

CHALLENGES FACING AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES SELECTED ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

African universities have shared fully in the substantial ferment to which the world of higher education has been subject over the past two decades and more. The causes of this ferment lie in transformations in political economy at both the global and local levels, in factors shaping the world of knowledge generation and application more particularly, as well as in specific economic and social demands of the national and local communities in which universities are situated. This account of the challenges facing Africa's universities will, therefore, be approached from the perspective that as they, like others the world over, struggle to reposition themselves in the changing conditions the strategies they adopt must take full account of these multiple transformations. Thus, a brief review of the relevant global and local factors will set the scene for a survey of some of the key challenges confronting the university sector on the continent, and the approaches adopted for dealing with them. From the years immediately following the attainment of political independence in most African countries, the typically young and small university sector was invested with high national aspirations and supported from public resources. The situation is a good deal more problematic today, with reduced levels of public funding for a hugely expanded and diversified sector, and a questioning of the mission and mandate, the character, and the proper place of the sector, its institutions and their products in society.

Change Factors

To help us understand the situation, it is necessary to refer to the broad range of changes that have conditioned developments, in Africa as elsewhere. The starting points are the fundamental alterations in the key drivers of wealth generation and power relations, caused by transformations in the global political economy and the heightened significance of information and knowledge to production, management and the services throughout the world. The main elements of this change process are the increasing pace of globalisation; the "commodification" of knowledge and the centrality of its generation and

application to social and economic development; the increased openness of national borders to flows not only of goods and services but of knowledge and information; the enhanced mobility and global market for high-skill labour; and the new organisational forms and delivery modes that have resulted from the ICT revolution. Against that background, the explosive growth in the stock of global knowledge and the rapid rate of obsolescence have led to a steady shift from the importance of acquiring a particular body of knowledge to developing the skills for acquiring new knowledge and the capacity for using knowledge as a resource in addressing societal needs. These developments have brought, on the one hand, demands for new kinds of knowledge, new modes of knowledge production and dissemination, and on the other, greater possibilities for effective networking and partnership. The result is a complete transformation of the environment of knowledge institutions such as universities and other higher education organisations.

The impact of these transformation drivers has been heightened in Africa, since the mid 1970s, by economic and social changes specific to the continent. These include the virtual collapse of many national economies following the secular declines in the terms of international trade against economies dependent on the production and export of primary products; the descent into autocratic military or civilian one-party governance systems in many countries; civil wars and wars between neighbouring states; and more recently, the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Added to the historic handicaps of underdevelopment bequeathed by colonialism, these movements blunted the ability of African countries to take advantage of opportunities offered by the current phase of globalisation, while exposing them to all its negative effects. In relation to universities, the relevance of these developments was the general retreat of the state from social provisioning and the declines in the level of real resources available to African higher education, at the very time that the role of knowledge in social development became accentuated. In the result universities, in common with other social institutions took severe body blows, especially in relation to research and graduate study, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as will be shown later.

Universities, in common with other social institutions, face yet another set of constraints. These consist of substantial accountability demands placed on them by a variety of internal and external constituents and stakeholders. In the case of universities these range from government, the main funder, demanding more stringent accounting for resource use and a bigger say in the agenda of universities – from access standards and numbers to curricular relevance and income-generation – to politicians, civil society and business groups, donors and external partners, each pushing sectional interests on the universities. Added to all this is the sheer weight and increasing diversification of the

expanded student population. While the university can ill afford to ignore stakeholder interests and demands, the cumulative pressure of such demands in the last two decades or so has put into very serious jeopardy the minimum levels of university autonomy in the design and execution of its intellectual agenda that has for decades been regarded as a condition for the effective discharge of its mandate. As African universities seek ways to cope with the variety of challenges and still thrive, this crowding of their space is proving a very serious limitation in many instances.

The “African” university in context

“ The national development project”

Widespread university education in Africa is essentially a post-colonial phenomenon. [2] Excluding North Africa with its different history, and South Africa with its special circumstances of both history and resources [3], only 18 out of the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa had universities or university colleges before 1960. [4] With the approach of political independence or soon thereafter, many African countries regarded the establishment of local universities as a major part of the post-colonial national development project. [5] The new universities were to help the new nations build up their capacity to develop and manage their resources, alleviate the poverty of the majority of their people, and close the gap between them and the developed world. In this sense the establishment of the new universities should be seen in the same light as the various efforts at nation-building, including the setting up of national industrial and commercial undertakings, national airlines and shipping lines, and the whole notion of import-substitution industrialisation. The new nations, set on valorising their national sovereignty by laying the basis for independent national self-development, saw the setting up of these national institutions, including universities as crucial measures to that end.

Mandate, mission and levels of support

Universities, with their promise of indigenous knowledge, local production of expertise and of cadres to staff the public services, the professions and industry, and generally of giving meaning to national sovereignty, not to mention the prestige they brought, were “unambiguously national institutions set up for national purposes”. In this Africa was not unique, as is indicated by the history of the land-grant universities in the United States of America, as well as university development in Japan of the 1880s and the Soviet Union in the last century (Coleman, 1994: 335). Again, it is no accident that most of the universities of Latin America were set up directly after independence. Other instances include the establishment of the University of Berlin immediately after defeat in the Napoleonic wars as a means of revitalising Prussia. The objective of all these new institutions was much the same – to serve the public interest by providing home-grown leadership in areas in need of rapid material and social development. Like these other “national” development

initiatives, the African university was invariably an explicitly *public* undertaking financed and supported from public sources. [6] Again, this was not unique to university education. Direct state involvement in the health and education sectors, and the range of state enterprises in agriculture, industry, banking and other services all reflected both the need of newly-independent African countries for rapid movement on all social and economic fronts and the contemporary orthodoxy of development economics that assigned to the state a decisive leadership role in these areas.

What were perhaps special in the African situation were the degree of specificity and narrowness with which the purposes were stated in some instances and the generosity of the public support to the new universities. Thus, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) of Mozambique was “nationalised” in 1980 by the new revolutionary government and given the task of producing human resources for the new socialist economy (Mario, 2003: 8), while the University of Brazzaville from its inception in 1971 had the mission of “training ... national executives within the spirit of scientific socialism” (Mbemba, 2003). Earlier, the Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar had been linked to the Senegalese drive for intellectual recovery and the generation of knowledge to counter colonial ethnography. More generally, one of the functions assigned to the University of Ghana was that of promoting African unity.

