africa*, 1, 34–63.
- Bennett, J. (2002b). *Southern African Higher Education Institutions Challenging Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment: A Handbook of Resources*. Cape Town: African Gender Institute.
- Bloom, D. (2001). Higher education in developing countries: Peril and promise. *SRHE International News*, 46, 20–24.
- Blumenstyk, G. (2000, June 1). A new web site details the corporate ties of some researchers. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 47(38), A25.
- Brainard, J. (2000, 30 March). At NIH meeting, scientists debate when they should reveal financial interests to volunteers. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A43.
- Burgan, M. (2002, September 6). Academic freedom in a world of moral crises. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B20.
- Byrne, P. (2001, January 5). Constitutional academic freedom in scholarship and in court. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B13.
- Chait, R. (1997, February 7). Thawing the cold war over tenure: Why academe needs more employment opportunities. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.



- Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: [http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable\\_verity.cgi](http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable_verity.cgi).
- Chronicle of Higher Education, The.* (2002, August 30). *Almanac 2002–3.*
- Chronicle of Higher Education, The.* (2003, April 11). Special report: Closing the gates, A12–A25.
- Cloete, N. & Bunting, I. (2002). *Higher Education Transformation: Assessing Performance in South Africa.* Pretoria: CHET.
- CODESRIA. (1996). *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995.* Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Daddieh, C.K. (1996). Universities and political protest in Côte d'Ivoire. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion, 24(1),* 57–60.
- Dégni-Ségui, R. (1996). Academic freedom and university autonomy in Côte d'Ivoire. In CODESRIA, *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995* (pp. 57–80). Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Devine, P.E. (1996, July). Academic freedom in the postmodern world. *Public Affairs Quarterly, 10(3),* 185–201.
- Diouf, M. & Mamdani, M. (Eds.). (1994). *Academic Freedom in Africa.* Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Domatob, J.K. (1996) Policy issues for African universities. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion, 24(1),* 29–35.
- Drazen, J. (2001, November) In the name of a fair trial. *The UNESCO Courier, 23.*
- Du Toit, A. (2001). Revisiting academic freedom in post-apartheid South Africa: current issues and challenges. Paper commissioned as support material for the book *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa.*
- Ebong, M.B. (2002). University-industry relations in Nigeria. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21st Century”.
- El Kenzi, A. (1996). Algeria: From Development Hope to Identity Violence. In CODESRIA, *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995* (pp. 45–55). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Elliott, V. (2001, November). Who calls the tune? *The UNESCO Courier, 21–22.*
- Elsadda, H. (2002, May-June). On the margins: Gender and academic freedom at Cairo University. *Academe, 88(3).* Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/02mj/02mjakk.htm>.
- Farah, Nadia. (1994). Civil Society and Freedom of Research. In M. Diouf & M. Mamdani (Eds.). *Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 262–273). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Fashina, O.M. (2000). Academic freedom and female academics in Nigeria. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 121–127). Dakar: Codesria Book Series.
- Federici, S., Caffentzis, G., & Alidou. O. (2001). *A Thousand Flowers. Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

- Fish, S. (1999, November 26). Academic freedom: When sauce for the goose isn't sauce for the gander. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. B4. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable\\_verity.cgi](http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable_verity.cgi).
- Gates, H.L. (1994, January-February). Truth or consequences: Putting limits on limits. *Academe* 80(1), 14–17.
- Gibbons, Michael. (2001, November). Globalization in higher education: A view for the South. *SRHE International News*, 46, 4–12.
- Grant, J. (2003, April 11). Uncle Sam Over My Shoulder. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B9–B10.
- Hamad, A.H. al-Z. (1995). Sudan. In J. Daniel, N. Hartley, Y. Lador, M. Novak, & F. Fleming (Eds.), *Academic Freedom 3: Education and Human Rights*. London: Zed Press.
- Higgins, John. (2000, Spring). Academic freedom in the new South Africa. *Boundary*, 227(1), 97–119.
- Human Rights Watch. (1998, July 29). Academic leaders urge Ethiopia to release detained Eritrean exchange students. *HRW Documents on Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2000). Academic freedom from *Human Rights Watch World Report 2000*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Retrieved April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.hrw.org/advocacy/academic/afp6.htm>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2000a, August 3). Egypt: Harassment of academics. *HRW World Report 2000: Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2000b, August 3) Egypt: Politically motivated imprisonment *HRW Documents on Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2000, August 10). Egypt: Academics released on bail. *HRW World Report 2000: Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2001). Academic freedom from *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.hrw.org/advocacy/academic/afp7.htm>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2001). *Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2001, May 10). Ethiopia: Government attacks universities, civil society. *HRW World Report 2001: Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2001, May 19). Ethiopia: Targeting human rights defenders *HRW World Report 2001: Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2002a). Academic freedom from *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.hrw.org/advocacy/academicfreedom.htm>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2002b). The State of Egypt vs. free expression: The Ibn Khaldun trial. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2002, January 1). 'Politically Motivated' verdict overturned in Egypt. *HRW Documents on Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

- Human Rights Watch. (2002, January 14). Egypt: Ibn Khaldun verdict meant to silence criticism. *HRW Documents on Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2002, May 22). Ethiopia: Halt crackdown on Oromo students. *HRW Documents on Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2003). *Lessons in Repression: Violations of Academic Freedom in Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2003, January 24). Ethiopia's educated suffer government repression. *HRW Documents on Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2003, June 11). Ethiopia: Police firing on unarmed protesters. *HRW Documents on Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Ignatieff, M. (2001, November 22). The Golden Section: Terror, rights and treason. *Index on Censorship*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://www.indenxonline.org/news/202\\_20020426\\_ignatieff.shtml](http://www.indenxonline.org/news/202_20020426_ignatieff.shtml).
- Iweriebor, I. (1990). Restriction to Research on Gender Issues in Africa with Particular Reference to Nigeria. Paper Presented at the Symposium on Academic Freedom, Research and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual in Africa, Kampala, Uganda, November 26–29.
- Jason, P. (1998, April). Secret Cults Terrorise Nigerian Universities. *New Africa*.
- Jega, A. (1996). Unions and Conflict Management in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 61–63.
- Johnson, V. (2003, April 11). When we hinder foreign students and scholars, we endanger our national security. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B7–B9.
- Kasente, D. (2002). Institutionalizing gender equality in African Universities: Case of women's and gender studies at Makerere University. *Feminist Africa*, 1, pp. 91–99.
- Keen, D. (2000). Organized chaos: Not the new world we ordered. In P. O'Meara, H. D. Mehlinger, & M. Krain (Eds.), *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century* (pp. 140–148). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kellogg, A.P. (2001, August 6). Leading medical journals hope to curb drug companies' publishing influence. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Kirkaldy, A. (1996). History teaching in rural areas: The University of Venda. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 17–23.
- Ki-Zerbo, J. (1994). The need for creative organizational approaches. In M. Diouf & M. Mamdani (Eds.), *Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 26–38). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Knightley, P. (2002, February 15). Losing friends & influencing people. *Index on Censorship*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://www.indenxonline.org/news/102\\_20020215\\_knightly.shtml](http://www.indenxonline.org/news/102_20020215_knightly.shtml).
- Komolafe, F. (2003, March 20). Ending the strike: ASUU, Govt. Restate stand at Abuja talks. *Vanguard*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200303200195.html>.
- Kwesiga, J.C. (2002). *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

- Lefort, R. (2001, November). Barbed wire in the research field. *The UNESCO Courier*, 24–25.
- Mafeje, A. (1994). Beyond academic freedom: The struggle for authenticity in African social science discourse. In M. Diouf, & M. Mamdani (Eds.), *Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 59–71). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Makamure, A. (2002, May 21). Gweru University Students Suspended. *The Daily News* (Harare). Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200205210209.html>.
- Mama, A. (2002). Editorial. *Feminist Africa*, 1, 1–8.
- Mathieu, J. (1996). Reflections on two African universities. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 24–28.
- Mavhunga, C. (2003, March 14). UZ closed indefinitely. *The Daily News* (Harare). Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://www.dailynews.co.zw/daily/2003/March/March14/11065.html>.
- Mazrui A.A. & Mazrui, A.M. (1998). *The Tower of Babel. Language and governance in the African experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2001a). At the edge of the world: Boundaries, territoriality, and sovereignty in Africa. In A. Appadurai, (Ed.), *Globalization*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2001b). *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mbilinyi, M. & Mbughuni, P. (Eds.). (1991). *Education in Tanzania with a Gender Perspective*. Report prepared for SIDA, Dar es Salaam.
- Mbow, Pena. (2000). Academic freedom and the gender issue: A report from Senegal. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 64–77). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- McMurtrie, Beth. (2002, May 24). Do professors lose academic freedom by signing statements of faith? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A12. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable\\_verity.cgi](http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable_verity.cgi).
- Meena, R. (2001). Women's participation in higher levels of learning in Africa: interventions to promote gender equity. Paper presented at the Carter Lectures 2001, "Governance and Higher Education," University of Florida, Gainesville, 22–25 March.
- Menand, L. (1993, May-June). The future of academic freedom. *Academe* 79(3), 11–17.
- Metzger, W.P. (1993). Professional and legal limits to academic freedom. *Journal of College and University Law*, 20(1), 1–14.
- Mkandawire, T. (1996). Social sciences in Africa: Breaking local barriers and negotiating international presence. The Abiola Lecture, 39th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, San Francisco, November 23–26.
- Mkandawire, T. (2003). Economy: Post-independence. In P.T. Zezeza & D. Eyoh (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century African History* (pp. 168–174). London and New York: Routledge.

