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Trends, Themes, Challenges and Opportunities for Transforming Higher Education in Africa

A Pan-African Agenda-Setting Dialogue

University of Botswana

September 27–28, 2010

Report of the proceedings by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| 1. Introduction: Transformation and the Higher Education Policy in Africa | 5 |
| 1.1 Transformation — An Operational Framework for Discussion | 5 |
| 1.2 The Higher Education Policy Agenda in Africa | 5 |
| 2. Framing the Issues: The Transformation and Policy Issues Confronting Higher Education in Africa | 9 |
| 2.1 Cross-National Boundaries | 9 |
| 2.2 Ownership of African Universities | 10 |
| 2.3 Research-Policy Nexus | 10 |
| 3. Trends, Themes and Methods | 11 |
| 3.1 Key Themes for Africa’s Higher Education Transformation Agenda | 11 |
| 3.2 The Value of African Knowledge and Intellectual Development | 12 |
| 3.3 Economics and Corporate Trends | 13 |
| 3.4 Gender and Transformation in Higher Education | 15 |
| 3.5 Role of Students in Transforming Higher Education in Africa | 15 |
| 4. Setting an Agenda for Transforming Higher Education in Africa — Recommendations and Actions | 16 |
| 5. Recommended Policy Initiatives and Areas of Intervention | 18 |
| ANNEX 1: Action Plan from TrustAfrica Policy Dialogue, University of Botswana, September 27–28, 2010 | 22 |

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of some of the key discussions, issues and actions that emerged from the September 27–28 dialogue on *Trends, Themes, Challenges and Opportunities for Higher Education Transformation in Africa*. Organized by TrustAfrica and the University of Botswana, the two-day meeting brought together actors from West, East and Southern Africa as well as the Diaspora to discuss and develop a work plan for the second phase of TrustAfrica’s African Higher Education Dialogues.

The meeting also served as a forum for discussing the preliminary findings of the scoping studies commissioned by TrustAfrica on higher education in Ghana and Nigeria. An introduction to the higher education landscape in Uganda and Tanzania also was presented, although these two countries are still to conduct their scoping studies.

The African Higher Education Dialogues are a three-year project designed to offer a platform for the strengthening and transformation of higher education in Africa. The three strategic imperatives of the project include:

- Build an effective platform for engaging in the formulation and implementation of higher education policies in Africa;
- Initiate and sustain policy dialogues among key stakeholders in Africa; and
- Leverage resources for higher education transformation in Africa.

Objectives

In his opening address to the first dialogue at the University of Botswana, Dr. Bhokinkosi Moyo, Acting Executive Director of TrustAfrica, noted that the policy dialogues “will contribute to shaping opinions and approaches by policymakers, government officials and leaders of higher education institutions.” The dialogues, Dr. Moyo added, also create “African ownership of the higher education agenda” on the continent. The series of six policy dialogues will include two in East Africa, two in West Africa, and two with a pan-African focus.

Situated within the project’s overarching objective of “strengthening transformation”, the key objectives of the September 27–28 policy dialogue were:

- To introduce TrustAfrica’s higher education project to a wider group;
- To present the preliminary findings and emerging issues of transformation;
- To collate news from across the board to build a global picture for the next three years; and
- To set an agenda through the development of an Action Plan.

Key Questions

This initial dialogue of actors in higher education from across Africa and from the Diaspora explored several key questions through papers and discussions sessions, in order to develop an action plan for moving the project forward. Several of these questions included:

- What kind of transformation is envisioned for higher education in Africa?
- How transformative has Africa’s higher education sector been?
- Has the policy framework helped or impeded higher education transformation?

- Who are the key stakeholders in higher education in Africa? And, how can the TrustAfrica project be participatory and inclusive?
- What is the difference between a university in Africa and an African university?
- How can resources that meet the holistic nature of transformation for higher education in Africa be leveraged from within Africa and externally?

Setting an Agenda for Transforming Higher Education in Africa — Recommendations and Actions

Several recommendations emerged from the two-day policy dialogue, which are outlined below.

The Role of Higher Education in Africa

Beyond the role of turning out professionals for the market, participants highlighted the strategic roles of higher education institutions as sites for intellectualism, knowledge generation, research, and for the development of the next generation of African scholars, among others. Many of these roles have taken a back seat in African universities that are faced with dwindling human and financial resources.

The Higher Education Policy Agenda and Framework

- There is a need to engage the higher education system in African countries to open up spaces and to shift from the State as a leading actor to a situation where the **State plus other actors** take ownership of tertiary education policy. Other actors include broader civil society groups, education interest groups where they exist, the general public, private sector and students.
- The link between universities and their role in overall policy development should be rebuilt through the development of **social contracts** where researchers, communities and policy makers mobilize.
- Decision-making and governance within higher education institutions in Africa should be decentralized. One way this can be achieved is by developing within the policy framework structures that begin to “pluralize power in the university” so that each stakeholder becomes a counterweight against the other as a means of ensuring accountability, better checks and balances, and the development of a collective agenda.
- Use issues of gender equality and equity entry points to transform tertiary education structures, policies, curriculum, teaching and learning, and also to transform attitudes, belief systems, norms and values.
- Ensure that the inclusion of, and access to, education of minority groups and other marginalized groups in the policy framework is equitable and sustainable, and that stakeholders from these communities have a voice.

Breaking Down the Walls (Academic communities that transcend national boundaries)

- Creation of more regional programs for the exchange of scholars, materials, students and academic programs;
- Strengthen distance learning programs to better suit the needs of providing access to tertiary education to larger numbers of people without sacrificing quality;

- Rebuild the notion of ‘internationalization’ within Africa whereby African universities become the sites for exchange, dialogue, leadership, capacity building, research among African scholars and students (centers of excellence within Africa).