As to the levels of support, the entire cost of establishment – buildings, equipment, and other facilities - was usually borne by the state. In most cases running costs were also a charge on the public purse, with students paying no tuition fees - in the few instances where they did, it was a token amount [7] Indeed, for years university students received a stipend in addition to free board and lodging in many countries! This situation continued well into the 1980s, when non-tuition subsidies came to be gradually withdrawn and replaced by subsidised student loans, scholarships and bursaries. These changes were much slower in the Francophone countries, where to this day, student services absorb up to half of a university’s recurrent budget in some instances, and where attempts to reduce or remove the subsidies have met with severe resistance from politically active student organisations. [8]

This level of support reflected the novelty of the university experience in the colonial and immediate post-independence years, the fact that few could then afford to pay their way through university, and the weight of social expectations of the new institutions. It also reflected the explicitly public purposes for which the universities had been set up. The assumption of sovereign status imposed on the new countries the obligation of running the public services and professions without colonial personnel, and delivering development on a scale and at a pace not conceivable in the colonial era. For this,

persons capable of running the state machinery, the professions, business and other civil institutions were absolutely and urgently needed. Also urgently needed were persons and systems for continuing and expanding the research support services provided to agriculture, health, etc., under the colonial administration. Such was the development ambition, the extent and urgency of the need, and the levels of optimism at the time that no expense was spared in supporting the universities and other institutions which were expected to provide the means for elaborating and implementing the national social and economic development project.

In relation to person-power production to replace colonial officials and professionals, Africa's universities are acknowledged to have performed beyond expectation. (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 192). Even in respect of research and policy support, the record was not all bleak, though it fell short of the very high expectations. Products of the national universities and other higher education institutions took increasing charge of the local science and technology infrastructure and its management, and were responsible for most of the research and development activities conducted in their countries. Today, the brain drain notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine where Africa would be in these matters without her universities and their operation during the "lost years" of the 1980s!

In the first years of political independence the overall mandate and mission of Africa's higher education and its institutions, especially the universities were clear enough to be taken for granted by all. However, differences soon began to surface. Impatience with the colonial model of liberal arts and basic sciences graduates moving into the services and business began to be voiced by those, especially among political leaders, concerned with the building up of high level, more specialised skills for the public service and leadership of the professions. This came to a head at the UNESCO/Economic Commission for Africa Conference of university leaders and outside participants held in Tananarive, Madagascar in 1962. The consensus at the conference saw universities as a "key instrument for national development", giving rise to the notion of the "developmental university". However, the colonial birthmarks were still prominent, and the modified mission implied by the Tananarive consensus did not quite materialise. A decade later, at a workshop organised in Accra by the Association of African Universities (AAU) (itself conceived at the Tananarive conference) the African university leaders and policy makers who dominated the event sought to give meaning to the workshop theme, "Creating the African University: Emerging issues in the 1970s". They agreed on the need to have African university problems defined and solutions proposed and implemented by Africans, to give the universities a truly "African identity". In their criticism of the colonial hangover and continued dominance by outsiders they were not acknowledging failure, but rather affirming a will to be more proactive and self-directed in response to new demands.

(Yesufu, 1973) Expectations remained high, but no higher than the general levels of optimism and confidence in the future. Except for those who lived through the experience, it is difficult to capture the purposefulness and positive atmosphere of those years. Yet within a decade of the Accra Workshop, the acceleration of major developments at the global, continental and national levels were to destabilise the environment of higher education in Africa and erode the basis of this early optimism, and the general confidence in Africa's universities, in common with other public institutions. As further background to the current challenges, we now set out briefly the major changes relevant to our account.

The environment changes – globalisation and its discontents

The truly revolutionary changes in technology, communications, geo-politics, etc., that have occurred in the last thirty years or so, and their impact on all aspects of life throughout the world are well-known. Of particular interest for this discussion are their multiple implications for knowledge generation and universities as knowledge centres. These too have been widely discussed (see, e.g., Carnoy, 2000; Castells, 1996,1997,1998; Gibbons, 1998; Sawyerr, 1999) and need not be spelt out here. What would be useful is an itemisation of some of the key features of the process in order to specify the altered environment and as background to the comments on some of the challenges that face Africa's universities today.

A key feature of economic globalisation is the increasingly integrated cross-border organisation of economic and financial activity across the globe. [9] This had both policy and technical bases. Against the background of the open international trading system established after the Second World War, the liberalisation of exchange controls in the leading industrial countries in the 1970s and the later deregulation of world money markets, opened up the world market in a way previously unimagined. On the basis of these developments transnational corporations, in their quest for competitive advantage, implemented strategies for world-wide investment, production, sourcing and marketing that led to a massive dispersal and reintegration of production across the globe. As financiers and speculators took advantage of the possibilities for moving large amounts of short-term money from one jurisdiction to the other instantaneously, this set in train massive flows of trade and finance across national borders, often beyond the sovereign control of states, and unified 'the world market' in a way never attained before.

At the technical level, spectacular developments in microelectronics, information technology, biotechnology and materials science, and their application to production, management and marketing have revolutionised production in the leading industries of the world. Among the results have been a steady reduction in the amount of material consumed in the production of a given output in the advanced sectors of industry, a

relative reduction in the rate of consumption of industrial raw materials, and a decline in the material intensity of the growth of the GDP in the industrialised countries. This, in turn, has consolidated the tendency to oversupply of primary products in international trade, with trade in primary commodities growing ever more slowly than trade in technology-intensive manufactures and services. [See [Fig_1](#)] This explains the secular long-run movement in the terms of trade against producers and exporters of primary commodities - where the same volume of exports of primary products enables a country to import less and less from outside – reducing their import capacity even as it predisposes them to external indebtedness.

At the national level, the resulting decline in export volumes as well as the relative decline in the price of primary products in world trade in the 1980s and 1990s, the mishandling of exchange rates and of external reserves, and the huge external debt overhang together created major resource gaps for the countries of Africa. This put serious pressure on their import capacity and the availability of resources for essential economic and social investment. The results included increased dependence of the typical sub-Saharan Africa country on aid from the developed countries, which was never going to be enough to offset the resource shortfalls. These were some of the factors behind the cycle of economic and social crises, which has been the lot of sub-Saharan Africa to this day.

Concurrent with these material developments, was the rise of neo-liberal ideology in the 1980s. The pro-market/anti-state bias of this ideology was both an outcome of the specific form of globalisation in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century, and a means for reinforcing those material forces, by pushing for and facilitating the removal of barriers to the flow of private capital in the domestic and international spheres. Coinciding with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of the alternative vision of society by the end of the 1980s, this gave rise to the unchallenged hegemony of capitalism and neo-liberal ideology, which came to be portrayed in many quarters as necessary elements of globalisation. Through the conflation of globalisation with the neo-liberal agenda and its promotion as the unstoppable movement of our times, a major dose of mythology was injected into the discourse on globalisation – the myth of the inevitability, almost “naturalness” of the neo-liberal agenda. This combination of reality and myth in the globalisation discourse has had a profound impact on contemporary life and development. The *reality* of globalisation - deriving from movements in economy and production - erodes the capacity of the typically marginalised and dependent sub-Saharan African state to generate enough production, savings and investment to ensure sustainable development. For its part, the *ideology* of neo-liberalism and the institutional arrangements that promote it, limit the policy instruments available to the state for

intervening in the market place to ensure the provision of the basic needs of its people, thereby restricting the state's capacity to fulfil its principal function.