- Monastersky, R. (2003, April 11). A man who thinks otherwise. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A 56.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1994). *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mustapha, A.R. (1996). The state of academic freedom in Nigeria. In CODESRIA. *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995* (pp. 103–120). Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Mutunga, W. & Kiai, M. (1996). The state of academic freedom in Kenya. In CODESRIA, *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995* (pp. 81–99). Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Mwinzi, D. (2002). The impact of cost-sharing policy on the living conditions of students in Kenyan in public universities: The case of Nairobi and Moi Universities. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Nafukho, F.M. (2002). The market model of financing state universities in Africa: Some innovative lessons from Kenya. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Nelson, C.M. (1996). PAT 101: Principles of patronage. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 45–51.
- Network for Education and Academic Rights. (2003a). Zimbabwean lecturers still on strike. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://nearinternational.org/alerts/71ae549949bb9451be3e92>.
- Network for Education and Academic Rights. (2003d). Zimbabwean students petition the UN. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://nearinternational.org/alerts/802fb079b8f387d7ba38b9>.
- Network for Education and Academic Rights. (2003c). Zimbabwean union leader injured while in custody. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://nearinternational.org/alerts/fb88502cdb2b86bef4f272a>.
- Network for Education and Academic Rights. (2003b). ZINASU Congress disrupted. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://nearinternational.org/alerts/d31dd61a867781db8d6736>.
- Nimar, R. (2002, October 24). Varsities in dire need of internal democracy. *The Nation*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200210240374.html>.
- Nyaigotti-Chacha, C. (2002). Public universities, private funding: The challenges in East Africa. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. & Jua, B.N. (2002). Introduction to a Special Issue: African Universities in Crisis and the Promotion of a Democratic Culture: The Political Economy of Violence in African Educational Systems. *African Studies Review*, Vol. 45(2):1-26.

- Obasi, I.N. & Eboh, E.C. (2002). The cost sharing dilemma in Nigerian Universities: empirical lessons for policy adjustment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Odejide, A. (2002). The Women’s Research and Documentation Center, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. *Feminist Africa*, 1, 100–107.
- Okeke, P. (2002). Higher education for Africa’s women: Partners with or cheerleaders for Men. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Oketch, M. & Amutabi, M. (2002). Privatization of higher education in Kenya: Problems and prospects. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Onyango, D. (2003, January 19). Will the new dawn woo back refugees abroad? *The Nation*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200301190050.html>.
- Otunga, R. & Ojwang, M. (2002). Women and leadership positions in higher education: A study of Kenyan universities. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Ouendji, N.N. (2000). Academic freedom and the position of women in Cameroon. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 128–154). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Oula, Q.O. (2002). Academic’s dilemma under neo-liberal education reforms: A review of Makerere University, Uganda. Paper Presented at the International Symposium “African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, The. (2003a). *Makerere University in Transition, 1993–2000: Opportunities and Challenges*. New York: The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa.
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, The. (2003b). *Higher Education in Tanzania: A Case Study*. New York: The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa.
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, The. (2003c). *Higher Education in Mozambique: A Case Study*. New York: The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa.
- Peil, M. (1996). Ghana’s universities and their government: An ambiguous relationship. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 24(1), 52–56.
- Pereira, C. (2002). Between knowing and imagining—what space for feminism in scholarship on Africa? *Feminist Africa*, 1, 9–33.
- Pereira, C. (Forthcoming). *Structured Inequalities: A Gender Analysis of the Nigerian University System*.
- Perley, J.E. (1995, January-February). Tenure, academic freedom, and governance. *Academe*, 81(1), 43–47.
- Phiri, I.A. (1994). Academic freedom and a gender balanced curriculum at Chancellor College. Paper Presented at a conference on academic freedom held at Mlangeni Holiday Resort, Malawi, October 17–20.

- Phiri, I.A. (2000). Gender and academic freedom in Malawi. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 47–63). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Power, B.M. (1997, June 20) The danger inherent in abusing academic freedom. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable\\_verity.cgi](http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable_verity.cgi).
- Ramani, K. (2003, January 27). Free at last for dons, students in varsities. *The East African Standard*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200301270830.html>.
- Rorty, R. (1994, November-December). Does academic freedom have philosophical presuppositions? *Academe*, 80(6), 52–63.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sall, E. (Ed.). (2000). *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Sall, E. Academic freedom and the African community of scholars: The challenges. News from the Nordic Africa Institute. Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.nai.uu.se/newsfrommai/arkiv/2001/salleng.html>.
- Sall, E. (2001, November). African scholars: Too poor to be free. *The UNESCO Courier*, 26–27.
- Sall, E. (2000). Introduction: Engendering academic freedom in Africa. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. ix–xvii). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Sangster, J. & Zeleza P. T. (1994). Academic freedom in context. *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 29(1), 39–144.
- Schneider, A. (1999, December 10). To many adjunct professors, academic freedom is a myth. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A19. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: [http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable\\_verity.cgi](http://chronicle.com/cgi2-bin/printable_verity.cgi).
- Sharawy, H. (2000). Social dimensions of intellectual and academic freedom in Egypt. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 79–104). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Singh, M.. (2001, November). Re-inserting the ‘Public Good’ into higher education transformation. *SRHE International News*, 46, 24–27.
- Siringi, S. (2003, March 13). Saitoti warns students on riots. *The Nation*. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/2003031303130195.html>.
- Ssebuwufu, P.J.M. (2001). Reforming higher education: Change and innovation in finance and governance. Paper presented at the Carter Lectures 2001, “Governance and Higher Education,” University of Florida, Gainesville, 22–25 March.
- Standler, R.B.(2000). Academic freedom in the USA. Retrieved on April 7, 2003 from: <http://www.rbs2.com/afree/htm>.
- Stange, M.Z. (2003, April 11). Homeland security and the lessons of Waco. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B10–B11.

- Tamale, S. & Oloka-Onyango, J. (2000). 'Bitches' in the academy: Gender and academic freedom in Africa. In E. Sall (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, pp. 1–23.
- Tempo* (Lagos). (1999, July 21). Editorial, save universities from cults and dictators.
- Thaver, B. (2002). Private higher education in Kenya: Six country case studies. Paper Presented at the International Symposium "African Universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century".
- Tierney, W.G. (1993, Summer). Academic freedom and the parameters of knowledge. *Harvard Educational Review*, 63(2), 143–160.
- Times Higher Education Supplement*. (2002, March 1). Students battle on for basic rights. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://www.nearinternational.org/alerts/5d9d41a74445aa291a94cb>.
- Times Higher Education Supplement*. (2002, March 29). Mugabe continues to target campuses. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://www.nearinternational.org/alerts/42f36ba5bbb9e7e1842b8c7>.
- Times Higher Education Supplement*. (2002, April 5). Madhuku continues to challenge Mugabe. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://www.nearinternational.org/alerts/d20468972e87ca43397795>.
- Trachtenberg, S.J. (1996, January-February). What strategy should we now adopt to protect academic freedom? *Academe*, 82(1), 23–25.
- Turk, J.L. (2001, November). Anatomy of a corporate takeover. *The UNESCO Courier*, 18–20.
- UNDP. 2000. *Human Development Report 2000*. New York: UNDP.
- UNESCO. (1998). *World Conference on Higher Education. Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action. Vol. IV. Autonomy, Social Responsibility and Academic Freedom*. ED.99/HEP/WCHE/Vol.IV-12. Paris: UNESCO.
- Vanguard* (Lagos). (2003c, March 27). ASUU will resist interference in varsities' affairs—Fashina. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200303270605.html>.
- Vanguard* (Lagos). (2003a, March 27). Autonomy bill is for law, order in varsities—Borisade. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200303270590.html>.
- Vanguard* (Lagos). (2003b, March 27). Editorial: Unending crisis over varsity autonomy. Retrieved on April 11, 2003 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200303270610.html>.
- Wise, Christopher. (1998). Chronicle of a student strike in Africa: The case of Burkina Faso, 1996–1997. *African Studies Review*, 41(2), 19–36.
- World Bank & UNESCO. (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries. Peril and Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Yahya-Othman, Saida. (2000). Tanzania: Engendering academic freedom. In Ebrima Sall, (Ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa* (pp. 24–46). Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.