Place a higher value on African scholarship, knowledge and areas of African studies

The neo-liberalist ideological thrust of higher education in Africa during the last several decades has placed greater value on knowledge and ideas that emerge from outside the continent. Participants therefore noted the need for more:

- Community engagement through research and teaching; and, greater cooperation between civil society and academics in the universities;
- Localization of curriculum (the use of local research, African theories, etc.) to inform teaching in addition to western scholarship rather than a heavy reliance on scholarship from abroad.

The Action Plan that emerged from the key issues above is provided in *Section 4* of this report: *Setting an Agenda for Transforming Higher Education in Africa — Recommendations and Actions*.

1. INTRODUCTION: Transformation and the Higher Education Policy Agenda in Africa

1.1 Transformation — An Operational Framework for Discussion

A common debate is that of the difference between ‘**transformation**’ and ‘**reform**’ and the intersection between the two, in light of the fact that both terms connote ‘**change**’.

To guide the dialogue and discussions on *Transforming Higher Education in Africa*, the participants to the dialogue grappled with providing a set of characteristics that unpack the term, ‘transformation’.

The need to give definitional clarity to the term is based on the understanding that terms like transformation, diversity, access, equity, relevance — all of which are used to inform tertiary education policies — are not neutral terms, and can be located in discourses that are also driving conservative reforms and agendas.

The following are an agreed upon set of characteristics for understanding, identifying and managing the process of transformation within tertiary institutions in Africa:

- Transformation is about change and many of the principles that form the basis of change — such as access, participation, diversity, equity, relevance, etc. — are political and not technical, and are informed by different contexts and histories.
- Transformation is *planned change* with a democratic foundation towards progress. The assumption behind this change is: “we want something better than what we have”. Change needs to be managed.
- Transformation is a process.
- There may be an accumulation of reforms to produce a new context in a higher education system which transform it. These changes may be gradual and unnoticeable.
- Transformation is driven by different interests with different ideologies. Therefore, the change can be “reformist”, i.e. retaining the existing power sites within tertiary education policy frameworks while accommodating some elements of change, rather than pro-active and focused on dismantling current sites of power in policy development for more voices and stakeholders to meaningfully participate.
- Transformation is contextual and historically defined, but the uniting thread is change.
- Transformation must be *Meaningful, In Context, Sustainable, and Driven* by local constituencies who take ownership of the issue.

1.2 The Higher Education Policy Agenda in Africa

Who sets the policy agenda?

The State plays the leading role in defining, providing resources and driving the policy agenda of tertiary education. The State’s actions are driven by external — international multilateral donor institutions, international donors, markets, etc. — as well as by local demands. Universities’ authorities and governance structures implement the State’s policy agenda, often in an

autocratic way. Power, therefore in relation to defining the role of the university in society and the policy agenda, is vested largely in the State, which responds to external demands.

Factors that influence the tertiary education policy framework in Africa

The scoping studies on Ghana and Nigeria, and the preliminary information provided to the proceedings from Uganda and Tanzania, show a range of quantitative and qualitative changes that have occurred in higher education on the continent during the past four-five decades.

In many African countries, institutional change has occurred as tertiary institutions struggled for autonomy, and to make more democratic the processes for making key appointments within institutions, such as appointing Vice Chancellors, department heads and faculties, among others.

Professor L. Adele Jinadu noted in his study on the higher education landscape in Ghana and Nigeria, that the transformation of higher education in African universities has been based on the following assumptions:

- A stable political and economic environment;
- A policy focus beyond primary and secondary education access and development which is consultative; and
- A functioning and accountable State.

A significant change in Africa during the last 20–25 years has been the development of a far broader notion of higher education to include polytechnics and technical colleges. In his study, Professor Jinadu noted that a milestone in the policy reform process was the re-designation of higher education as tertiary education to refer more broadly to “post-secondary institutions of higher learning or professional studies, which provide advanced academic and/or professional instructions, and which conduct research in the sciences, social sciences, humanities and career-focused programs”.

Another notable transformation that has taken place in higher education across Africa has been **quantitative** — i.e. the tertiary education sector’s response in exponential increase to the issue of access. The Scoping Study on Ghana and Nigeria and the preliminary presentation on Uganda and Tanzania all show a steady growth in student enrolments in publicly funded tertiary education institutions. These countries, like many others, also have seen a mushrooming of private tertiary education institutions that have tapped into the growing demand.

Although higher education institutions across Africa have transformed to open their doors so that larger numbers of students can obtain tertiary education qualifications, access is still a major issue, because demand far exceeds supply. Access, in terms of gender imbalances and tertiary education being within the reach of marginalized and minority groups within countries, also is still a challenge. Also, as will be discussed below in the section on *The Higher Education Policy Agenda in Africa*, greater access was not matched by investments in teaching, infrastructure and other services.

The higher education policy framework is a major factor that has influenced the reforms and transformation within Africa’s tertiary education systems. While this framework is localized and contextualized according to the historical, political and economic developments of specific countries, there are broad similarities in terms of the main components of tertiary education policy in Africa and the drivers of the higher education policy agenda.

In post-independence African countries, tertiary education policy reform has focused on reinventing and reconstructing the idea of the university in Africa to meet the country's development challenges. Policy reform in tertiary education also is situated within the broader education sector reform and a country's development policy.

There have been two ideologies informing the tertiary education policy framework in Africa:

- Social and political liberalism, with an emphasis on self-reliance, diversity, pluralism and equity; and
- Neo-liberalism with emphasis on the market, globalization and the new information and communications technologies, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.