The collapse of many national economies in Africa under these forces and the accompanying destabilisation of social structures threw all institutions, including those of higher education, into a prolonged crisis. The ensuing struggle to survive and find new directions in rapidly deteriorating conditions is within our personal experience. A variety of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) were introduced in the 1980s and 1990s to reverse the economic and social crises. These programmes were intended, first, to give freer reign to market forces by removing rigidities in the production, pricing, marketing and exchange rate regimes. They also sought to cut back the role of the state, downsizing it and reducing its reach. All this was to be combined with the rapid opening up of the economy to international competition. Whatever the benefits of SAPs – and this is a much-contested issue - they have entailed enormous social costs, including the de-industrialisation of national economies and the substantial loss of national control over economic and social policy-making. The results are yet new challenges to Africa's universities - the downgrading of university funding (in favour of basic education) and the pressure on them to adjust to the severe austerity regimen imposed by the various economic stabilisation policies, at the same time as they were pressured to increase enrolment and maintain quality levels, without commensurate increases in resources. [10]

The reform effort – a comment

While some of the most perceptive analyses of the fundamental structural changes that have occurred in society over the past two decades have come from the universities, they showed little realisation of anything like the full implications of those changes for higher education itself and their own institutions. Thus, until recently, the primary preoccupation of university leadership appeared to have been limited to minimising the impact of the social changes on their institutions, so they could continue in virtually the same direction and at the same pace - in short, restore the levels of government subvention, and return to “normal” operations! Yet, even without the economic crises of the last decade, it should have been obvious that, with enrolment almost quadrupling from 1975 to 1985, and trebling again in the following decade ([Fig 2](#) [11], public subventions, the mainstay of all our universities, could not be sustained at levels that would enable the hugely expanded universities to provide a quality learning environment, etc. Even less could they be expected to support research, including fieldwork, significant scientific experiments and industrial attachments and, at the same time provide board and lodging for students and municipal services for the university community.

National governments came to this realisation earlier than the universities and other higher education institutions in most instances, partly in reaction to the conditionalities and policy advice of the international financial and donor agencies in the era of structural adjustment [12]. The typical reaction of governments was to respond to the economic imperative by emphasising cost-cutting and cost-recovery by the universities, while accommodating the political pressure of unmet demand for university places by pushing for increased enrolment. A further factor was the policy of privileging expenditure on basic education at the expense of higher education, a posture reflecting the policy positions of the World Bank and leading donor agencies, as well as the argument that the social rates of return on investments in basic education were higher than in higher education. [13]

With all this occurring at a time when the under-resourced and run-down universities were having to cope with bloated enrolments, it was not surprising that attempted reforms were met with resistance by the institutions. Clearly, such reforms, challenging long-held assumptions and threatening established interests, were unlikely to be welcome news to the university community under the best of circumstances. Matters were compounded by the autocratic nature of the military and one-party government regimes of the time, which had little legitimacy for effecting any real mobilisation behind the reforms, despite the many committees, meetings, fora, etc. Moreover, the reduced means available to the state limited its options for defining and providing appropriate incentives for viable progressive reforms. In any event, the typically high-handed manner of the introduction of the reforms and the disruptive effect of the frequently violent interactions between state and institutions can be seen, in retrospect, to have delayed the acceptance by university leadership and the wider university community of the need for radical transformations.

“There is no doubt that the introduction of the reform programme [in Ghana] and the vigour of its prosecution have driven the universities to take some positive measures, many of which have been under consideration internally for years. At the same time, it can be argued that the manner of its introduction and attempted implementation generated stronger resistance to the programme than was necessary, leading to avoidable delays in addressing problems acknowledged to be in need of urgent attention, and the long-term alienation of important sections of the university community from the Government and its education policies.” (Sawyer, 1994: 48)

Within the last decade there have been strong indications that the situation is changing, that increasing numbers of university leaders have come round to accepting that what was happening was not simply a disturbance of the normal order of things, calling for little more than measures aimed at restoring the old order. The realisation has dawned that many of the assumptions of the preceding three or four decades needed to be fundamentally challenged; that modes of work and organisation, as well as expenditure priorities needed to be seriously adjusted. In addition, the strong trend to democracy and the liberalised political atmosphere in most countries in the 1990s facilitated genuine engagement among the key players in the field - government and university community.

In this atmosphere, the specific problems of African higher education have begun to engage serious attention, both within Africa and within the donor community. Several African governments and institutions have undertaken major reviews and strategic planning, and the leading donors to African education, which had for over a decade turned away from higher education support, have started looking anew for ways of helping to support the re-energisation of African higher education. [14]

If these reform endeavours are not to fail, or indeed make matters worse, it is important to appreciate the true nature of the challenges facing African higher education, taking into account, its origins and specific features [15]. These latter would include such issues as:

- ✍ The colonial and immediate post-colonial origins of most of Africa's systems and institutions, as reflected in the fact that the vast majority of the universities are public, with mandates which define them explicitly as part of the national development project;
- ✍ The small number of universities at the apex of the educational pyramid in most countries (Fig. 3) (with major exceptions), shouldering the entire burden of higher education leadership – a factor that limits the scope for diversification;
- ✍ Exploding enrolment, side by side with huge unmet demand; (Figs 2 & 4)
- ✍ Low national and average household incomes, with the result that higher education represents a heavier charge on national and average household incomes in Africa than anywhere else (see Figs. 5 & 6 [16], even though in per capita terms higher education expenditure is lower in Africa than elsewhere;
- ✍ Generally low levels of literacy (Fig. 7) which, combined with the pervasive poverty at both the national and household levels, means that, even under the best of conditions there will be difficulty in sustaining higher education at levels of coverage and quality appropriate to current needs;
- ✍ Poor infrastructure for teaching and research, and weak links to the global knowledge system;
- ✍ Increased diversity in the demands on higher education - from governments, students, the community and the productive sector;
- ✍ The rise of market ideology, with its predictable impact in all social sectors; and
- ✍ The diversification of the national higher education systems, with the increasing presence of private tertiary institutions, domestic and foreign-based, as well as off-campus sites for teaching and research.

Thus, in addition to facing in more acute form the major challenges of higher education world-wide - intensification of the pressure for new knowledge; resource shortages, greater accountability for resource use, etc. – African universities have to deal with

challenges specific to their condition: operating for decades in face of autocratic governance systems; the redefinition of mission and mandate; dramatic loss of quality at this time of greatest competition; crucial staff shortfalls, etc. Against this sombre background, the African university is obliged to reposition itself to (a) support the national effort to meet essential human needs in a sustainable manner; and (b) contribute to the competitiveness of the nation and its enterprises through the development and application of science, technology and other forms of knowledge appropriate to its condition.

In what follows, an attempt will be made to identify some of these special challenges, how they are being handled, and what more could be done. It must be acknowledged at the start the impossibility of capturing the full diversity and complexity of the political and economic context and the differential impact on higher education development. Again, given the vastness of the subject, we concentrate on a few aspects only - the patterns and scale of university enrolment, and their relation to new forms of social exclusion; movements in some indirect indicators of quality and the risk of over-extension; and system differentiation and “the public good” dimension of the university function. [17] It is our expectation that comment on this limited set of issues will serve to generate discussion of the general problem of repositioning the universities of Africa for the tasks ahead of them.