- Zezeza, Paul Tiyambe & Romanus Ejiga. (2003). Education: post-independence. In Paul Tiyambe Zezeza & Dickson Eyoh, (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century African History*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 180–186.
- Zezeza, Paul Tiyambe. (1997). *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*. Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
- Zezeza, Paul Tiyambe. (2003). *Rethinking Africa's Globalization*. Volume 1: The Intellectual Challenges. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Zia-Zarifi, Sam. (2001, November). In the line of fire. *The UNESCO Courier*, 30–31.
- Zimbabwe Independent* (Harare). (1998, September 25). Battle lines drawn at UZ staff defy changes. Retrieved at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/199809250152.html>.
- Zimbabwe Standard* (Harare). (2000, July 18). Hill asked to remove ban. Retrieved at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200007180639.html>.
- Zimbabwe Standard* (Harare). (1999, June 20). Tribalism rife at UZ, says report. Retrieved at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/199906200062.html>.

---

## Information and Communication Technologies in Higher Education in Africa: Initiatives and Challenges

Lishan Adam<sup>1</sup>

---

### Abstract

African higher education institutions are at a stage where they are striving to improve their information and communication technologies (ICTs) infrastructure, content, and skills; making resources available to meet the growing needs of students and faculty; and responding to the pressure for effectiveness. They are also confronted with a dilemma of turning ongoing ICTs initiatives into opportunities and understanding what ICTs mean to the transformation of higher education in general and to research, teaching, and learning in particular. This paper examines the increasing role of ICTs in African higher education, ongoing initiatives, progresses made, and the dilemmas and challenges.

### Résumé

En Afrique, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur s'évertuent à améliorer leurs technologies d'information et de communication (TICs) en termes d'infrastructure, de contenu et de capacité. Ils fournissent également des efforts énormes pour la mobilisation des ressources afin de répondre aux besoins croissants des étudiants et des facultés. Dans le même sens, ces établissements travaillent à se hisser à la hauteur de la pression des revendications avec efficacité. Mais ils restent confrontés au dilemme suivant: comment transformer tout ce qui est offert par les TICs en opportunités? Le rôle des TICs dans la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur en général, de la recherche, de l'éducation et de l'apprentissage en particulier. Cette contribution examine la place grandissante qu'occupent les TICs dans l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique, surtout en ce qui concerne les initiatives en cours, les progrès réalisés, les dilemmes et les défis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Information Science and Centre for Knowledge Dynamics and Decision Making, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

## Introduction

Higher education institutions have been undergoing transformations in response to a wave of education sector reforms and the promise of ICTs<sup>2</sup> in teaching, research, and learning. Recent increases in the number of students entering colleges, matched by declines in the number of qualified teachers, the mounting demand for accountability, and apprehensions about the social and economic roles of higher education, have compelled academic institutions to work towards “successful, self-sustaining client oriented providers of education in a rapidly changing borderless education world” (Till, 2003). The fast growth and convergence of ICTs have also forced academic institutions to react to the new way of knowledge creation, management, and distribution. Yet, African higher education institutions have remained very much behind other regions in embracing sector reforms and ICTs. They have also lacked research on what ICTs mean to the reform process, their students, and teachers and to their evolving organizational structures.

In the past, there was not much of a connection between the provision of ICTs and the higher education reform process in Africa. ICTs were isolated from the reform process, often added on as extras by a few technology-oriented departments like electrical engineering and computer science or by technology-savvy individuals. The latest reform process, which began around the mid 1990s, proceeded without changes to academic work practices or deliberations on ICTs. Most recently, it became apparent that higher education reform could not take place without paying attention to ICTs, particularly to applications in education management and administration and access to knowledge in support of teaching, research, and lifelong learning.

Progress on the adoption of ICTs in Africa has remained uneven. While some universities and colleges that had the funds for ICTs have embraced them enthusiastically by creating their corporate IT departments, others who lacked the resources have adopted a piecemeal add-on approach. ICTs in most universities in Africa have remained clutters of computers and networks that have either worked badly or are islands of low bandwidth connections with frequent breakdowns. Although universities in Algeria, Botswana, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe<sup>3</sup> have made some

---

2 Information and Communication Technologies in this paper means tools for communication and access to information that seamlessly integrate to open Internet standard.

3 A list of online universities in Africa provides a fair picture of ICT situation in academic institutions is available at: <http://www.chem.ru.ac.za/afuniv.html>

progress in applying ICTs, their venture to effective use of ICTs in higher education has proved rather complex.

One symptom of this intricacy is the quality and speed of connectivity available to universities throughout the region. The underlying infrastructure is adequate anywhere in Africa, while the low level of awareness and commitment by higher education administrators is discouraging. With few exceptions, universities have been unable to develop and implement institutional ICTs strategies that integrate a host of parallel ICTs development programs, such as advanced research in networking, computer science, community applications, and programs that promote technology-savvy intellectual capital. Economic factors ranging from the lack of capacity to pay for costly infrastructure to sustaining computer networks introduced through donor funding weighed on the universities as their budgets continued to get slashed.

Nevertheless, significant commitments and promises for ICTs uptake in Africa have been registered recently, mainly driven by the increased sophistication and cost reduction of ICTs tools, the availability of open source software, and the resurgence of international and national support for universities. This paper examines the increasing role of ICTs in African higher education, as well as ongoing initiatives, progress made, and some of the challenges on the horizon for ICTs in African higher education.

### **Context of ICTs Diffusion in African Higher Education**

The recognition of the evident link between the rates of participation in higher education and economic growth (Dollar & Collier, 2002); the ongoing search for solutions to challenges of increasing number of students; and other chronic problems such as brain drain, frequent labor strife, campus closures, and declining educational quality have prompted significant interest in higher education reforms in Africa. Another significant challenge to higher education has come from the development and convergence of ICTs over the past decade. ICTs not only increased opportunities for the rapid information exchange that facilitates teaching, research, and lifelong learning, but they also led to the globalization of higher education. In most education circles, ICTs are regarded as a solution for the problem of having to do more with less, providing access to increasingly diverse demography of students and faculty and improving both the quality and quantity of educational content. Students and faculty are not only expected to participate in the conventional “chalk ‘n talk” teaching and learning process but are also required to be part of the virtual knowledge enterprise. The creation of new types of education providers through ICTs has also begun to challenge traditional models that were adopted and put into practice throughout the world.

Despite these promises, enormous benefits, and real progress, ICTs applications in African higher education have been and remain far from satisfactory. For some time, policymakers were not interested in the universities in the region because higher education was considered to be something that benefits only the individual elite, rather than all of society. Investments in a national system of innovation were diminished on the advice of the World Bank that countries reduce their spending, privatize their industries and services, de-value their currencies, and open their markets to foreign investments. Most countries transferred resources from universities to spend on their elementary and secondary schools, which were regarded as having a higher social return. In fact, in the 1980s and 1990s, when international financial institutions aggressively promoted structural adjustment programs that slashed most funding for public higher education, universities suffered to the extent that, for example, they cut journal subscriptions altogether. (The symptom of this particular void is evident when one visits the serial departments of most African libraries.) Although this undervaluing of higher education has begun to change, the low status accorded to higher education by governments and multilateral and bilateral agencies over the past twenty to thirty years has greatly influenced the level of ICTs diffusion in African higher education institutions.

The anxiety about the low status of ICTs in African higher education was widespread around the end of the millennium. The Association of African Universities (AAU), with over 100 universities and colleges as its members, and the Inter-University Council for East Africa were among those who voiced their concerns about the grave ICTs situation at the end of the last century. During its 10<sup>th</sup> General Conference, AAU emphasized the need for connecting all its member universities to enable them to track students, faculty, and budgets; facilitate teaching and learning in class rooms; and enhance communication and networking of academics to participate in global research networks (AAU, 2001). AAU observed that ICTs could expose learners and faculty to international contexts and offer opportunities for making African research results available to a global audience.