The policy process also has been characterized by stops and starts, moving forwards and backwards, depending on the shifts in the political and economic contexts of countries. The Scoping Study of Nigeria and Ghana presented at the dialogue illustrates how policy reform is dynamic and not always on the path of transformation. As Professor Jinadu pointed out, the complexity of transformation lies within countries' political and economic seesawing from "social liberalism to conservatism, which is often dressed up to look liberal".

Trends in Tertiary Education Development in Tanzania and Uganda

Since the 1960s, both Tanzania and Uganda have witnessed a growth of both public and private tertiary institutions. Student enrolments also continued to rise, and affirmative action and gender policies helped to open access to higher education for larger numbers of female students in both countries.

The primary role of the State in Higher Education in both countries has been to finance education; and to create the legal and policy framework for the development of higher education. The Private Sector increasingly has gained a foothold in the higher education sector in both countries through the establishment of tertiary education institutions (private sector ownership of higher education institutions in Uganda is now 66.2%, and a similar trend is noted in Tanzania), and in providing internships and scholarships to students. The higher education agenda in the two East African countries also is heavily influenced by the external donor community.

Tertiary education institutions in both countries have restructured curriculum and tailored academic programs to the needs of the market. This has led to a situation where students with degrees in the humanities, social sciences and more theoretical areas graduate into a market that is unable to absorb them.

Many of the challenges that confront the higher education sector in Uganda and Tanzania mirror those of the sector across the continent. Dwindling resources from the public sector to higher education has resulted in low pay for academic staff, donor-driven research agendas with very little focus on an inward research agenda, rising student-staff ratios which have impacted negatively on the quality of higher education, and despite the Affirmative Action and gender policy frameworks adopted, gender imbalances in student enrolment in some faculties and among academic staff remain evident.

A. Rwomire, T. Marijani and L. Rukundo, September 27, 2010

The tertiary education policy framework in Africa today is largely informed by neo-liberalism. The areas of focus in the current higher education policy frameworks for many African countries are:

- The structural-institutional process and socio-cultural roots of inequalities (gender, minority groups, regional, etc);
- Building national capacity to lead, teach and conduct research in tertiary education institutions;
- Creating an integrated and coordinated tertiary educational system;
- Co-ordination of tertiary education with all other sectors of the educational system and overall national development and educational policies and priorities;
- Improved internal administration of tertiary institutions;
- Balance between the supply of trained personnel from the tertiary institutions and labor market demand;
- Emphasis on the sciences and technology fields

But as Prof Jinadu points out in the Scoping Study on Ghana, countries' policy frameworks sometimes are situated within competing ideologies and objectives. Ghana's policy reform, for example, is based on the push and pull of two objectives: 'marrying the need for 'social justice' (equity, diversity) with 'cost-effectiveness and efficiency', and market pricing in the face of accelerating students' enrolment in tertiary education institutions [Jinadu citing Girdwood, 1999].

Transformation within Africa's higher education institutions is influenced therefore by the logic and dynamics within the institutions, as well as by external factors. For example, many African states became independent at a time when development planning was central to national development. Planners needed to be trained and institutes and universities became the sites for training this expertise. How to manage the internal dynamics and external factors for change remains the key challenge for African institutions of higher education.

The consequences of the current tertiary education policy framework in Africa

The two-day policy dialogue noted a number of outcomes of the current tertiary education policy frameworks in Africa which have impinged negatively on the quality of higher education. These include:

- Heavy emphasis on teaching and administration;
- Connection to other policy frameworks becoming weak and fragmented;
- Declining emphasis on research, knowledge generation, the humanities and the creative arts;
- More emphasis placed on developing African academics rather than intellectuals;
- Very little emphasis on African languages and African epistemology;
- Few resources for the development and the renewal of research and policy capacity;
- Changing staff-student ratios (more students, less staff, crowded classrooms);
- Balance between quality and quantity now skewed towards quantity;
- More focus and value placed on 'international knowledge, academics and intellectual capacity' than on local knowledge, academics and intellectual capacity;
- Changing structures of tertiary education to widen access — e.g. distance learning;
- Students have been reduced to paying assets instead of learners;

- Relatively good policy framework for addressing issues of gender inequalities in the structures, curriculum, teaching, learning and research in higher education, but weak implementation and other challenges (mindsets, informal curriculum (silent curriculum, sexual harassment and violence, etc.)

Several of these consequences were discussed in more detail in presentations and discussions during the two-day dialogue.

2. Framing the Issues: The Transformation and Policy Issues Confronting Higher Education in Africa

As Professor Tade Akin Aina noted in his presentation, *Breaking barriers, crossing boundaries: reflections on emerging trends in African higher education*, the basic structure of higher education is the same worldwide. “While there are dominant models of higher education, there is no one model,” he said.

The mantra of change is echoed in universities across the continent, because they are “stressed and stretched”, compelling many to change. “The issue is not about change, but more about confronting change and managing change,” Aina noted.

Several issues emerged in the presentations and discussions on the key transformation issues confronting universities in Africa today in light of the infrastructural and other constraints they face.

Higher education in Africa is at a cross-road where the sector must begin to re-think and re-vision the role of tertiary education; re-configure how tertiary institutions within Africa relate and work with each other; re-visit the link between research and policy; and, there is a need to expand the ownership of university and higher education systems to include a larger number of stakeholders in order to pluralize the sites of power within tertiary institutions for better governance and to leverage new resources.

2.1 Crossing national boundaries

Universities in Africa should begin to look beyond their national boundaries to create new models of universities that pool resources to strengthen and give a transformative nature to the issues of diversity, access, equity and relevance within Africa’s tertiary education systems.

These academic communities that transcend national boundaries can facilitate the mobility of students and scholars across borders, and provide the basis for creating platforms for exchange among tertiary education institutions within regions (East Africa, Southern Africa, and etcetera). These cross-border academic communities also would change the governance and management structures of tertiary education systems, as well as create more diverse and dynamic unions and associations of academics and students.