THE KEY CHALLENGES

Access and Social Equity

Capacity and enrolment expansion

A striking feature of the higher education terrain in Africa has been the rapid increase in the number and variety of institutions as well as the levels of enrolment since political independence in the 1960s. From a low of 52 in 1960, the number of universities almost trebled to 143 by 1980, and more than doubled to 316 by 2000 (See [Fig 8](#)). The vast bulk consisted of public universities, which accounted for almost all the increase till the 1980s. The number of *private* universities, estimated at seven in 1960, remained below 20 till the mid-1980s, only to begin a rapid climb, from 27 in 1990 to an estimated 71 within ten years and 84 two years later. (See [Fig. 9](#)) Overall student enrolment increased at an equally striking rate. From an estimated total of 181,000 in 1975, there was a three-fold increase within five years, according to published figures, to over 600,000 by 1980. After something of a lull the numbers more than doubled again in a decade, to 1,750,000 by 1995. (See [Fig 2](#)) [18]

What was striking about the spurt of expansion of both institutions and enrolment in the 1990s was the acceleration in the rate of establishment of *private universities*. (See Fig 9). Though their number is still low and student enrolment quite small relative to the public institutions, their rapid spread represents a new departure in higher education provision in Africa. Evidence of this more recent expansion, though not yet fully captured in the official statistics, can be seen from case study material from selected countries. Fig. 10) From our selection, the mover in the 1980s was Kenya, which went from 2 private universities in 1980 to 9 by 1990. In the 1990s it was Tanzania (from 1 in 1990 to 11 by 2000); Uganda (2 to 10); Congo (0 to 4) and Senegal (0 to 3). In the last couple of years, the movers have been Burundi, which went from none in 2000 to 4 by 2002, and Ghana.

The case of Ghana is particularly striking. In 1990, there were three public universities with a total enrolment of just under ten thousand (10,000) students, and no private universities. By the academic year 2000/2001 the numbers had risen to five public universities and seven private universities [19], with a total combined enrolment of just under 43,245 made up of 40,673 in the public, and around 2500 in the private universities. The trend has been just as sharp in Mozambique, where enrolment at the University of Laurenço Marques (later Universidade Eduardo Mondlane) stood at 2433 at independence and the start of the civil war in 1975. After dropping to 750 within three years, it climbed back to 4000 by 1990. Less than ten years later, the number had trebled to over 12,000. Similar stories can be told almost everywhere. Thus, in the Republic of Congo, the number of students at the Université Marien N'gouabi grew from 3785 in 1976 to 19,000 by 1997, while in Nigeria the rise was from 176,000 in 1989/90 to 376,000 a decade later.

Another general feature of this expansion of higher education has been its persistence all through the social, political and economic upheavals of the 1980's and 1990's, as well as the civil and other wars in several countries. Thus the increases in enrolment in the Republic of Congo [20] and Mozambique, noted above, occurred despite civil wars. Indeed in the latter case six new institutions were established over the period of the civil war, a period which saw Mozambique become the poorest country in the world. (Mbemba, 2003; Mario *et al*, 2003)

The pressure to increase higher education enrolment in Africa reflects three main factors. The first, the historic factor, is the need to fill the substantial pent-up demand arising from conditions in the colonial and immediate post-colonial period, when opportunity for local university education was restricted in virtually all African countries. Also important was the specific need to staff the expanding public services, the professions and business in newly independent states. These considerations explain the enrolment explosion in the

first years of independence. The second factor is the high rate of population growth, and the consequent youthfulness of the population in virtually all African countries [21]. Large pools of children of school-going age pressed for entry into secondary schools. This prompted the third factor, namely, the very substantial expansion of both primary and secondary education, leading to sustained increases in the pool of secondary school graduates. For instance, in 1980, Uganda had 510 government-aided secondary schools, with 37,000 pupils. By 1996, the numbers had risen to 621 and 256,000, respectively. (Musisi, 2003) Tanzania experienced a 60% increase in secondary school enrolment between 1990 and 1998 (Mkude and Cooksey, 2003), while Burundi is reported to have experienced an explosion in secondary school enrolments between 1985 and 1993 (Shabani, 2001). As to the pool of applicants qualified for university admission, the figures for Uganda were 7,472 in 1994 rising to 24,000 in 2000. Of the latter, only a third could be admitted into university. The proportions of admissions in Ghana and Nigeria were 33% and 12% respectively. All these factors created enormous social pressure for tertiary education, which accounts in part for the rapid enrolment expansions noted above.

It is noteworthy that these enrolment increases continued not only against the background of economic and political crises, but more specifically, despite serious reductions in employment avenues for university graduates. In a study of student attitudes in Nigeria, Lebeau observed that

“Even if the university as a direct passport to becoming an elite in the country is no longer a reality, our interviews revealed clearly that higher education as a pre-requisite to social climbing is an ideology that is still widely supported in Nigeria”. (Lebeau, 2000: 165)

This persistence of pressure for university education in the face of diminishing employment opportunities has been explained by the notion of “the qualification-escalation ratchet” mechanism. As Dore put it:

“If you have set your sights ... on a modern sector job, and if you find that your junior secondary certificate does not get you one, there is nothing to be done except press on and try to get a senior secondary certificate, and if that doesn't work to press on to the university”. (Quoted in Coleman, 1994: fn. 24) [22]

Thus, neither the prospect nor the reality of graduate unemployment is likely to reduce the pressure for university education any time soon.

Participation rate

Despite the remarkable expansion of enrolment, the gross enrolment ratio (GRE), that is, the proportion of young people aged 19-24 that is in university, is, on average lower in Africa than anywhere else, and can be considered inadequate to the demands of the modern knowledge society. While the average GRE for all developing countries went from 5.2% in 1980, to 9.6% in 1996, the corresponding increase was from 1.6% to 3.6% for

sub-Saharan Africa. (See [Fig 4](#)). Yet these African averages mask considerable variation from one country to the next. Thus, while the ratio for countries like Burundi, Mozambique and Tanzania fell short of 1% in 1995, others at the high end were – Botswana: 5.3%; Gabon: 8% and South Africa: 18.1% (World Bank 2002: Annex 13). In view of this generally low participation rate, rapid and substantial increases in enrolment at all levels of the educational system can be justified as necessary for the well-being of society and the competitiveness of national economies in the present state of globalisation and the centrality of knowledge. There is thus considerable room for further enrolment expansion in order to meet the medium- to long-term demands of the knowledge society for high-level skills. In the ideal situation, policy in Africa should, in consequence, aim at providing the maximum opportunity for the highest number to participate in higher education. However, under current conditions, a number of limitations need to be noted. First is the absence of the resources required to provide, even at current levels of enrolment, for teaching and research at adequate quality levels, with obvious implications for educational quality generally. The second and related factor consists of stagnant national economies with already limited job openings for most graduates and poor prospects for self-employment. Thus massification of higher education would exacerbate an already difficult situation. A third and, in many respects, the most interesting feature is the fact that the expansion in enrolment has not led to a broadening of the social composition of the student body. To the contrary, all the evidence suggests that in combination with other developments, the pattern of access to university education is introducing novel forms of social exclusion. This will be examined further.