This regional call was not translated into a cohesive strategic action that improved ICTs in higher education institutions, however. In most universities, ICTs are just extras that are not integrated into the education system. Why did the international community that was fascinated by ICTs impact on communities in the mid 1990s choose not to invest in African universities? Why did governments choose not to promote ICTs in higher education as a basic element of the reform process? Will African universities be part of the global knowledge discourse, or are they going to be overwhelmed by the growing internationalization of trade in education services?

Obviously, African universities are losers in the knowledge revolution. First and foremost, they require a higher level of knowledge and skills and enormous amounts of resources just to participate in the knowledge society discourse. Although African universities have much to contribute, the continuation of northern domination over the flow of knowledge from “center” universities in the north to “periphery” institutions in the south will not go away. Some of the global knowledge discourse tends to perpetuate this trend.

In the developed world, governments have played a key role in creating conducive environments for the flow of knowledge; in sharp contrast, most African governments put up constraining barriers, making it harder for ICTs and knowledge diffusion. Most of the progress toward ICTs use in higher education came from individual faculty efforts and through support from foundations like the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the French Cooperation. Although these were substantive in many ways, they were unable to bring a cohesive development of knowledge institutions across the region.

On the other hand, the promise of ICTs for flexible learning in initial and continuing education has increased donor interest in the adoption of ICTs in Africa. This interest gained some momentum in the late 1990s, with the introduction of the African Virtual University (AVU) by the World Bank, to deliver higher education based on materials and faculty from “center” universities in the north to “peripheral” African universities. AVU invested a considerable amount of resources in seventeen African countries during its first five years.

Despite the failure of its technology-driven, uni-directional flow of content to create the confidence, community, content, and care needed to advance distance learning in Africa, the AVU scheme was useful in increasing awareness of the use of ICTs in continuing education. The scheme also showed that online learning is “about Africa’s own initiative and more of imaginative improvisation based on best practices elsewhere” (Uys et al., 2003). Distance learning institutions like the Open University of Tanzania; business schools in South Africa and Ethiopia; the University of South Africa, Pretoria, Free State, Potchefstroom, and Stellenbosch; and others in Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda have begun experimenting with various ICTs applications to provide access to their tutors and students.

On the whole, differences in donor interventions, the level of economic development, and the status of infrastructure led to different levels of adoption of ICTs by higher education institutions across Africa. While some institutions have moved a step further in integrating ICTs in teaching and research and experimenting with the use of course management software such as Black Board and WebCT, the majority of institutions linger around emerging stages of ICTs

usage, where administrators and faculty members are just beginning to explore the possibilities of ICTs in educational management, teaching, and research (Buettner et al., 2000). A few exceptions, like the University of Western Cape in South Africa, have developed exemplary open source applications like the Knowledge Environment for Web-based Learning (KWEL)<sup>4</sup> now being used by many universities in the region to manage online courses. Different levels of social and other constraints affect the contexts of ICTs in higher education in Africa, and these differences vary from one country to another or from one institution to the next.

### ***Constraints to ICTs Diffusion in Higher Education in Africa***

Comprehensive, up-to-date information on the ICTs status in African universities is not readily available, although many universities have now invested in computers and networks. The speed with which ICTs change at institutional and national levels and a lack of incentives for gathering data are two of the barriers to gathering information on ICTs in higher education. Attempts by organizations like the Association of African Universities to collect such data have proven complex. Not only did gathering ICTs data through lengthy questionnaires prove inadequate, but the results were unusable since the data was out of date by the time the completed questionnaires had arrived.

The majority of higher education institutions in Africa have neither well-established ICTs strategies nor management information systems that provide consistent figures on their ICTs situation. Different departments and units often receive ICTs equipment through donations and direct purchase without central coordination. In effect, coordinating and integrating parallel ICTs activities into a cohesive campus-wide program is one of the most difficult tasks facing corporate ICTs units in Africa. Even if the information were available, the lack of historical or baseline data means that it would be difficult to establish with any reliability how ICTs were advancing from a lower base over the years. Moreover, a recent increase in the number of technology-savvy private universities in Africa in the delivery of ICTs-led higher education makes generalization across institutions rather difficult.

It is possible to extrapolate an overall perspective on the situation of every African country from the general ICTs trends at the national level, however, using information on web presence. The status of ICTs in African higher education mirrors the overall e-readiness of their respective countries. Qualitative analysis of universities' web presence could provide a glimpse of the extent to which higher education institutions value knowledge sharing.

---

4 <http://kwel.uwc.ac.za/>

**Table 1:** African Countries Sorted by Their ICTs Status in 2002

Country	Number of Telephone	Penetration	Mobiles	Penetration	Internet	Penetration	Personal Computer	Penetration	Bandwidth	Bits/capita	Index
Seychelles	65,500	79.97	44,100	53.87	262	31.99	12,000	14.65	3	6.21	197.67
Mauritius	677,200	55.95	350,000	28.91	3,462	28.6	130,000	10.83	35	3.41	142.57
South Africa	16,976,000	37.75	12,081,000	26.58	238,462	53.51	3,300,000	7.26	900	9.1	141.02
São Tomé & Príncipe	5,400	3.63	-	3.63	927	61.8	-	-	0.378	8.67	83.73
Botswana	458,600	27.28	415,000	24.13	1,273	7.57	65,000	3.87	4.5	8.38	74.2
Gabon	295,300	23.4	258,100	20.54	79	0.61	15,000	1.19	5	13	60.66
Morocco	7,326,100	24.71	6,198,700	20.91	2,680	0.09	400,000	1.37	80	6.74	55.51
Cape Verde	113,100	25.77	42,900	9.78	48	1.09	35,000	7.97	2.45	7.04	55.29
Namibia	217,400	11.9	150,000	8	4,632	25.36	100,000	5.47	15	0.76	53.95
Tunisia	1,445,400	14.9	389,200	4.01	341	0.35	255,000	2.63	70	7.73	34.77
Egypt	9,482,200	14.69	4,412,000	6.72	3,061	0.47	1,000,000	1.55	100	8.29	32.65
Swaziland	98,100	9.5	63,000	6.1	1,142	11.2	-	-	20	0.95	29.69
Nigeria	2,335,100	1.94	1,633,100	1.36	1,030	0.09	800,000	0.68	60	20.55	24.79
Zimbabwe	640,900	5.51	353,000	3.03	3,494	3.04	600,000	5.16	25	0.81	21.85
Mayotte	10,000	6.98	21,700	14.66	-	-	-	-	-	-	21.64
Mauritania	277,700	10.35	245,700	9.16	79	0.29	27,000	1.03	0.96	0.28	21.48
Gambia	90,100	6.74	55,100	4.12	568	4.14	17,000	1.27	3	1.53	19.14
Côte d'Ivoire	1,363,200	8.27	1,027,100	6.23	4,397	2.67	118,000	0.72	13	0.4	18.83
Senegal	778,000	7.94	553,400	5.65	761	0.78	200,000	2.04	15	0.01	17.49



**Table 1 (Continued): African Countries Sorted by Their ICTs Status in 2002**

Country	Number of Telephone	Penetration	Mobiles	Penetration	Internet	Penetration	Personal Computer	Penetration	Bandwidth	Bits/ capita	Index
Djibouti	25,100	3.83	15,000	2.29	498	7.59	100,000	1.52	0.85	0.04	15.95
Congo	243,800	7.41	221,800	6.74	36	0.11	12,000	0.39	0.2	0.04	14.72
Libya	660,000	11.8	50,000	0.9	70	0.13	-	-	4	1.08	14.27
Togo	168,400	3.62	120,000	2.58	80	0.17	150,000	3.2	1.7	0.33	14.17
Equat. Guinea	35,800	7.34	27,000	5.53	3	0.06	4,000	0.72	0.2	0.14	14.13
Kenya	1,653,300	5.18	148,300	4.15	2,963	0.93	175,000	0.56	35	0.89	13.31
Mozambique	242,100	10.35	152,700	0.86	16	0.01	70,000	0.4	6	1.17	12.96
Algeria	1,980,000	6.42	300,000	0.96	821	0.26	220,000	0.71	75	2.67	12.62
Lesotho	126,000	5.82	92,000	4.25	60	0.28	-	-	0.75	0.36	10.94
Cameroon	411,400	2.67	563,000	3.57	439	0.28	60,000	0.39	7	0.59	7.79
Benin	184,000	2.86	125,000	1.94	574	0.87	11,000	0.17	4.5	0.33	6.55
Zambia	227,600	2.13	139,100	1.3	1,095	1.03	80,000	0.75	7	0.48	6.19
Uganda	448,300	1.81	393,300	1.59	2,242	0.91	70,000	0.29	10	0.41	5.26
Sudan	826,600	2.65	190,800	0.59	-	-	300,000	0.92	9	0.31	4.73
Tanzania	575,400	1.71	427,000	1.27	1,478	0.44	120,000	0.36	30	0.33	4.41
Rwanda	86,500	1.09	90,000	1.1	1,233	1.51	-	-	2.7	0.07	4.02
Ghana	435,900	2.08	193,800	0.93	313	0.14	70,000	0.33	15	0.2	3.87
Eritrea	35,900	0.9	-	-	859	2.16	10,000	0.25	2.5	0.13	3.66
Angola	215,000	1.54	130,000	0.93	8	0.01	27,000	0.19	16	0.52	3.48
Madagascar	205,900	1.33	147,500	0.95	234	0.15	40,000	0.26	10	0.17	3.09