Evidence of how these cross-border associations can work are already emerging in East Africa through Leadership Training and Development initiatives, as well as between universities in Eastern and Southern Africa that are sharing scholars, students and resources in regional graduate degree programs (for example the Women’s Law Institute, based in Zimbabwe which offers a Master’s program for students from Eastern and Southern Africa on women, law and development).

Another area of transformation that can occur as tertiary education institutions in Africa begin to break down national boundaries and barriers is the rebuilding of equal relationships between African universities, as opposed to the current scenario whereby African universities are often twinned with an institution of higher education in the North.

This ‘internationalization’ of tertiary education institutions within Africa, whereby African institutions begin to seek more equitable partnerships with each other in the production of knowledge, research and other areas, can become the foundation for creating *centers of excellence* among African universities.

2.2 Ownership of African Universities

Participation and access are key principles informing a transformative higher education agenda in order to broaden the base of ownership of the higher education agenda in Africa, and to create more counterweights within the current governance structures of tertiary education institutions for accountability to more stakeholders.

Universities need to be democratized and should be seen as part and parcel of, not independent of, the societies in which they are located. In creating African leaders for the 21st century, universities and institutions of higher education in Africa can become sites where societies can be transformed through the quality of the students tertiary institutions produce.

A transformative higher education agenda in Africa also must focus on expanding ownership of the university and higher educational systems to larger numbers of stakeholders, particularly civil society and public interest groups. Entry points need to be found with broad-based policy groups that have the right to education on their advocacy agenda.

Consensus building with wider educational and rights-based coalitions and networks need to be built to drive change in tertiary educational policy, and these engagements with civil society and other actors is one way to bring issues of higher education into the political arena.

2.3 Research-Policy Nexus

The research-policy link between African universities and the political, economic, social and development challenges African nations face is another key area for setting a transformative agenda.

A strong emphasis on the link between research and policy featured in the early development of higher education institutions in Africa, especially given the major focus on social policy during the post-colonial development of African nations. The developmental purpose of the early universities in Africa, mixed with the Ideology of Self-Reliance as governments focused on human resource development in order to achieve the ‘Africanization of the Public Service’, also featured strongly in post-independence higher education policies.

The gulf has widened between research and policy in the current neo-liberalist policy framework of tertiary education institutions in Africa as States search for instant solutions to developmental challenges such as poverty, and because of emerging mindsets that universities should not be engaged in policy.

Universities, according to Professor Adebayo Olukoshi in his presentation, *A Research-Policy Nexus in the African Higher Education Agenda*, often became the last viable site to resistance of

the State's monopoly on power in the post-independence period, making it difficult for the research-policy nexus that had developed to continue.

During the 1990s, with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) across Africa, there was a further erosion of this nexus and a deepening crisis within the higher education sector. With no constituency within African institutions able to speak on neo-liberalism, multilateral institutions built constituencies inside and outside of the African university systems who could defend and support these programs.

Increasingly, African policymakers became less comfortable with indigenous researchers and began to relate more to external knowledge and research often driven by international donors. This was a defensive mechanism as well as reflective of the complexity of the situation, Professor Olukoshi noted.

The current historical period beyond SAPs in most African countries provides the opportunity to rebuild the research-policy nexus to engage in political and policy processes. This can be done through Social Contracts whereby researchers, communities and policymakers mobilize. However, heavy investment is needed for the development and renewal of research capacity in higher education, because many African universities are no longer research-focused. Investment also is needed in developing policy institutions and rebuilding policy capacity.

The policy-research nexus in a higher education transformative agenda also needs to be re-defined to be more inclusive of players other than government. There is a need to re-define, Professor Olukoshi said, 'what is meant by policy' and a different understanding of 'who educates who' in terms of 'is it the city that educates the university?', or the 'university that educates the city?'

"There are three things needed to get universities in Africa moving: Good academics, resources (incentives other than money) and an enabling environment," said Professor Adam Habib of South Africa in his response to the research-policy nexus and other issues of framing and emerging issues in African higher education.

In a transformative agenda, the State still has a leading role to play in re-establishing the research-policy nexus, because "public money drives research, not private money". This requires a pro-active engagement with the State, because the bureaucrat's job is to find money, Professor Habib said.

The enabling environment also needs to be addressed, Professor Habib said, because the dramatic increase in student enrolments has left little time for academic research, and the low pay of academics has pushed them more and more towards consultancies. Thought needs to be given to how to bring research and consultancies together in a higher education transformative agenda.

3. Trends, Themes and Methods

3.1 Key Themes for Africa's Higher Education Transformation Agenda

An effective functional public education system is a key component for transforming the higher education system in Africa, said Professor N'dri Assie-Lumumba, who highlighted the following additional areas and themes for conceptualizing and articulating specific issues for the transformation of tertiary education in Africa:

- Renewal of the idea of the university as a public good with the State playing a central role;
- Curricular assessment encompassing systematically comprehensive African knowledge systems;
- Innovative strategies to increase the intake capacities and improve the inclusion of under-represented and marginalized groups while at the same time ensuring quality;
- Coordination for increased efficiency in cross-border education;
- Tapping into the resources of the Diaspora;
- Strengthening not only sciences and technologies, but also the social sciences and other fields to ensure top technical competence and critical thinking;
- The creation of better structural linkage between higher education and the lower levels of the educational systems to ensure continuity in the quality of education, and competence among the learners.

The transformation agenda also must take into account several other issues which have remained a challenge for African universities. These include African languages and epistemology, applied research and continuing and life-long education. Professor Assie-Lumumba also noted that it is important for the agenda on transforming higher education to be mindful of the fact that beyond transforming the institutions, it is important to build the knowledge on how to make the new structures useful and productive.