Implications for quality

The first implication of enrolment expansion at this rate and under present resource conditions concerns the issue of quality. Almost without exception, resources failed to match the rate of increase in enrolment. African universities were, therefore, called upon to do more with less in terms of infrastructure, teaching and research facilities and staff. The implications of this for the quality of teaching and research will be examined later.

New forms of social exclusion

For now we take up an issue posed by the observed patterns of access - equity and social exclusion. In the immediate postindependence years, the small numbers enrolled in Africa's universities tended to be drawn from different social classes and all parts of the country. While it was never a case of equitable representation from all parts and segments, the source of 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 [23].

Recent studies suggest that, despite explicit policy and much rhetoric on equitable access to education at all levels, the sources of recruitment into university have remained limited and, in important respects, may have become even narrower. 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. Data from the leading public universities in Ghana show that in 1999/2000, 2 out of 3 students admitted into the University of Ghana, and 3 out of 4 into the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the two oldest, largest and most prestigious of Ghana's universities, were drawn from only 50 out of the 500-plus secondary schools in the country, and that over two-thirds of the matriculants were resident in three of the ten regions of the country. Perhaps even more starkly, the top 18 schools (4% of the total) provided 40% and 46%, respectively, of admissions to the two universities. A review of these enrolment figures by subject area led to the conclusion that:

“... with our present education system, over 70% of our future doctors, scientists, engineers, architects, pharmacists, agriculturists, future managers and other professionals in the humanities including lawyers, accountants and administrators will emerge from just about 10% of our schools, with almost 50% of all these categories emerging from ... only 18 out of 504 Senior Secondary Schools.” (Addae-Mensah, 2000: 12)

Using the educational level of parents as an indicator of socio-economic origin of students and relying on survey data, Mario *et al.* arrive at similar conclusions for Mozambique. They found that 70% of the fathers of students at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (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, such as law, medicine, etc. [24]

These figures raise important questions about access and equity for traditionally marginalised groups and areas, and invite the closest interrogation of university enrolment patterns and their equity implications. Limited as it is to such a small number of each age group, university education in Africa contributes significantly to the upward mobility of all who receive it. [25] It is also invariably accompanied by a gravitation of such people to the major urban centres in the key regions of the country, where the better schools at both primary and secondary levels tend to be located. The upshot is that children of the better-off residents in the small number of urban centres tend to be better

prepared for entry into university, whatever the basis of selection - whether it be secondary school examination results or special university entrance examinations. This puts them at a significant advantage in the fierce competition for the limited numbers of university places. Thus the advantages of one generation tend to be reinforced in the next.

The discussion can be taken a step further, as school access could be used as a rough proxy for social class in the current circumstances of most African countries. Taking Ghana as an example, in the decades immediately following independence the best primary and secondary schools were the government and mission schools, which were reasonably spread throughout the country. As these schools were virtually free, they provided fairly open access for people in different geographical areas and varied economic circumstances, largely as a result of the policy of accelerated educational development pursued by the government of Kwame Nkrumah in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While representation was by no means even, there was representation nevertheless. The take-over of mission schools by the state, the progressive abdication by the state of its obligation to maintain quality schools at all levels in all parts of the country, and the increasing numbers seeking admission, combined with the increase in the number of private fee-charging schools altered the situation quite dramatically. Today, the payment of high school fees in the private schools and a variety of other charges even in the public system constitute a screen for entry into the better secondary schools. Because of the very tight competition for university places, extra classes at extra cost to parents have become indispensable for adequate performance in secondary school. Thus, even in the officially tuition-free public system, parents have to make substantial additional payments to improve the prospects of their children. Against this background, access to the top high-fee-paying primary and secondary schools and the expensive extra classes have come to reflect, in large measure, family wealth and status. It is on this basis that access to particular schools can be used as a proxy indicator for family income and status.

From this perspective the Ghana data on the restricted number and regional location of the secondary schools that dominate university admissions speak also to the narrowing of the social base from which students are drawn. In sum, the data show a skewing of opportunity for university admissions in favour of high income and residence in selected urban centres. Similarly a study of the situation in Senegal finds that most entrants into the two public universities, which have the highest standards and the most prestige, are from selected high schools in the four or five main cities. (N'diaye, 2001) As the children of privilege go to the better schools in the advantaged areas, the trend to the reinforcement of privilege from generation to generation is set. We have already referred

to Mayanja's study of Makerere University students. Mario, *et al.*, writing about the situation in Mozambique draw this sombre conclusion:

"The evidence suggests that there is a growing tendency for the educational system as a whole, and the field of higher education in particular to reproduce existing social inequalities. ... If measures are not taken to improve the chances of less privileged children (either by providing scholarships to private schools and/or in the long term strengthening the quality of government schools), we will witness, with the impossibility of social mobility through education, the consolidation of a closed socio-economic elite in Mozambique, concentrated in Maputo". (Mario, *et al.*, 2003: 30-31) [26]

There is another dimension to this bias in favour of the already favoured. Despite the relative decrease in state support for higher education and the rise of the number of fee-charging private institutions, university education in Africa remains quite heavily subsidised by the state. Thus, to the extent that university admissions favour the privileged the public subsidy goes disproportionately to the already privileged. This tendency to regressive social spending appears to have reached exaggerated proportions, say, in Uganda where out of a total of over 25,000 university students, about 3,000 (less than 12%) received the performance-based public subsidy in the early 1990s, the rest being either in private universities or paying fees at Makerere, the premier public university. To make matters worse, Mayanja's study shows that a disproportionate share of those enjoying the subsidy were students from the high-income group, who attended the best and most expensive primary and secondary schools and obtained the high grades required for free university education. A study of the situation in Nigeria similarly concludes that

"On the whole, the most expensive [and best] universities, in terms of tuition fees have a student population coming from a more well-to-do background than those in the more expensive [and less good] universities, which sell their admission at a high price". (Lebeau, 2000: 153)

All this falls in line with the observation of Patrinos' that in the typical developing country, the top 20% of the income bracket appropriate more than 30% of public subsidies while the bottom 20% appropriate between 5% and 15%. (Patrinos, 2002) However, this should not be read as support for the removal of all public subsidies from higher education, for that would almost certainly kill off altogether the limited access opportunities for the disadvantaged, given the notoriously poor record of scholarships, bursaries and loan schemes to equalise access. What it argues for is effective means-testing and creative and proactive measures for redressing the equity balance at all levels [27].

So what?

One of the factors creating the screen for higher education access is the reliance on secondary school results or university entrance examinations, which for the reasons given

above, tend to favour the top schools and a few selected areas. What if other assumptions were made? What if we started from the position, for instance, that the top 5% to 10% of the population, whatever their school, geographical location, family background or income status could, with such support as may be necessary to correct for initial handicaps, perform at the same level? What if it were, therefore, general university admissions policy that the top 5%, 10%, or 12% of students from each school, or district, or region in the country, should be given admission in proportion to the available university places in the public system – provided only that they met the minimum requirement for admission? A slightly more complex formula has been suggested. Suppose secondary schools were categorised into A, B, and C according to endowment, performance, etc. Then the formula will allocate university places as follows:

- ✍ 50% on merit, i.e. to the top performers in the school-leaving or university entrance examinations, whoever they are, wherever they come from- as at present;
- ✍ 15% to students in each of category A, B, and C schools (who did not qualify as above); and
- ✍ 5% to “special cases”, that is, the disabled, the socially vulnerable, residents of otherwise underrepresented areas, etc. (Opoku, 2000).