**Table 1 (Continued): African Countries Sorted by Their ICTs Status in 2002**

Country	Number of Telephone	Penetration	Mobiles	Penetration	Internet	Penetration	Personal Computer	Penetration	Bandwidth	Bits/ capita	Index
Malawi	159,100	1.52	86,000	0.82	22	0.02	13,000	0.13	3.5	0.2	2.95
Guinea	81,200	1.07	55,700	0.73	251	0.33	32,000	0.42	4	0.19	2.94
Comoros	10,300	1.35	-	-	11	0.15	4,000	0.55	0.49	0.18	2.65
Burkina Faso	132,600	1.14	75,000	0.64	409	0.34	17,000	0.15	20	0.17	2.6
Mali	95,200	0.92	45,300	0.44	158	0.15	14,000	0.13	6	0.44	2.37
Sierra Leone	49,600	1.01	26,900	0.55	277	0.56	-	-	1	0.08	2.34
D.R. Congo	170,000	0.32	150,000	0.29	134	0.03	-	-	4.5	1.6	2.25
Guinea-Bissau	12,000	0.98	-	-	20	0.16	-	-	0.25	0.52	1.98
Burundi	50,700	0.74	30,700	0.45	3	0.01	-	-	0.3	0.07	1.36
CAR*	19,900	0.53	11,000	0.29	6	0.02	7,000	0.19	0.7	0.12	1.23
Chad	33,000	0.43	34,200	0.43	11	0.01	12,000	0.16	0.9	0.02	1.1
Ethiopia	418,600	0.62	50,400	0.07	43	0.01	100,000	0.15	6.5	0.06	0.98
Niger	23,800	0.21	2,100	0.02	119	0.1	6,000	0.05	2	0.2	0.69
Africa Total	52,738,800	6.6	33,563,500	4.19	281,184	4.95	8,708,000	1.23	1,688	2.31	20.29

Source: International Telecommunications Union.

\*Central African Republic

Without over-generalization, it is safe to say that countries that enjoyed high bandwidth and a high-level of Internet penetration had significant ICTs access in their higher education. A quick picture of the higher education use of ICTs can be obtained from basic indicators such as Internet hosts, the amount of bandwidth, penetration of telephones, mobile phones, and computers. Table 1 shows basic ICTs statistics for African countries based on ITU data in 2002 sorted by the sum of all the indicators. Using the sum of the indicators and online content it was possible to recognize that the top 30 countries have well-connected universities, in relative terms and in comparison to the lower 20 countries.

The data above and an analysis of African higher education online content show that countries like South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, Senegal, Namibia, Morocco, Mauritius, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have achieved increased ICTs penetration as well as a relatively advanced use of ICTs in their higher education sectors. The rate of growth in the number of computers was also high in these countries thanks to the availability of cheap clones and a vibrant local private sector. South Africa, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritius have vibrant ICTs private sectors that rely heavily on innovations in the universities.

**Table 2:** Web Presence Comparisons among Universities in Africa

Countries with better university web presence	Countries with lower university web presence
Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, DR Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Mali, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania

Based on: A list of online universities in Africa <http://www.chem.ru.ac.za/afuniv.html>

The data also indicates that there is a great deal of disparity between African countries. South Africa accounts for about 50% of Internet users. Egypt and South Africa account for about 50% of personal computers in the region. The gap between the highest and lowest country is astronomical. This suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach or translating models designed for the developed world to Africa or from one country to the other will face difficulties.

Countries at the bottom of the list, like Niger, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and Malawi are significantly behind the rest of the region in terms of ICTs investments and development. These countries face infrastructural limitations and operational challenges like low quality human resources, inadequate political will, and limited financial resources and capacity to implement university-based ICTs project effectively. They lack necessary supportive infrastructure basics, such as working phone lines, a reliable power supply, and meaningful content. National policies do not adequately support the growth of ICTs in education in most of these countries, as well.

On the whole, there are broad categories of constraints that affect all higher education institutions in the African countries listed above. Lack of adequate bandwidth is at the top of the lists of ICTs constraints for almost all African universities. Obtaining high bandwidth circuits is a challenge, due to high tariffs on international connections. Even in countries like South Africa and Egypt, which have relatively high ICTs capacities internet bandwidth in academic institutions is very congested. In addition, academic institutions face financial constraints on sustaining and upgrading ICTs. Creating an interactive e-learning content that involves students and faculty in generation and use is a significant bottleneck, as well. Technical skills are generally scarce with the exodus of highly skilled people from public and academic sectors to the private sector or abroad, in search of better jobs. Universities also face cultural problems such as the unwillingness of faculty to adapt to the changing circumstances in networked environments. The following section discusses four outstanding constraints facing African higher education institutions in some detail.

### **Bandwidth Constraints**

Bandwidth is the scarcest ICTs resource in African universities mainly due to prohibitions on academic institutions' accessing international circuits and to high licensing fees for connecting to advanced circuits or for obtaining authorization. Most countries do not have adequate international bandwidth. A survey by Jensen (2002) shows that almost 60% of African countries have bandwidth that is less than that of a typical institution in the developed world. Only six African countries have a reasonable outgoing bandwidth. Table 3 shows distribution of outgoing bandwidth in Africa.

As a result of insufficient bandwidth, a typical university of 6,000 students and 300 staff members is often limited to a 128 Kbps connection. Studies on how such a low bandwidth is actually used are absent in African higher education, but experience elsewhere shows that low levels of access could be far more frustrating than having no bandwidth. An exasperating information search on the net can create more damage to academic enterprise than hunting for a

book in a library or elsewhere. Experience also shows that whatever bandwidth is available to academic institutions it is often quickly filled up, suggesting a need for investigation into how available bandwidth is actually used in African universities. Such information would allow institutions to develop strategies for conserving their available bandwidth by looking at options like hosting local caches, implementing good traffic management techniques such as dynamically assigning existing bandwidth to web and email traffic, and creating digital libraries. More bandwidth cannot resolve the current access problem by itself.

A serious barrier to acquiring bandwidth in Africa is its high cost. A survey carried out by Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (2002)—an initiative by Ford, MacArthur, and Rockefeller Foundations and Carnegie Corporation of New York—by shows that a typical 128 Kbps uplink and 512 kbps downlink cost between US\$4,500 to \$12,000 per month, ten times the cost of similar capacity in the developed world.<sup>5</sup> Ideally, mass deployment of Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) technology could bring the equipment cost down to US\$2,000 and internet bandwidth at US\$200/month or less. The license fee then becomes the largest cost of accessing the Internet unless African regulators and policy makers adopt enabling policies that encourage universal access.

Technically, the necessary bandwidth is already accessible through the SAT/WAF3<sup>6</sup> submarine cable now connecting 11 countries in west and southern Africa and may soon be available from foot prints of low cost Satellite technologies that promise to cut costs by 1,000% and guarantee access to landlocked and remote areas. Recent discussions about extending submarine fiber cable to east Africa and an ongoing initiative by the Southern African power company ESKOM to carry digital fiber over power lines also promise region-wide bandwidth availability for higher education needs in medium terms.

Clearly, African policies and regulatory frameworks make up the major bottleneck in the availability of adequate bandwidth. Current policies not only restrict access to satellite technologies but also impose higher license charges on installation of networks. Insufficient private sector investments in the telecommunications infrastructure and the lack of competition has led to arbitrary pricing-setting that has set the cost of ICTs beyond the reach of most universities.

---

5 Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, *ICT for Teaching, Learning and Research*, Proceedings of a Workshop for African Universities, Addis Ababa, 29 July–1 August 2003.

6 Undersea communications cable running from Portugal through to South Africa connecting a number of countries in western and southern Africa.