3.2 The Value of African Knowledge and Intellectual Development

Participants in the first policy dialogue emphasized the strategic need for an African transformative agenda for higher education to value and leverage African intellectual development to effect change.

There have been renewed calls for the decolonization of higher education in Africa, and in 2008 the Africa Union conceptualized the establishment of a Pan-African University. South Africa's former President, Thabo Mbeki noted that higher education is critical to the realization of his vision of an African Renaissance.¹

In the higher education policy frameworks that are grounded in neo-liberalism, the emphasis on science and technology has resulted in a diminishing of resources and a devaluation of the humanities and social sciences which are core areas for the production of African knowledge and research. Areas such as history, African languages, the creative arts, and performing arts have lost stature within the African higher education institution. All of these areas are critical to knowledge generation in Africa. History, for example, involves memory which is critical to knowledge production, while the creative arts develop "empowered consciousness". The current policy framework also has given rise to a distinction between academics and intellectuals, with academics viewed in terms of "job descriptions".

¹ Dr. Ibrahim Oanda Ogachi, Corporate Trends and the Challenges of Transforming Universities in Africa into African Universities, presentation to the Pan-African Agenda Setting Dialogue, University of Botswana, September 27-28, 2010

Reclaiming African and African-Diaspora Research Methods

An African-focused research agenda in higher education institutions on the continent needs to be grounded in a pluralistic and consensus building approach which draws on a pluridisciplinary methodology, i.e. looking at an issue or topic from many different lenses. Several research methods used in Africa historically in various ways that need to be revisited include, among others:

- Egyptology
- Hermeneutics
- Pan-African methodologies
- African-centric methodology
- Griot historiography
- Sankofa* methodology
- Street soldiers methodology
- Mathematics for African Studies

Prof. Abdul Karim Bangura, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

An intellectual hierarchy has emerged in the tertiary educational landscape in Africa which favors knowledge, science, social science research and historical and cultural discourses from outside of Africa's borders. Shifting the discourses in the humanities, cultural and creative arts, as well as in history and other fields to issues pertinent to Africa, Africa's intellectual development, and to African intellectuals, must be high on the African higher education transformation agenda. Re-thinking the value of the humanities is vital to the creation of a confident, African intellectual community.

3.3 Economics and Corporate Trends

A major trend and challenge that has emerged as a result of an African higher education policy framework being informed by neo-liberalism is the increasing commercialization of university academic and non-academic programs. The growth of the number of tertiary education and students is therefore viewed positively in the tertiary education sector in light of the fact that students are seen more and more as a source of revenue for higher education institutions.

The neo-liberalist package, said Dr. Ibrahim Oanda Ogachi in his presentation on *Corporate Trends and the Challenges of Transforming Universities in Africa into African Universities*, has affected the tertiary education sector in Africa in the following ways:

- Increasing standardization and little differentiation in emerging institutions and academic programs;
- The development of mission statements that emphasize the private sector and remain silent on responsibility to local communities and concerns;
- New tensions between university governance organs and workers on sharing revenues;
- Creation of private sector bodies that direct academic programs of institutions (e.g., Makerere University Private Sector Forum)
- New equity issues as students without money are left out;
- Increased vocational focus of university programs; and

- Graduates being churned out with skills in markets that cannot absorb them or where the skills are not relevant.

As a result of these trends, Dr. Oanda Ogachi noted that “universities are increasingly being transformed from sites generating knowledge to kiosks for selling education wares”, and institutional capacities to respond to local developmental concerns have been eroded.

A transformation agenda for higher education in Africa must therefore focus on ways to develop African universities. Steps in this direction include:

- Changing existing research and other partnership models between universities in Africa and those abroad in ways that enhance African universities capacity to take the lead in driving the partnerships;
- Creation of a sustainable research funding mechanism in African universities that is not dependent on the funding dynamics of the North. This requires policy reorientation at the national and institutional levels in Africa that focus on efficient systems of institutional governance; and
- Contextualize research and academic programs in universities within an African agenda that is linked to the ongoing efforts of political and economic integration in Africa, as well as to the political, economic, social and developmental challenges the continent confronts.

How to tap the economic benefits of a knowledge-driven economy

Global changes in the production system accentuated by the digital and knowledge revolutions have forced higher education institutions in Africa to respond to new demands. The transformation of societies from labor-oriented production to information marketing and the licensing of intellectual property can be advantageous to tertiary institutions in Africa that are capacitated to tap the economic benefits of a knowledge-driven economy.

There are several ways the higher education agenda in Africa can be transformed to benefit from the current global context:

- Refocus higher education to maximize its strengths to construct and commoditize knowledge;
- Reform and re-tool higher education to minimize its weaknesses;
- Re-position higher education to optimize opportunities like the increasing social demand for knowledge; and
- Re-energize higher education to adapt to threats.

While there is a price tag on applied skills, the higher education policy framework in Africa should be transformed to drive the production of knowledge as a right, principle and basic need of a people and nation in order for the tertiary education sector in Africa to optimize the opportunities created by the knowledge society.

Professor Joel Babatunde Babalola, *The Economics of Transforming Higher Education in Africa*

3.4 Gender and Transformation in Higher Education in Africa

While gender studies and gender good practices are new areas of focus in higher education, gender equality as a principle has had a transformative effect on the higher education sector in Africa.

Gender equality can be used as a paradigm to transform and inform higher education structures, patterns of enrolments, policy frameworks, curriculum, teaching and learning, research, the production of knowledge and the development of new teaching materials.

Professor Joy Kwesiga, using the example of Makerere University, illustrated in her presentation how gender equality can drive a transformative agenda, as well as revitalize Africa's higher education sector. Gender also is now widely accepted as a key issue within the checklists of good governance in higher education.