While the specifics may be varied, the formula seeks to balance merit with equity.

A similar approach could be adopted in dealing with the gender imbalances evident right through the system. What if the policy was to admit, on a 50/50 basis, all men and women who met the minimum entrance requirements? This reasoning has been taken even further at the University for Development Studies in Ghana. It is proposed that *all* women applicants who met the minimum entrance requirements be admitted. There will have to be supplementary pre-admission or remedial help. While this will be an experiment in a new and small university in a largely disadvantaged region of the country, it is a bold initiative that would bear watching.

To conclude this discussion, we advert to James Coleman’s apt warning that “... fundamental group inequalities in society tend to be powerfully self perpetuating and the fragile and vulnerable apex of the education system is not the place where they will be resolved...” (346). While we ignore such warnings at our peril, we need to look at our own experience. The experience of Ghana, as argued above, was that the generalised use of public subsidies at both the pre-university and university levels had some initial success in equalising access opportunities across considerable social and geographic differences, while the drastic reduction or removal of those subsidies has contributed to new forms of social exclusion. These crucial issues call for more systematic studies than

have been done so far, using more robust and refined indicators than schools attended, residence, parental language, etc. Such studies should inform the crafting of social policy in this matter, given its very grave implications for equity and social stability.

Quality and Relevance

The principal contribution of a university to society turns on the quality of the knowledge it generates and imparts, the habits of critical thought and problem-solving it institutionalises and inculcates in its graduates, and the values of openness and democratic governance it promotes and demonstrates. These are essentially subjective phenomena, which pose enormous problems of definition and attribution. For present purposes, the easiest means of getting a handle on the issue of the quality of performance of universities is to use indirect indicators such as:

- ?? the calibre 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 worldwide knowledge.

Quality in African universities- the rise ...

In the colonial and early independence years, the question of the quality of the universities in Africa was hardly ever in issue as the institutions were able to operate at close to “international standards”, in effect, the standards of the relevant colonial power. There were two main reasons for this: (a) the nature and the extent of the relationship that the African institutions and their faculty had with metropolitan institutions helped set and maintain metropolitan standards; and (b) the small sizes of the universities and the relatively substantial support from the state meant that they had the resources for doing quality work. To take up the first point, relations between the universities and the metropolis took a variety of forms. From the start, they were modelled after metropolitan examples, and typically started off as colleges or affiliates of metropolitan institutions. For the ex-British colonies, the first post-war universities were set up as colleges “in special relationship” with the University of London. Staff appointments, syllabi and examinations were controlled from London. [28] In any event, as even the local staff had invariably been trained and socialised in the metropolitan institutions, local institutions followed the metropolitan models faithfully. French and Belgian policy had a similar effect. This general feature continued into independence when, often with subsidies from the former colonial powers, metropolitan staff continued in service at these institutions. Again, initially with metropolitan subsidies, faculty and potential faculty of the institutions obtained scholarships and other facilities for general staff upgrading and graduate education at foreign universities. This ensured substantial continuity in the qualifications, values and attitudes of staff as well as the curriculum and pedagogy at the new African universities.

In the British system the external examiner scheme, under which the teaching and examination processes of the new institutions were subjected to oversight by faculty from metropolitan institutions, helped to maintain the standards established during the period of direct tutelage. In addition, collaborative research involving local and expatriate researchers, as well as joint publications in both metropolitan and local journals ensured the maintenance of international standards in research and publication. Though the universities opened up to the wider world after independence, bringing in experience from the United States, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, China and Cuba, the British, French and Belgian influence long persisted, especially in what might be called the “first generation” of universities.

The second factor that helped to ensure the quality levels of the institutions was the crucial fact that for many years the institutions remained small with low enrolments and, in addition to substantial state subventions, benefited from support by foreign governments and international donor agencies and foundations. Staff enjoyed reasonably good conditions of service, and there was in place an adequate staff development programme which ensured that young faculty moved on to higher qualifications, while senior faculty had leave and other opportunities for self-renewal and updating. All this meant that even after the cessation of direct external tutelage, the autonomous institutions had the staff, the systems, the values, the resources, and the facilities to maintain quite high levels of teaching and scholarship. [29] Indeed, vibrant local research with a strong component of fieldwork led not only to the production of international quality work but also to the rise of acknowledged centres of excellence in particular fields. The list would include the Makerere Institute of Social Research; the “Historical Schools” of Ibadan University and the University of Dar-es-Salaam; the Humanities and Ethnography at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar; Theatre and Dance at the Institutes of African Studies at the Universities of Ghana and of Ife, etc.

As to the curriculum and pedagogy, while these remained basically faithful to the metropolitan models on which they had been based, they were progressively transformed over the years by the infusion of locally relevant perspectives and material. Thus, contrary to views widely held, the content of the programmes taught at African universities by the end of the second decade of independence already showed marked departures from the metropolitan models, while the quality levels generally remained as high.

... and fall?

These conditions that facilitated the development and the maintenance of international standards at the new universities were to undergo substantial and dramatic change in the

late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The collapse of national economies resulted in sharp reductions in the capacity of the state to support universities at the levels provided in the early years of independence, especially in the face of competition for resources from other social and economic sectors. From about the middle of the 1980s this was compounded by the policy of directing resources towards basic education as well as the enrolment explosion. A further factor was the coincident reduction in the general support of higher education by international donors. This took the form, first of the progressive withdrawal of the subsidies for expatriate staff working at African universities, and secondly, reductions in the general support for universities by the colonial government, the international foundations and the financial institutions. These latter policy changes reflected disillusionment with the notions of earlier years that the new universities would lead the way to noticeable improvements in the development situation and the furtherance of democracy and equity in the new countries, which clearly was not happening. (Coleman, 1994: 338-339). A final, less direct factor was the huge increase in the fees charged to foreigners studying in the UK, Australia and other European countries. This reduced the number of Africans who could finance their study in those countries or get government scholarships to do so. Also significant was the more recent drying up after 1990 of the generous scholarships previously available in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Cuba.

