

Towards Partnership in Higher Education with Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction :

Higher education institutions in Africa can be traced back to two or three centuries B.C. Alexandria library and Museum were good manifestation to that. It was argued that for well over a millennium, the scholarly achievements of ancient Alexandria served as guiding lights for the great humanists of European Renaissance (1). During the early years of Christianity, the philosophical and theological speculations of Alexandria's clergy and the Ethiopian educational establishments constituted continuation to the earlier institutions.

Perhaps most remarkable to the creation of the modern University were the contributions of the Africa Islamic Universities , notably the University of Karawiyyin (founded 859 A.D.) and AL Azhar (found 969 A.D.) . These together with their academic achievements, had drawn an international community of students and staff .The academic standard of these institutions can be evaluated if scholars like the great historian and sociologist of all times, Ibn Khaldoun, was among the staff of AL Azhar during the period (1382-1421 A.D.)(2). The University of Timbuktu presented a different flavour since it was not centralised but had a number of independent schools (compuses). It is hoped that the present project (3) will uncover the great scholarly contributions of this University.

The major characteristics of these institutions were that they were indigenous, relevant and were responsive to their community's problems.

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The Colonial Era :

The European explorations of Africa and the slave trade (1600-1850 A.D.) were disruptive of Africa intellectual life. It disrupted the arts, crafts, manufacturing, agricultural production, peaceful trade and all notions of communal solidarity. The abolition of the trade thus involved the need for rehabilitation of the people and reconstruction of the continent. Thus the demand for Western education was growing by the nineteenth century.

Western type schools were introduced by missionaries who found it an efficient way for evangelization (4). On the other hand the colonial powers were reluctant to establish higher education institutions since they were very keen to limit financial commitments to the colonies and because they were aware of the fact that education and enlightenment were not in their colonial interests.

Due to the high cost of expatriate staff, they were forced to establish institutions with the sole objective of graduating junior and loyal staff needed to run the colonies. This was the start of modern higher education institutions in Africa .As such Forugh Bay College was established in Freetown in (1876), Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum in (1898), Makerere Government College in Kampala in (1921) ,Yaba Higher College in Lagos in (1909) etc . These colleges were run by expatriate academic and administrative staff and were linked to Metropolitan Universities of the colonial powers.

Unlike the British, the French philosophy of education in the colonies in Western and Central Africa was for the spread of the French secular culture and not for evangelization (5). This undermined the spread of missionary schools and left the masses uneducated except for elites who were encouraged to seek their education in France and were made to feel at home in Paris than in Africa . Until the second world war only one Teacher Training College for the whole of the French west Africa was set at Gore' in Senegal (5) . Later a school of Veterinary medicine and a polytechnic were established in Mali.

By the end of the Colonial Era (1960) , Sub-Saharan Africa had no more than twenty three University institutions .Most of the currently

independent states had no university . The institutions were alien and irrelevant to the African environment and culture.

Independence Era:

As the countries attained political independence, the inadequacy of the colonial university colleges was evident. Also it became a symbol of the acquired sovereignty to have autonomous and degree-granting institutions, thus ending affiliation to the universities in London and Paris. This did not go far enough to consider education philosophy and curricula due to external and internal factors: Externally, in the politics of independence the Colonial powers controlled the process of decolonization which resulted in tentative constitutions that were mandatory for a stipulated period of time and that were designed to extend the colonial legacy (6) .Zivenge (7) described the internal factor as a doctrinaire approach by African governments in accepting education policies without questioning their relevance in the new era. The universities continued to adopt curricula suitable to graduate employees and had never endeavored to train owners of production and entrepreneurs.

Nevertheless, the decade of independence made significant impacts on the development of higher education in Africa: An increase in the number of universities, students, and programs. By 1980, the number of universities in Sub-Saharan Africa had increased to 100 and only seven countries did not set up universities.

Post independence (1980-2000):

Expansion of universities continued due to population growth, improvement in secondary education and due to political ambition of politicians. This occurred despite the economic hardships that faced most of the countries: Rocketing oil prices, service of external debts, decline of the prices of exported raw materials, internal conflicts, etc. All these made public resources available to universities to dwindle. African governments depended heavily on aid agencies and accordingly African education had been intimately linked with the international donor community. Of these, the World Bank had adopted policies on structural adjustments that favored investment in general education rather than in higher education ,arguing that the return on investment was both too low and unjustifiable(8). It was stated that it was cheaper, more cost

effective and beneficial to train African students in universities abroad than to do so in Africa.

From 1985-1989, 17% of the world bank world wide education sector financing focused on higher education. For the same period from 1995-1999, the proportion allotted to higher education declined to 7% (9).