The principle of gender equality has changed institutional policy frameworks to focus on issues of access, diversity and parity for women and other marginalized groups in terms of academic programming, student enrolments, academic and non-academic staffing and appointments, among others, with higher education institutions establishing mechanisms to ensure that these policies are implemented in all aspects of tertiary institutions' operations.

Academic programs and curriculum also have been transformed as Departments of Women's Studies or Gender Studies have been formed; courses on gender have been included as components of conventional disciplines such as agriculture, literature, religion, history, media and journalism studies, among others.

While there is evidence of the breaking down of stereotypes, gendered norms and attitudes formed by the unequal position of women in societies, some of the challenges that still must be confronted include the tendency to treat gender issues as peripheral or an add-on, and not part of the mainstream and broader higher education transformative agenda; and the need for institutional policy frameworks to address the 'informal curriculum'² prevalent in higher education institutions which reinforce gender roles, norms about "acceptable" sexual orientation, gender stereotypes and in subtle ways, the informal, hidden curriculum can perpetuate violence against women and girls on campus.

3.5 Role of Students in Transforming Higher Education in Africa

The neo-liberalist policy framework of higher education institutions has rendered students to being viewed as sources of revenue for tertiary education institutions, rather than as one of the key stakeholders in the ownership of African universities.

² The Association of African Universities Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender in Curriculum notes that every organization has a "hidden curriculum" or "informal curriculum" that may carry gender stereotypes. Much of this curriculum is related to sex and connote sexual ethics and values which are not dealt with in the tertiary education's formal curriculum and may be haphazardly dealt with within the informal curriculum. For example, the hidden curriculum may stress: "If you refuse to have sex with your boyfriend, he will desert you, so it is better to agree"; or, "Some male lecturers demand sex from you: If you don't agree, they will fail you"; among others which reinforce sex and class divides among university students.

In setting an agenda for transforming higher education in Africa, there is a need to re-think where students are placed and their role in this transformation, argued Dr. Godwin Murunga in his presentation on *The Role of Students in Transforming Higher Education*.

Students are most commonly viewed as “troublemakers to be taught by trained intellectuals”, and in the literature on higher education in Africa, students appear mainly as statistics -- in terms of the gender demographics of the student population, as well as in terms of ‘who pays’ and ‘who does not pay’. Those who pay, Dr. Murunga noted, are seen as a “net asset”, and those who are not able to pay are viewed as “troublemakers” and the “organizers for change”.

In a transformation agenda for higher education, students should not be reduced to a “problem to be sorted out” but must be seen as a “voice to be heard”, Dr. Murunga said. A transformation agenda also should focus on new approaches to teaching and learning, shifting from the current “rote approach” whereby students are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge and the emphasis is on regurgitation back on exams of the notes and lectures provided, he added. Approaches to learning to build a critical consciousness and thinking include seminars, dialogues, mentoring programs and exchanges of students from different countries within Africa to meet and share their experiences.

An area for more research is how students are defining university education in Africa and mobilizing for their interests, as well as research on “university life” on campuses.

4. Setting an Agenda for Transforming Higher Education in Africa — Recommendations and Actions

The papers and discussions during the two-day policy dialogue emerged into several key areas for beginning to chart a discussion and dialogue path with other audiences on how to transform higher education in Africa. The areas and issues given below as recommendations are by no means definitive, but serve as pointers for future dialogues to deepen the discussions and agenda-setting issues and plans as TrustAfrica’s three-year higher education project continues.

The Role of Higher Education in Africa

Participants noted that there is a need for discussions, critical thinking and research on what the role of higher education in Africa should be at this juncture in the continent’s political, economic and social development.

Beyond the role of turning out professionals for the market, participants highlighted the strategic roles of higher education institutions as sites for intellectualism, knowledge generation, research, and for the development of the next generation of African scholars, among others. Many of these roles have taken a back seat in African universities that are faced with dwindling human and financial resources.

The Higher Education Policy Agenda and Framework

The following are some of the key issues that emerged from discussions on the higher education policy agenda and policy framework that currently influences the growth and development of Africa’s institutions of higher learning:

- There is a need to engage the higher education system in African countries to open up spaces and to shift from the State as a leading actor to a situation where the **State plus**

other actors take ownership of tertiary education policy. Other actors include broader civil society groups, education interest groups where they exist, the public, private sector and students.

- The link between universities and their role in overall policy development should be rebuilt through the development of **social contracts** where researchers, communities and policy makers mobilize.
- Decision-making and governance within higher education institutions in Africa should be decentralized. One way this can be achieved is by developing within the policy framework structures that begin to “pluralize power in the university” so that each stakeholder becomes a counterweight against the other as a means of ensuring accountability, better checks and balances, and the development of a collective agenda.
- Use issues of gender equality and equity entry points to transform tertiary education structures, policies, curriculum, teaching and learning, and also to transform attitudes, belief systems, norms and values.
- Ensure that inclusion of and access to education of minority groups and other marginalized groups in the policy framework is equitable, sustainable and stakeholders from the communities have a voice.

Breaking down the Walls (Academic communities that transcend national boundaries)

The sharing of higher education resources within countries, within sub-regions and regionally was highlighted as a key strategy to strengthen the base of Africa’s higher education institutions and thereby strengthen transformative processes. Actions in this direction include the following:

- Creation of more regional programs for the exchange of scholars, materials, students and academic programs;
- Strengthen distance learning programs to better suit the needs of providing access to tertiary education to larger numbers of people without sacrificing quality;
- Rebuild the notion of ‘internationalization’ within Africa whereby African universities become the sites for exchange, dialogue, leadership, capacity building, research among African scholars and students (centers of excellence within Africa, not outside)

Place a higher value on African scholarship, knowledge and areas of African studies

The neo-liberalist ideological thrust of higher education in Africa during the last several decades has placed greater value on knowledge and ideas that emerge from outside the continent. One result of this tendency has been a de-valuing of scholarship and knowledge produced within the continent and which is derived from the indigenous knowledge of local communities, and civil society activism. Participants therefore noted the need for more:

- Community engagement through research and teaching; and, greater cooperation between civil society and academics in the universities;

- Localization of curriculum (the use of local research, African theories, etc) to inform teaching in addition to western scholarship rather than heavy reliance on scholarship from abroad.