Implications: the learning environment

In sum, the end of direct metropolitan tutelage coincided with exploding enrolments as well as reductions in the resource support from local and external sources to erode some of the key factors that had helped guarantee quality levels in the early years of independence. The story of the resulting deterioration in physical conditions in most African universities in the 1980s and 1990s has often been told. What need to be emphasised are the consequential transformations in the teaching, learning and research environment. Teaching and residential facilities now cater for multiples of the number of students for which they were built. For instance, the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), built for up to 13,000 students, now hosts over 23,000, while Makerere University at 21,000 now has more than six times the number it had only 10 years ago. Not surprisingly, there are reports of students having to take lessons standing, for lack of seating space in the classroom, while in other instances, some students have to listen from *outside the classroom!* Libraries are not only overcrowded, but books are out of date, whilst journal holdings lag years behind. Small-group tutorials, industrial and other attachments, and fieldwork are hardly feasible in many universities. Science students go through degree programmes with no hands-on experience of computers, scientific equipment and basic experiments. Overcrowded residential facilities only compound the problem. At the University of Ghana there are reports that rooms originally built to take two students, are now officially allocated to five students (after minor modifications), but

unofficially occupied by as many as eight or nine – to the knowledge of the university authorities! Apart from the obvious hygiene and health hazards posed, what kind of ambience does this provide for study after classes? All of which have brought most African universities to a state of serious deterioration. This is evident not only to those who work or study in those universities but to even the most casual visitor. Studies by Afemikhe (2002) at the University of Botswana, and El Badawy (2002) at the University of Zagazig show something of the relation between overcrowding and deteriorating material conditions on the one hand, and student perceptions of quality in teaching and research. The situation at Makerere University in the 1970s and 1980s is summarised in Box 1, as an illustration of the general deterioration in the policy and material environment that characterised many of Africa's university campuses at the time.

... and diversion of focus

In addition to its devastating effect on the conditions of teaching, learning and research, this state of decay had a different sort of impact, to which I wish to draw attention. This is the massive diversion of focus from the core business of the university, especially the improvement of the curriculum, pedagogy and research. University managers and administrators were caught up in a grim struggle to keep their institutions liquid and operational. [30] Beyond that there were the numerous new requirements for the drawing up of development plans and budgets; changing from one form of budgeting to another – and yet again; fundraising and reporting to benefactors and government; setting up and managing income-generating ventures; restructuring faculties, departments and units – each of these frequently with impossible deadlines, inadequate skills and resources, under pressure from government or donors, and in the face of resistance by dissatisfied students and workers and often faculty! Not only were inordinate amounts of the time and energy of senior university management necessarily devoted to such matters, not surprisingly, but much of the effort to reform the university system and its operations also tended to be focussed on just these matters – access, strategic planning, cost-cutting and income-generation, etc. While this drive to cope is understandable, it has tended to crowd out proper attention to the core business for the discharge of which the institutions are struggling to survive, in the first place. We take up this point again in the concluding section.

Changing demography: Faculty quality, strength and motivation

Just as serious were the implications for faculty quality, strength, morale and dedication. The first crop of African university lecturers, educated mostly in the 1960s and earlier, had generally been trained to the highest international standards at public expense, both at home and abroad, and had embarked on academic careers under conditions that respected and provided adequate means for the cultivation of knowledge. This group has been described as “the first generation” of African scholars. (Mkandawire, 1995: 7) The

“second generation” came of age in the 1970s and early 1980s, when it was still common to supplement local degree work with graduate study abroad. However, so harsh were economic conditions at home that almost anybody who could, remained abroad after graduating – the “brain drain” generation. By the mid-1980s, as noted above, access to opportunities for study abroad, especially in Europe, had so tightened up that most university staff had to undertake their entire education, from first degree to doctoral studies, at home - this, at a time when the range and currency of library holdings, as well as the quality of teaching and research at most African universities were in decline. These constitute “the third generation” that has borne the brunt of the quality declines mentioned above, and make up the bulk of current faculty at most universities. Not surprisingly, reports indicate a decline in the general level of qualifications of staff at post, if the PhD degree or equivalent is taken as the norm for mid-career academics. Erinoshio reports that fully 60% of Social Science and Administration faculty in Nigeria were still enrolled in PhD programmes in 1995/96 (Erinoshio, 2002), while in Makerere only 25% of the faculty is reported to have PhDs. (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003)

A second factor concerned the incentive packages available to university faculty. In the early years faculty salaries and other conditions of service matched the best in the public service. In addition the good working environment, other perquisites of academic life, including study and sabbatical leave opportunities, and the general prestige attached to academic work made university life attractive. With the economic declines of the 1970s and 1980s and severe inflation, university faculty suffered the fate of all public service workers – the pauperisation of the salaried classes. Average salaries are reported to have declined below the levels of a “living wage”. In addition, such perquisites as university housing became harder to get for the majority of staff. Large and crowded classes, as well as heavy teaching and grading loads without the benefit of modern audio-visual facilities and the support of Teaching Assistants led to a further deterioration of working conditions, which merely compounded the situation.

The exodus of some of the best minds especially among young and mid-career faculty, and the inability of the universities to recruit or retain replacements in adequate number and qualification, have been the inevitable consequences. The number of university staff at post in Côte d'Ivoire is reported to have dropped from 828 in 1995 to 412 by 2000 (Houenou et al., 2001), while the University of Ouagadougou is reported to be facing difficulty retaining staff because of the competition from the business sector (Guenda, 2001). Again, with one exception, all Federal Universities in Nigeria are reported to be understaffed by an average of over 50%, some as high as 70%, according to the staffing norms established by the National Universities Commission (Obasi, 2002). To varying degrees, this story can be repeated in country after country.

The old order changeth ...

One of the enduring features of our universities in the early years, and a guarantee of academic quality, has been the practice of senior professors supervising graduate students and working with junior colleagues on research projects. The survival of research and graduate study programmes, such as it was, during the difficult years of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s owes much to the commitment of those professors educated and appointed to the university in the early independence years - the "first generation" scholars. As they move towards retirement, we are coming to the end of an era. For, they are not being replaced at the rate required to maintain the appropriate levels of experience and leadership within the academy. This has brought on the phenomenon of the ageing of the faculty in African universities. Fig. 11 summarises the situation of the public universities in Ghana. A recent study concluded as follows:

“ A look at the age structure of all the public universities reveals that around 40% of the teaching and research staff are above 50 years and will therefore be retiring in the next 10 years” (Manuh *et al.*, 2002: 46).

This observation can be applied to any number of African universities, as is reported from the Congo (Mbemba, 2003), Cote d'Ivoire (Houenou, et al., 2001), Nigeria (Erinosho, 2001: 19) and Senegal (N'diaye, 2001). [31] Short-term measures for dealing with this problem include the raising of the retirement age from 60 to 65 years in Cote d'Ivoire (Houenou, et al., 2001), and the retention of the over-60s on contract till they reached 65 in Ghana. But clearly these are not enough. Correction of the conditions that created the situation in the first place is obviously the place to begin. Appropriate incentive systems and substantial improvements in facilities and the teaching and learning environment must be part of the solution. Makerere University is reported to have stanchd the haemorrhage by a substantial increase in average staff incomes. But that has been achieved at a considerable price, as we shall see later.

... yielding place - - - but to whom???

