

Appendix 4

Speech by the Minister of State for Higher Education in Ghana Hon. Elizabeth Ohene on the occasion of the Launching of the DATAD database on 30th April 2003

Balme Annex, University of Ghana, Legon

Vice-Chancellors of the Universities of Ghana,

Secretary General of AAU,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to have been invited to this historic event, that marks a new milestone for higher education in Africa: The launching by the Association of African Universities of its *Database of African Theses and Dissertations* (DATAD).

I am also proud that the University of Ghana, particularly the Balme Library, has been chosen as the venue for the launch, in recognition of its contribution to higher education development in Ghana.

One of the key missions of higher education is to create, advance, and disseminate knowledge through research. This is the main pre-occupation of universities and other higher learning institutions the world over.

The emergence of new, global trends in the production and dissemination of knowledge has strongly influenced higher education, and Africa is no exception! The changes that are occurring in industrialized/developed countries, specifically on how to produce, organize and disseminate knowledge have implications for national education systems and universities in Africa.

Today's globalized world is putting special pressures on higher education in Africa. And there is the need to strike an appropriate balance between the global and local systems. Unless the engagement of our higher education system with the global order is guided by national objectives, we risk the danger of entrenching the already unequal power relations between the developed and developing worlds.

Information is a vital resource for any development undertaking and a critical resource in higher education and research development. Those who have timely, accurate and appropriate information stand to benefit more from world resources than those without.

African nations face particular challenges in this connection: the growing *digital divide*, and *North-South scientific* gap. Developed countries have 10 times as many scientists and technicians per capita as developing countries, and produce 84 percent of the scientific articles and 94 percent of new patents. While 50 percent of the people in developed nations are connected to the Internet, no more than 2 percent are on-line in Africa. Yet it is on the basis of this technological infrastructure that new economies are being built.

The *brain drain* is another very real obstacle to improved education systems in the Third World. An estimated one-third of foreign students studying in the U.S. do not return to their home countries. Corrective government policies ought to reflect an awareness of this problem.

For example, new information technologies and distance learning could be used to retain talent at home. Higher education institutions in Africa need to tap this resource to improve teaching, learning and research.

Even though African universities and institutions of higher learning generate a lot of research-based information in the form of theses, dissertations, memoirs etc, these are neither indexed in major databases nor do they feature in the international literature.

These research outputs also have limited circulation even within the institutions in which they are produced. This is so because coordination, dissemination and publication of research results in Africa are hampered by lack of adequate structures.

The advent of information and communication technology (ICT), threatens to marginalize African scholars and African scholarly output. This threat is real in a globalized world where “reviewing research literature” is increasingly limited to “review of electronic literature”.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is noteworthy that in recent years, most institutions of higher learning in Africa have made considerable investments in ICT infrastructure development. A strategic use of ICT and Local Area Networks (LANs) has great potential to support local research development.

The DATAD program by the AAU was conceived to address the problem of production, management, access and dissemination of research information from universities and institutions of higher learning in Africa. A three-year pilot project was started in February 2000. The DATAD database is a major output of the pilot phase.

The eleven (11) institutions involved in the pilot project are: University of Zimbabwe, Addis Ababa University, Cheikh Anta Diop University, CODESRIA, University of Dar es Salaam, Eduardo Mondlane University, Ain Shams University, Yaounde1 University, University of Ghana, Makerere and Kenyatta Universities. Of these, eight (8) have submitted between 1,000 and 2,500 records into the DATAD launching database while three are finalizing work on their records.

The DATAD database serves multiple roles:

- ?? as a research results dissemination tool it gives a summary of the findings;
- ?? as a networking tool it gives the names of the authors, the supervisors, and their contact information;
- ?? as a quality control tool it serves to bring to light the quality of research undertaken in African Universities;
- ?? it serves to identify research gaps and reduce duplication;
- ?? as a motivation tool, it puts to light the works of African scholars and lecturers.

The database will be available on the Internet through the AAU-DATAD homepage and on CD-ROM.

I have no doubt that DATAD is a VERY important program. AAU should be supported to sustain it while ALL African institutions that have graduate programs should be encouraged to join.

It is now my great pleasure to declare the DATAD online database duly launched.

Thank you.