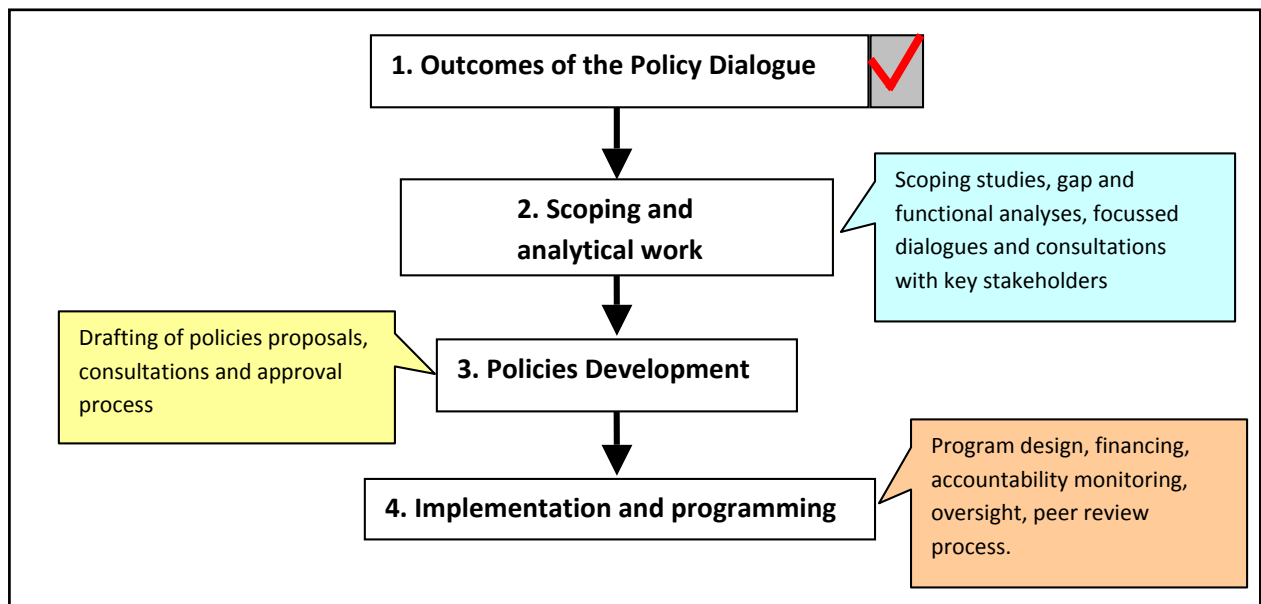
The issues and recommendations which emanated from the two-day dialogue were developed into an Action Plan (see Annex 1).

5. Recommended Policy Initiatives and Areas of Intervention

The previous section(4) proposed an agenda for transforming higher education in Africa. From this ambitious agenda, there is need to concretize the possible policy initiatives and areas of interventions.

Although the policy dialogue at university of Botswana was useful in narrowing down the agenda, before we talk about real *policies* that would affect the functions of the higher education institutions we need to specify a due process as follows:

Figure 1



The areas proposed by the agenda in section 4 could be grouped into the following areas:

- (i) **understanding and reforming governance structures** of universities across Africa (identifying models and good practice);
- (ii) **understanding the multiple roles** of universities;
- (iii) how to get rid of the barriers to **improve exchanges between universities**;
- (iv) and reforming finances to include **innovative ways of financing universities**.

For each of these areas there will have to be studies and in-depth analytical work in preparation for institutions' policies that would transform the functions, roles and positioning of higher education institutions in Africa.

i. Understanding and reforming governance structures

The policy dialogue concluded that there is a need to change universities' shareholding compositions (moving away from State own and governed universities towards opening up to non-state actors), to increase democratization of the institutions by creating a space for a voice of citizen and society, to increase, where appropriate, decentralization and independence.

There are two governance issues that need to be fully understood of every organization, whether governmental or not: accountability and transparency. Two dimensions of accountability are worth mentioning: vertical and horizontal. Vertical accountability establishes the accountability mechanism between the main stakeholder (or stakeholders) — for all public universities this role is played by the central government; the executive and lower down the administrative and academic structure of the institution. Horizontal accountability entails the mechanism by which executives, managers and academic are accountable to one another for the running of the institutions.

A policy initiative that aims at reforming universities' governance structures needs to start with a focused study, involving analytical work and documentation of good practice. The analytical work will entail understanding the different corporate governance models across the continent, a classification of the different models into groups for comparative analysis and documenting case studies to see whether good practice could inform policies.

The study would need to cover the following:

- a) What are the institutional arrangements responsible for decision making — i.e. with executive power?
- b) What are the accountability mechanisms currently in place? Who's accountable to whom? Is there scope for changing them and what are the implications (especially the legal implications, for example it might be necessary to change an Act of Parliament)?
- c) How transparent are decision-making processes and outcomes within the institutions? Is there scope for greater transparency? Transparency is a pre-condition for democratizing the institutions. Citizens, students, and civil society need to have access to the process and the outcomes of the decisions taken by the university in order to provide some level of participation and scrutiny.

ii. Understanding the multiple role of universities

As the policy dialogue highlighted, universities are institutions that provide:

- Teaching
- Research
- Policy advice (some universities may have a role as think tanks)

And they play an important role as civil society institutions. So they perform (or should perform) a multiple role in society. Are these roles relevant, adequate at this juncture in the political and economic development of the continent?