**Table 3:** African Outgoing Bandwidth

Countries	Bandwidth Mbits/sec	%
Egypt, South Africa, Morocco	100–500	6
Algeria, Senegal, Tunisia	50–100	6
Botswana, Gabon, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe	10–50	13
Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia	5–10	15
Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, DR Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, São Tomé & Príncipe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Togo	< 5	60

Source: <http://www.idrc.ca/acacia/divide>, Mike Jensen

African higher education institutions confront additional challenges that need to be addressed concurrently with policy reforms that aim to address access and high costs of bandwidth:

- The majority of universities cannot afford the cost of megabits of connections even if bandwidth is readily available. Higher education cannot afford the current pricing models.
- Most universities do not have plans regarding how to optimize their existing bandwidth and manage the traffic and usage.
- The underlying infrastructure—such as electricity, local loop, and technical skills—are inadequate to support high bandwidth intensive applications.
- There is lack of political will and regional cooperation throughout Africa to benefit from an economy of scale or aggregated bandwidth.
- There is limited knowledge on what types of technology (optical fiber, satellite, etc.) are appropriate for different settings in Africa.

A significant amount of pressure on government is needed to modernize African policy and regulatory environment to facilitate affordable and universal access to the Internet for higher education institutions. At the same time, ana-

lyzing different technical options and strategies for aggregating and optimizing existing bandwidth is important. Similarly, developing the necessary skills for high-bandwidth intensive applications is necessary.

### **E-learning Content**

Introduction of ICTs into higher education is not only about promoting access and communication but is also about stimulating the flow of electronic content (e-content) that promotes teaching and learning, including electronic learning (e-learning). Creating and promoting a content rich e-learning environment that satisfies teaching and research needs is a daunting task even in the developed world. E-content is one of the most overlooked areas in higher education institutions in Africa. Actually, African higher education institutions have double tasks ahead that make their jobs even more difficult. On the one hand, universities need to promote access to globally available and appropriate content; on the other, they have to stimulate locally produced content by faculty and students.

Appropriate and improvised content ranging from learning materials such as textbooks, journals, web pages, video, television, radio, audiotape, and multimedia packages to learning support tools such as study guides, exam sheets, worksheets, laboratory manuals, and field exercises are in short supply in higher education institutions in the region. The dearth of learning materials is particularly evident when one compares African higher education libraries to the developed world. A typical developed country's institutions' libraries subscribe to tens of thousands of journals, while those in Africa can hardly afford more than a hundred. Globally there has been a substantial surge in e-learning materials on the Internet, ranging from course syllabi and e-books to online journals that are freely available. The net has not been fully exploited for assessing and adjusting learning materials to local settings, however, due to problems of the underlying ICTs infrastructure, the lack of information literacy to search and evaluate online information, and the lack of information on various possibilities that are available to developing countries.

Creating local e-learning content has proved more difficult in Africa, partly because the academics in the region are not conversant with courseware tools and digital environment. Most importantly, academics have excessive loads and limited time, skills, and incentives to develop e-learning materials suitable to their local needs. The educational reward system was not designed to encourage faculty and students to own and get involved in e-learning content development and use. Moreover, maintaining an e-learning environment requires consistent improvisation and skills that are not readily available to most of the African universities. It is also a resource intensive enterprise. A typical

US university pays US\$25,000 to develop an online course and a further US\$5,000 a year to maintain it (Nwuke, 2001).

Nevertheless, a number of innovations can be adopted to address the e-content challenge in Africa. Incremental deployment of courseware material, collaborative development of open content, and sharing of courseware materials among group of countries that follow compatible syllabi (Keats, 2002) are some of the possibilities proposed by experts based on experiences around the world. Achieving such a collaborative development environment proved more difficult in practice than in theory, however.

Improving the information literacy of and incentives for faculty could increase the availability of local e-learning content. In the long run, a serious look at e-learning in Africa is essential to understanding the factors that contribute its uptake in different settings, as well as the dilemmas, uncertainties, and implications of e-content to relatively weak educational standards in Africa. Studies on the impact of e-learning and online content to critical thinking, research, and development will be indispensable in the future.

### **Skills and Awareness**

The pervasiveness of the Internet has recently increased the awareness of the significance of ICTs to higher education in Africa. Yet this overall awareness has not been matched by advanced skills that could assist institutions and individuals to choose different technologies, tools, systems, and networks suitable to their particular setting and to develop e-learning content. While ICTs literacy is generally on the rise, skills for the application of ICTs to subject areas in natural sciences, engineering, medicine, social sciences, and art have not been fully developed. In most universities, ICTs in education commonly means teaching learners how to use computers. Information literacy skills to access, navigate, assess, and evaluate information within global networks are not taught in universities and colleges. Academic policy makers also lack overall understanding about how to reorient teaching, learning, and research with the digital domain. This general trend in Africa implies a need for a significant shift in the training of students and faculty on ICTs literacy to promote the ability to access, assess, use, and evaluate information from different sources to solve problems and add value to knowledge.

African universities also face a critical shortage of skilled workers that understand basic and advanced programming to plan, design, and implement distributed information systems and manage large-scale e-learning projects. The high turnover of skilled technical personnel is another problem for universities, which have seen constant deterioration over the years in their ability to pay salaries that are competitive with the private sector. African higher education institutions have



found it difficult to attract technicians to help them expand, migrate, and build campus-wide networks and develop and manage administrative, research, and courseware applications.

Some higher education institutions have tried to work around this problem by launching extensive and ongoing professional development programs for their staffs and exploiting their computer science and electrical/network/computer engineering departments. Corporate computing centers at Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Western Cape in South Africa, the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, the University of Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique, and the University of Chiek Anta Diop in Senegal have been able to garner national and international support that created the necessary incentives for their computer center staff. The majority of universities have relied on training as many student technicians as they can. Experiences from these universities suggest that it is important to share experiences on how to cope with staff shortages and to attract and retain valuable technical personnel.

### **Resource Constraints**

Despite a mainstream claim that investing in ICTs is cost effective, the total cost of ownership of ICTs has remained high for universities. Therefore, higher education's investments in ICTs require long-term planning that should take into account sustainability and the developments that ICT-enhanced education may bring (Sayed, 2003). ICTs costs often include that of computers and peripherals, video equipment, specialized tools like digital microscopes, electrical wiring, internet access, lighting, air-conditioning, space, network equipment, software, manuals, books, videos, audio-tapes, and other supplies. Despite the continuous decline in ICTs prices, the total ownership cost of modern ICTs, including maintenance, upgrading, skills development, etc. remains staggering.

Universities in Africa seldom plan or budget for ICTs, since most of their investments come through donations. Ongoing cuts of government budgets; competition from other equally deserving sectors of the economy, like health and social development; and economic stagnation have all contributed to the limited foresight shown by universities regarding ICTs. Except for the end of the year, when universities have some residual budget funds left over, ICTs do not feature on the list of institutional investment priorities or considerations. On the contrary, during the year, ICTs are often relegated to the bottom of institutions' priorities list when compared with other important items like paying staff salaries or maintaining utilities.

Besides limited interest in ICTs and the lack of centralized financial planning, universities are often unable to coordinate their different departments and faculties that receive equipment through donations or as part of project grants. This "island approach," where equipment is purchased and received by

individual departments without a cohesive institutional ICTs strategy, not only increases competition for scarce donor funding but also limits the value placed on cooperation to share other intangible resources like knowledge. The experience of the Kenya Education Network (Kenet) shows that cooperation that transcends institutional barriers could be effective in cutting costs and increasing the exchange of content between universities, professional training institutes, post-secondary institutions, schools, colleges, research institutes, and libraries. The involvement of parents, families, businesses, industry, government agencies, private foundations, and social, religious, and professional organizations could also be effective in mobilizing ICTs resources for the growing demands of innovation and access.

Overall, and despite the above challenges, African higher education institutions have been actively innovating around harnessing ICTs for administrative, teaching, research, communication, and networking purposes. The last ten years have also seen a considerable amount of interest paid by national and regional institutions in spending on initiatives aimed at improving ICTs in schools and colleges in Africa, as part of the overall information society and digital opportunity discourse. The following section discusses some of these initiatives and their implications to higher education.

### *ICTs Initiatives for Higher Education in Africa*

ICTs initiatives relevant to higher education institutions in Africa can generally be grouped into three broad categories: 1) individual institutions' initiatives aimed at expanding access to ICTs, as part of an institutional or national education network, 2) regional initiatives that cover most countries or universities, and 3) initiatives aimed at increasing the flow of content in higher education.