The World Bank lack of emphasis on tertiary education had resulted in the absence of higher education from the Poverty Reduction Strategies in African countries. This policy had given a severe blow to higher education in Africa. Not only by upholding aid from donor agencies but had encouraged African governments themselves to neglect and marginalize higher education.

The Status quo:

Despite the hundreds of public universities established, the enrollment ratio of students in Sub-Saharan Africa in the age group 18-23 is less than 5%; the world's lowest. This is to be compared with 50% in the developed countries. Thus the need for more universities can never be more emphasized.

This prompted the emergence of a large number of private universities in an astonishing rate. This also attracted a number of universities from the developed world to provide educational services in African countries, either by opening branches or through distance means. Three categories of universities are now in existence:

a- Public Universities:

As has been stated earlier, each country had inherited a university from the Colonial Era. These universities remained colonial. Since they paid greater attention to their standing in the eyes of the foreigners than to the relevance of their activities to the needs of their countries.

All subsequently established universities took the earlier universities as models and they themselves became colonial. They grew up with irrelevant goals, alien curriculum that hinders innovative and creative development, rules and regulations that distance the university from its community and that preserve the dependency relationship. Coupled to these are the problems of poor finance (internal and external) and the pressing need for expansion in enrollment. And in some circumstances, civil wars that have resulted in abandonment of campuses and the flight of staff and students in exile.

It is fair to say that public higher education in Africa is in crisis. It has not only failed to respond to the aspirations of the people, but also failed to sustain an acceptable standard of instruction or research and finally has failed to maintain its infrastructure, libraries and personnel. There is real fear that if this deterioration were to continue, complete collapse of institutions may result. This may not be allowed to happen physically for self pride, but it may happen through the process of the evaluation and accreditation that is currently underway.

b. Private Universities:-

A noticeable feature of the higher education institutions in Africa is the surge of Private Universities in the last few years. Two obvious reasons can explain the surge: "The public failure theory" as discussed earlier and the "demand absorption situation". The overwhelming majority of these private universities are church owned and church oriented (10). Thus evangelization will be the third reason for the unprecedented growth of private universities in Africa.

It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of these universities, since the number is continuously growing. The study undertaken by the Association of African universities on private education in Africa in 2000 had listed 80 private universities (10), but this is now outdated. The table below shows a comparative list of public and private universities in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa:

	Country	Public	Private	Remarks
1.	Kenya	7	8	
2.	Uganda	4	10	
3.	Tanzania	5	10	
4.	Zimbabwe	8	5	
5.	Mozambique	7	6	
6.	Nigeria	45	8/24	
7.	Ghana	8	5	
8.	Cameroon	6	1	+12 other private institutions
9.	Senegal	2	1	+42 other private institutions
10.	Sudan	33	3	+12 other private institutions

Comparative list of public and private universities in Sub-Saharan Africa (11). In Nigeria 8 private universities were reported in (11) in 2004 while 24 private universities were reported in (12) in 2006.

Despite the fact that the number of private universities matches that of public universities in many countries, the student enrollment is much higher in public universities.

The different education policies of the colonial powers noted earlier in the growth of church-oriented schools in British colonies can be clearly seen in the large number of church-oriented universities in former British colonies. The Sudan being an exception, since almost all private institutions are profit-driven.

c. Foreign Universities :

With Globalization and the inclusion of education in the GATS, cross-boarder education in Africa is gaining momentum. Although it did not, as yet, taken a large share in the higher education sector, however, with the free movement of multinationals, the affluent elites within the African communities will increasingly opt for the prestigious and accredited universities of the developed world, resident or abroad.

The Future and a possible Turkish Role :-

If Sub-Saharan Africa is to develop and contribute to the present knowledge and information era, then a vivid higher education sector must be a major actor. This requires the cooperation of all stake holders. External help is vital. It is fortunate that the World Bank ,after inflicting great damage to higher education in Africa, has admitted that its earlier policies were erroneous(9).

It is very difficult to interfere with the missions and objectives of both private and foreign education institutions. Attention is to be directed towards public institutions. They are in crisis and are looking for rescue.

For any party, the following options are available:

1. Feel unconcerned.
2. Adopt one-sided colonial policies.
3. Enter in partnership for the mutual benefits.

Our very presence in this conference rules out the first option .It is very difficult for the new comers (China, India and possibly Turkey) to win new friends by adopting the second option. Partnership for the benefit of both parties is the only reasonable option.

Cooperation agreements and twinning programs with some universities in countries of special interest can be established. Research projects, relevant to the African problems, (increasing crop productivity, fighting desertification, eradication of endemic diseases etc), can be initiated. If sincere effort is exerted and suitable finance is secured, success is the natural outcome. Higher education institutions will then feel confident enough to critically examine higher education philosophy, policies and curricula to obtain a real African University desperately needed for the development of the continent.

In return the other party's technology, expertise, goods and services will slowly diffuse to the African continent.

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