Understanding these roles is critical as it forms the basis for any policy that aims at transforming the academic institutions.

iii. Improving exchanges between universities

A study to understand how exchanges between universities could take place, would need to understand:

- Barriers to exchanges of academic staff and students: institutional, legal (e.g. immigration and visa restrictions), and financial.
- Implications for increased exchanges between universities: what needs to be reformed and how we could go about reforming the systems
- Costs of proposed reforms: each proposal for reforming the system needs to be grounded on a detailed financial costing and if possible a value for money (bringing costs and benefits together) analysis.

iv. Innovative ways of financing universities

Public universities in Africa depend for their finances on their own governments. This dependency has its pros and cons:

Pros:

- Predictability of financial transfers: the government would normally provide predictable finances to cover recurrent costs as per particular formulae linked to the enrolment of students, research outputs, and other administrative requirements.
- Free higher education: when the government is the main financier of a national university, it often results in no-tuition fees and low student maintenance costs. This is not always the case — countries with low revenue collection may have to impose university fees to (partly) finance the institutions.

Cons:

- The government retains the decision over the finances of the university.
- Government's decision on level of finances depends on overall public finances and volatility of government revenue and other external factors.
- The university has no control over its own finances.
- When the government is the main shareholder (providing most of the finances) it has a large say in the running of the university. This reduces the university's independence and decision making power.

It is important to appreciate the role that additional finances (over and above what government can afford) can play in:

- a) Retaining world class scholars and academic professionals
- b) Attracting new scholars and professionals
- c) Sponsoring high quality research
- d) Upgrading of facilities (teaching and research)
- e) Reducing dependency from government finances (and in turn increasing the independence of the institution)

Therefore a study should explore:

- Opportunities for other sources of finances as a substitute to the government's or additional.
- New ways of financing: how to set up endowment funds, private sector, borrowing, access to foreign sources of funds (aid and non-aid).
- The establishment of trust funds at regional or continental level where universities would compete for funds mainly for research or capital investment.

Summary of recommendations

Four policy areas have been identified for further development: (i) understanding governance of universities across the continent; (ii) understand the multiple roles of universities in Africa; (iii) improving exchanges of students and scholars between universities; and (iv) the role of finances and new ways of financing universities

It is recommended that before we can develop policies on these four areas, we would need to commission four analytical studies. All four studies will need to entail a wide range of consultations with key stakeholders: governments officials, Parliamentary committee(s) relevant to higher education (education, appropriation and finance committees) top management of universities, a representative sample of academics, private sector with interest in higher education, institutions outside Africa that have employed good practice in these four areas, etc.

The studies need to ground their findings in the reality of the continent and in the legal environment higher education institutions operate in.

The next step would entail policy development, which will require using the findings from the studies and translate them into policy statements. The process outlined in figure 1 requires a substantial allocation of time, finances and access to technical expertise. It is envisaged that from the outcomes of the policy dialogue to the development of policies, twenty-four months could pass. Legal procedures in countries could delay further the approval of policies.

Annex 1: Proposed Action Plan from TrustAfrica Policy Dialogue, University of Botswana, September 27–28, 2010

| Strategic Objective — TrustAfrica | ACTIONS |
|--|--|
| <p>Build an effective platform for engaging the formulation and implementation of higher education policies in Africa</p> | <p>Finalize the scoping studies and add to the TORs for these studies a point on the need for capacity to re-package and communicate these studies in different ways to different audiences;</p> <p>Identify civil society, broad public policy interests groups with a focus on education; identify community groups with strong constituencies</p> <p>Identify networks of African scholars and regional networks of African students;</p> <p>Package the findings of the scoping studies in various formats to disseminate the findings to the broader stakeholders identified</p> <p>Create a journal where African scholars can share their knowledge and experience on higher education in Africa</p> <p>Develop policy briefs based on the policy dialogues on higher education in Africa convened with different stakeholders</p> <p>Use new media — social network platforms, blogs, twitter, etc. — to stimulate and disseminate dialogue and discussions among students and other activist constituencies on transformation of higher education in Africa</p> |
| <p>Initiate and sustain policy dialogues among key stakeholders in Africa</p> | <p>Beyond the six planned policy dialogues, convene seminars within universities, public forums and collaborate with civil society to host and convene seminars focused on key issues that have emerged from this initial dialogue on transforming tertiary education in Africa</p> <p>Create platforms for dialogues with targeted communities within universities and tertiary institutions (such as Vice Chancellors, Students, Administrators, Deans, Lecturers, etc)</p> <p>Create specific dialogues comprised of student panels (undergraduates and graduate students)</p> <p>Convene policy dialogues on higher education transformation in Africa for continental bodies</p> |

| | |
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| | <p>such as the African Union (AU) and regional groupings such as Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC)</p> |
| <p>Leverage resources for higher education transformation in Africa</p> | <p>Breaking down the walls — way to combine and share resources within Africa (added value of re-shaping the notion of African tertiary education institutions) places focus and value within the continent on African scholarship and knowledge;</p> <p>Leverage the resources of African scholars in the Diaspora through more cooperation and exchange programs for sharing knowledge and driving the research agenda in Africa</p> <p>Develop private-public partnerships for private sector investment in research and other areas within the public tertiary education institutions</p> <p>Create new partnership models, based on co-equality, between African tertiary institutions and the external community (donors, higher education institutions, foreign scholars, foreign researchers, foreign research institutions, etc.)</p> <p>Initiate dialogues on the development of African philanthropy and community initiatives for funding higher education to change the notion of ‘who is a donor’</p> |