### **National Initiatives**

Almost all tertiary education institutions in Africa have some form of ICTs activities that fall into two main stages of development:

- 1) The emerging stage, where ICTs are used by staff and selected students for basic chores such as word processing, communications, and access to learning resources on the Internet and CD-ROMs. The majority of institutions in the region fall into this category, although some have been moving forward to integrate ICTs into teaching and learning. This transition was nicely summed up by Musisi and Mwanga in a study entitled "Makarere University in Transition 1993–2000: Opportunities and Challenge."<sup>7</sup>

... As Makarere builds its ICTs infrastructure, users will need training not just in using technology but also in information retrieval skills. A CD-ROM or Internet search can pull up thousands of citations unless the searcher has phrased his/her search question properly. Learning how to evaluate Internet search results is another important skill. The Library needs to begin thinking about subscriptions to materials that are available online. Faculty need to incorporate new information technologies into their teaching techniques: syllabi can be posted, as well as lecture notes and assignments. Students can send in papers and homework and pose questions by e-mail. Teaching staff needs to consider using ICTs to improve the way courses are taught. Planning and exploration should begin now while the infrastructure is being put in place. Adequate resource allocation to ICTs must be an on-going strategy because of the rapidity of technological change...

Musisi and Mwanga, 2001

Other universities and colleges that have developed their strategic plans to move towards the ICTs integration stage include the Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, the University of Dar es Salaam, and the University of Rwanda. These and a couple of others were able to build considerable experiences in campus wide networks and in developing and implementing an ICTs policy at the college level.

- 2) The integration stage, where ICTs are fully incorporated in content and in providing access to coursewares and campus services to staff and students. A few universities at this stage were able to implement an elaborate management information system for managing finances, research outputs, student enrolment, course transfers and online libraries. Academic institutions in Botswana, Egypt, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia have been striving to integrate ICTs fully into their teaching and learning processes. The University of Botswana, for example, has introduced a robust ICTs infrastructure, where every staff member has access to the internet, and faculty and students actively participate in shaping its e-learning platform.

There is a correlation between the level of integration of ICTs in academic institutions and national ICTs policy making. In some countries, like Mozambique, the academic institutions played a key role in setting national ICTs policy. Countries that saw advanced ICTs use in their higher education

---

7 Musisi, Nakanyike and Nansozi Mwanga, 2003. Makarere University In Transition 1990-2003: Opportunities and Challenge. [http://www.foundation-partnership.org/case\\_studies/makarere.php](http://www.foundation-partnership.org/case_studies/makarere.php).

sectors were able to develop national ICTs strategies in general and electronic education (e-education) plans in particular.

South Africa is one such example where ICTs have been promoted all along through partnerships between government, proponents of ICTs, the academic community, and the private sector. In South Africa, internet connectivity that began in early 1990s through funding from the Foundation for Research and Development culminated with the rise of a Tertiary Education Network (TENET),<sup>8</sup> which now provides internet access and technical support to universities, technikons, and research institutions. TENET was jointly founded in August 2000 by the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) and the South African Universities Vice Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA), but it was also supported by the government, universities, and donor agencies.

The presidential EDUNET initiative in Tunisia is another example of strong government support that was instrumental in providing full connectivity to universities and schools since 1997. Senegal and South Africa introduced special education rates (e-rates) to facilitate ICTs access to schools and colleges. Mauritius has gone even farther towards establishing a university of science and technology to capitalize on ICTs development. These experiences suggest that strong government support is a key for advancing ICTs availability and usage in higher education as a broad social and economic development enterprise.

Countries that have seen expanding academic use of ICTs have also shown considerable interest in building technology parks, ICTs clusters, innovation hubs that aim to increase access to capital, and advanced technologies for those who would like to pursue ICTs entrepreneurship. Gauteng and Cape Town in South Africa and El Ghazala in Tunisia have become attractive to foreign investors with spillover to the area of higher education institutions. The cities of Giza in Cairo, Port Louis, Abidjan, Rabat, Dakar, and Accra are also striving to become innovation technology hubs that could support the advancement of ICTs in the universities.

The private sector has also been contributing to this endeavor. Universities in most African countries, particularly those in West Africa like Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Togo, and Ghana, have signed agreements with UNDP and CISCO to become CISCO academies and are training hundreds of ICTs entrepreneurs and students in new internetworking technologies. These initiatives have not only boosted the institutions' technical capacities for managing their networks but have also provided enough experts to support the local public and the private sector needs.

---

8 <http://www.tenet.ac.za>

Sustaining meaningful ICTs utilization in an academic environment remains a problem for all the institutions, however, particularly to those universities that rely on donor funding. The transition from the early stage of ICTs utilization to their full integration in learning, teaching, research, and institutional management will remain a test for higher education institutions in the years to come.

### **Regional Initiatives**

In addition to institutional initiatives, there were a number of regional initiatives that promoted ICTs use in higher education. The majority of these initiatives focused on harnessing ICTs to deliver higher learning from a distance. Institutions in this category range from the African Virtual University to the Open University of the United Kingdom, which provided training to senior policy makers and teachers in Africa. Other institutions tend to deal with policy and regulatory issues facing higher education and analyzing the economic impact of higher learning and ICTs in Africa. The Economic Commission for Africa falls in this category. The rest provide funding for research and development of institutional ICTs capacities.

The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie are the two major organizations that spent a considerable amount of energy and resources in funding various activities aimed at sharing experience, transforming universities, improving their ICTs situation, and advocating for wider recognition of the importance of African universities as key knowledge producers in the information age. Table 4 lists the major ICTs initiatives relevant to higher education in Africa.

**Table 4: ICTs Initiatives Relevant to Higher Education in Africa**

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Web site</b>
Partnership for Higher Education in Africa	An initiative of the Ford, MacArthur, and Rockefeller Foundations and Carnegie Corporation of New York, it aims to generate and share information about African universities and higher education issues, discuss strategies for supporting universities, support universities to transform themselves, encourage networking and advocate for wider recognition of the importance of universities to African development. The Partnership supports ICTs infrastructure, research, networking, and other related activities.	<a href="http://www.foundation-partnership.org/corestatement.php">http://www.foundation-partnership.org/corestatement.php</a>
Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie	The Agency works with universities in French speaking Africa to integrate ICTs into their teaching and learning processes, harness new technologies in distance education, and promote e-learning content, campus networks, and exchange of experience.	<a href="http://www.auf.org">http://www.auf.org</a>
UN Economic Commission for Africa	The Commission through the African Information Society Initiative supports various policy initiatives pertaining to ICTs in Africa. AISI focuses on connectivity, policy advice, development of national strategies, and the promotion of ICTs application in key sectors including education.	<a href="http://www.uneca.org/aisi">http://www.uneca.org/aisi</a> <a href="http://www.uneca.org/adf99">http://www.uneca.org/adf99</a>
E-Africa Commission	The Commission is the digital opportunity arm of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). E-school is one of the flagship projects of the Commission that is believed to have a spill over to higher education.	<a href="http://www.eafrica.commission.org/">http://www.eafrica.commission.org/</a>

**Table 4:** Continued

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Web site</b>
WorLD	WorLD is an initiative of the World Bank to link students and teachers around the world using ICTs to improve educational opportunities and build global awareness.	<a href="http://www.worldbank.org/worldlinks/">http://www.worldbank.org/worldlinks/</a>
Imfundo: Partnership for IT in Africa	UK initiative dedicated to using ICTs to enhance teacher training and improve education and management of information systems.	<a href="http://www.imfundo.org">http://www.imfundo.org</a>
African Virtual University	A World Bank initiative to increase access to tertiary education, it has now established a satellite-based learning centers in 17 African countries.	<a href="http://www.avu.org">http://www.avu.org</a>

### **E-content Initiatives**

The third and perhaps most important area that has gained some attention lately is the promotion of e-content to support systematic management and sharing electronic information. Apart from considerable support by the Agence Universitaire de la Franchphonie in improving content in French speaking universities, the efforts supporting e-learning content remained ad hoc and scattered. Systematic knowledge management and sharing are still main challenges to African higher education institutions. Initiatives tend to promote regional e-content over building the capacities of the institutions to manage and share e-content. Table 5 lists some of the knowledge exchange initiatives relevant to higher education in Africa.

Interestingly, apart from the two initiatives stated above, the rest do not have comprehensive ICTs packages for higher education or resources that link local efforts to regional and e-content initiatives. Most initiatives and donors also tend to invest where local activities are significant. It is, therefore, imperative that higher education institutions take charge of their knowledge initiatives in order to advance ICTs use and garner support from the international community.

**Table 5:** Knowledge Exchange Initiatives in Africa

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Web site</b>
International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)	INASP is a co-operative network of partners aiming to improve worldwide access to scientific information. It provides training to information providers. INASP is widely known for its African Journal Online project and resources on electronic publishing. INASP has also played a key role in promoting availability of online journals free of charge to developing countries.	<a href="http://www.inasp.info">http://www.inasp.info</a>
The Association for the Development of Education in Africa	ADEA is a network of partners promoting the development of effective education policies based on African leadership and ownership. ADEA uses ICTs to share information with policy makers and development aid agencies.	<a href="http://www.adeanet.org">http://www.adeanet.org</a>
Database of African Thesis and Dissertation (DATAD)	The initiative is a project implemented by the Association of African Universities with funds from Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. It aims to facilitate capturing, organizing, and disseminating African theses and dissertations electronically.	<a href="http://www.aau.org/datad">http://www.aau.org/datad</a>

### Conclusion

This article provides an examination of the constraints and the institutional and regional initiatives that show that, despite some progress, the ICTs situation in African higher education remains far from adequate. Universities across Africa are at a cross-roads of making ICTs useful to their academic enterprise and at the same time understanding their implications to learning, teaching, research and institutional development. Despite enormous potential benefits, it is still unclear what impacts ICTs may have on teaching and learning and research particularly at resource-poor, low quality, peripheral universities in Africa.

Arguably, ICTs present enormous opportunities, particularly in the non-formal education delivery, in opening up to the world of information and in



facilitating interactions that otherwise would have been unthinkable. ICTs have made distance education more attractive both to the growing body of students and to universities transforming from elite to mass education. ICTs can improve the role of the Diaspora in creating a strong knowledge bond with higher education institutions in Africa. This knowledge network may well be as significant for African development as financial remittances from the Diaspora. ICTs are critical for future students to secure employment in the knowledge economy. It is imperative for the storage and retrieval of a vast array of information, including course materials that improve the quality of instruction and learning. ICTs could transform organizational patterns of higher education by making all institutional tasks more effective.

Equally and conversely, ICTs present a considerable challenge to African higher learning. It is not clear how low quality higher education will cope with floods of “Googles” and “Yahoes” in the long term. Universities in the region need to promote a high-level of critical thinking without compromising access to the vast array of information. The gap between those with access to ICTs at national and institutional levels and those without is a key concern. It is the duty of all African universities to strive towards achieving some form of universal ICTs access to all students and faculty. Constraints ranging from bandwidth availability and expense to the changing of the culture of academics and students, both cited above, should be addressed.

The dilemma suggests that, beyond the rhetoric, relatively little is known about how ICTs are actually used on African campuses and how they impact students and faculty. Most of the work in this area is largely rhetorical and lacks detailed consideration on the ways in which ICTs can be deployed in local context. ICTs involve a multifaceted social negotiation between different actors both on and off campus and, at a broader level, within the backdrop of university transformations and organizational reforms that have implications to the future of knowledge. This complex social negotiation process includes interactions of heterogeneous network of actors, artifacts, and systems whose outcome are not so obvious.

Comprehension of the actual use of ICTs on African campuses against the background of limited flow of information, resource constraints, problems of attracting quality faculty, less committed and badly trained students, and other social factors that endorse or stall its uptake is important. Neither the role of ICTs in African education nor the role of academics in the transition to knowledge society has been identified or fully understood. An African-led research agenda on ICTs and higher education is crucial to understanding the emerging complex negotiations between different actors at local, regional, and interna-

tional levels and the implications of ICTs applications to social, political, and organizational development.

The main and immediate obstacle to the use of ICTs in Africa remains universal access to higher bandwidth. Providing universal access to higher education is costly and complex. The need to create a robust bandwidth capability throughout Africa exposes the various constraints that need to be addressed at the institutional, national, and regional levels. Strategies for improving bandwidth and conserving existing circuit capacity should be developed and promoted widely.

More coordination and resource sharing between African academic institutions could be beneficial as universities move to fully integrate ICTs into their teaching and learning. Regional platforms for sharing information on ICTs policies and courseware and exchanging experiences are critical to increasing the positive contribution of ICTs to higher education.

Experiences have shown that a lot can be achieved in higher education by identifying and supporting campus ICTs champions and creating a network that brings these key players of e-learning together. Initiatives like the Santec<sup>9</sup> network, which aims to contribute to educational technology and e-learning in southern Africa, should be encouraged and replicated throughout the region. Also important are south-south collaborations between higher education institutions in Africa and their Asian and Latin American counterparts that have gone through some of the troubles of building a robust bandwidth, creating appropriate e-learning content and motivating students and staff to participate in networked education.

The creation of ICTs and knowledge management strategies at higher education institutions within the framework of their reform process are vital. Equally important is the strengthening of ICTs research and development on African campuses. Universities cannot actually build a good e-learning environment without strong teaching, research, and improvisation in networking; open software; and modern computer applications development. Highly skilled human resource development is also a foundation of ICTs in higher education.

The importance of ICTs in higher education has wide-ranging national implications. A well-articulated, networked learning environment in higher education requires significant government intervention. Government policy has a real impact on strategic initiatives in universities and often determines the parameters of such initiatives through laws, regulations, and the allocation of funds. At the same time, higher education institutions should play a key role in

---

9 <http://www.santecnetwork.org>

articulating national e-strategies. Universities could play a monitoring, mentoring, and evaluation role in shaping ICTs laws and regulations.

Developing effective tri-partite partnerships between government, higher education, and the private sector is also central to reaping the full educational benefits of ICTs. Governments should encourage the private sector to play a more socially responsible role by improving national infrastructures. With greater institutional ICTs infrastructures, universities could produce highly skilled human resources for the ICTs industry and the public sector. ICTs partnerships between higher education, government, and the private sector could elevate technology from a campus tool to a truly social service that advances the flow of knowledge and ultimately contributes to the social and economic well-being of African people across the continent.

### References

- ADEA. (2000). Working group on higher education. Association for the Development of Education in Africa. Retrieved from: [http://www.adeanet.org/workgroups/en\\_wghe.html](http://www.adeanet.org/workgroups/en_wghe.html)
- Altbach, P. & Davis, T. (1999). Global challenge and national response: Notes for an international dialogue on higher education. Available at: [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News14/text1.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News14/text1.html)
- Buettner, Y. et al. (2001). Information and communication technology in higher education. Retrieved from: <http://www.vision.ime.usp.br/>
- Dollar, D. & Collier, P. (2001). *Globalization, Growth, and Poverty: Building an Inclusive World Economy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Expert Panel on Skills. (2000). Stepping up: Skills and opportunities in the knowledge economy. Report of the Expert Panel on Skills. The Canadian Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Science and Technology. Retrieved from: <http://acst-ccst.gc.ca/skills/finalreprocs/acst.pdf>
- Grotevant, S. (1998). Business engineering and process redesign in higher education: Art or science? Available at: <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/cnc9857/cnc9857.html>
- IDRC. (1997). Communities and the information society: The role of information and communication technologies in education. Available at: <http://www.idrc.ca/acacia/studies/ir-unes.htm>
- International Telecommunication Union, *Telecommunications Statistics*. Retrieved from: <http://www.itu.int/statistics>
- Jensen, M. (1998, September). The Regional Informatics Network for Africa (RINAF): An external evaluation for UNESCO. Retrieved from: [http://www.unesco.org/webworld/build\\_info/rinaf\\_ev.rtf](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/build_info/rinaf_ev.rtf)
- Keats, D. (2002). Collaborative development of open content: A process model to unlock the potential of African universities, *First Monday*. Retrieved from: [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8\\_2/keats/#note1](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8_2/keats/#note1)

- Musisi, N. & Mwanga, N. (2003). *Makarere University in Transition 1990–2003: Opportunities and Challenge*. Retrieved from: [http://www.foundation-partnership.org/case\\_studies/makerere.php](http://www.foundation-partnership.org/case_studies/makerere.php).
- Nwuke, K. (2001, 19–21 November) “Reforms in higher education and the use of information technology,” *Issues in Higher Education, Economic Growth, and Information Technology*. Ad-Hoc Expert Group Meeting. Nairobi, Kenya.
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa. (2003, 29 July-1 August). ICT for teaching, learning and research. Proceeding of a Workshop for African Universities, Addis Ababa.
- Sayed, Y. (2003). Missing the connection? Using ICTs in education. *Insights Education #1*. Retrieved from: <http://www.id21.org/zinter/id21zinter.exe?a=1&i=InsightsEdu1Editorial&u=3f388ca5>
- Stockwell, J. (1999). Free software in education, a case study of CWP/SU. *Seimisc* <http://edge-online.org/pdf/tle1607r1045.pdf>
- Till, G. (2003). Harnessing distance learning and ICT for higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa: An examination of experiences useful for the design of widespread and effective tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Report to the Rockefeller Foundation.
- Uys, P. et al. (2003). Innovation and management strategies for higher education in Africa: Harmonizing reality and idealism. Retrieved from: <http://www.globe-online.com/philip.uys/transformationofhighereducation.htm>