This alteration in the demography of the faculty bears not only on the quality of research and teaching, but also on the crucial task of mentoring junior faculty. As is well-known, the development of research skills takes place principally "on the job", i.e., in the course of conducting research, whether as an individual effort or as part of a team. It is in this process that the skills and insights acquired as part of formal training are sharpened and extended. Moreover, on-going research, particularly when it is collective or networked, provides an irreplaceable opportunity for the experience of each member of a team or network to complement and help raise the capacity of others. For young and mid-career researchers such participation, especially under the mentorship of senior colleagues, constitutes the most effective form of research capacity development. From this

perspective, questions of the mentorship of junior faculty and the supervision of graduate study assume the greatest significance for the maintenance of a research culture and proficiency in the academy. (Sawyer, 2004)

With the substantial erosions in income and living conditions, faculty have tended to concentrate on the struggle to keep body and soul together – by any and all means available. The quest for alternative income through moonlighting, contract research and consultancies has become desperate. (Erinosho, 2002) The result is a decline in the dedication to scholarship and teaching. In many though, not all cases, faculty have little time for lectures and tutorials, and those who do, tend to be demoralised by the bloated classes, inadequate teaching facilities and the generally poor educational environment. There is not much research and hardly any fieldwork, and dissemination of research results through publication has taken a back seat [32], as has supervision of graduate work. In general, the life of the mind, which has for decades defined and sustained academic communities everywhere in the world, is an endangered category on many an African university campus.

“And in the seventh ‘year’ ...”

A final aspect of the question of staffing and staff quality on which we offer comment is the virtual collapse of the system of *sabbatical leave*. The practice of enabling faculty to get away from regular teaching once every seven years, to spend up to a year renewing themselves was one of the most effective means of enabling faculty to remain abreast of developments in their field and maintain international contacts. Ideally the year should be devoted to working at advanced laboratories with professional colleagues, completing research projects, catching up on the literature or pedagogy. As the crisis at the universities deepened, this ideal picture was decisively fractured. The drying up of scholarships and fellowships abroad meant that a lecturer on sabbatical would have to subsist on his or her local salary. As this was insufficient for living at home, what use was it abroad? Sabbatical leave, thus, became a period for taking full-time employment abroad. For a while, it was mostly work in academic institutions. This soon changed to work in any field that paid well. In time, lecturers accumulated leave periods by working continuously for twelve years or more, thereby “earning” two years of sabbatical leave, which made it easier to get full-time employment abroad! By this time, its infrequency and the uses to which it was put had completely subverted the sabbatical leave as a means for faculty self-regeneration.

The list of factors affecting quality could go on. What is clear is that the conditions and factors that had underpinned the quality of teaching and research and assured a scholarly ambience in earlier years had ceased to exist in many universities by the middle of the

1980s. There was a general perception of loss of quality in the work of most universities. While it is difficult to measure and prove this, anybody who has visited any of the affected campuses would need little convincing. More objective support for this perception is provided by such indirect indicators as the levels of dropout, repetition and failure.

Relevance – what limits?

Turning to the question of relevance, we highlight a few issues which we believe should guide any discussion aimed at determining the appropriate mission and operation of Africa's universities in these troubled times. The first of these is to insist upon the obvious, namely, that universities are primarily institutions for the generation and dissemination of knowledge. To be sure, they are, and should be other things as well. However, they will not deserve to be called universities, nor will they justify the massive material and psychological investment they enjoy if they were not, above all, principal sources of new knowledge and ideas, of trained minds and workers, and major contributors to the knowledge base for policy and development.

We have already discussed the original mission of the universities of Africa in helping replace departing expatriate personnel and provide skills for research and policy support. After the initial successes noted above, by the early 1970s, disappointment began setting in, especially among governments and donors. The development situation in most countries was deteriorating rapidly in spite of the substantial investments in higher education. The initial optimism and confidence about the capabilities of the universities to contribute to development soon gave way to anxiety that matters needed to be improved by a more explicit focusing on the development issues facing the communities. From different perspectives, governments and the donor community as well as the institutions themselves, as previously noted gravitated towards the notion of the “developmental university”, that is a university whose work and mission were directed towards the attainment of concrete and demonstrable development goals. The history and limitations of the idea of a developmental university are captured in Yesufu (1973), Coleman (1994), and Ajayi *et al* (1996). It is rewarding, if rather depressing, to go back to these texts at this time when the proper role of the African university in development and transformation is once more to the fore. The central message of these early assessments is that the idea of the developmental university is not without contradiction and complication. While there is no disputing the propriety of the concern to ensure that universities, like all other social institutions, made their due contribution to social development, there has always remained a question about the tolerable and feasible limits of such involvement, *consistent with the basic mission of the university* - teaching and research (Coleman, 1994: 347). As noted above, over and above the calibre of its graduates, a university's contribution to development turns on the quality of the knowledge it generates and

disseminates. Application, no matter how vigorous and well-intentioned, of unsound knowledge cannot conduce to development. Thus commentators on the developmental university have pointed out the indispensable role of the quality of its knowledge-generating base as a condition for a university's effective discharge of its service and development functions. Thus, pushing for service and outreach without dealing with the massive quality deficits in the academic heartland is at best a risky undertaking.

A second risk factor is the danger of a fundamental overload on the universities as they struggle to be all things to all people. We need to bear in mind at all times the sober admonitions of such as Ajayi et al.:

“ ... in the face of demands which far exceed their capacities, African universities would have to be highly selective and consider very carefully what they could expect to achieve, ... given the means actually at their disposal. There are several deserving critical areas. *However, it is important for the universities to strike a balance between what is essential and possible and what is desirable and possible but not essential*”. (1996: 197 - 198) [33] (Emphasis supplied)

Such advice, sound as it is, puts the typical university on the horns of a dilemma. The university needs the full support of the public and the policy maker in order to get the resources it needs to rehabilitate itself, revamp its courses and facilities, and produce good teaching, research and service. To get or maintain that support, it has to satisfy the extended, sometimes conflicting demands of the various stakeholders – admit more students; introduce “more relevant” courses; recover costs; charge no tuition fees; produce quality research; cut costs; produce sound minds; produce work-ready graduates; etc. As the study on Mozambique puts it, the challenge of the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) is that of reconciling its role as the only full-blown university with the demands for immediate market relevance. To attempt all this, even if the UEM like the typical African university were not as weakened as it was, would be asking a lot. Yet, in its current shape, this university, like the others, runs the risk of over-development, so aptly described by Coleman:

“...Not only can the quality of performance of traditional functions of the university 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”. (Coleman, 1994: 351)

System Diversification: Complementarities And Competition

Change factors – increased diversification

Post-secondary education in most African countries has for decades consisted of a mix of colleges, trade schools and vocational and other skills-training institutions. These were capped in most instances by polytechnics and one or two universities. [Fig. 3]. For much of this period higher education, especially the university sector was seen as a “public

good”, and received very generous state support. For decades the small number of public universities concentrated the bulk of their countries’ intellectual capacities and resources within them, and shouldered almost exclusively the burden of university education, research and high-level work force development. This was supplemented by study abroad, especially at the graduate level. By the 1980s changes in the general environment of higher education had altered the basic assumptions underlying the structure and functioning of the system. We have noted that the rapid increases in university enrolments across the continent still left a large pool of qualified applicants with no places in the universities, which was seen in policy circles as a waste of human resources and a major social problem.

New players, new demands

The players ...

Apart from its extent, a significant new feature of the demand for university education in the post-independence years was the increasing diversity in the patterns of demand that emerged in the 1980s. This reflected the different types of students and the new knowledge needs that had been thrown up by the changing social and economic conditions of the 1970s and 1980s. While the majority of university students, and the bulk of demand still came from the age group 19–24 seeking full-time study towards regular degrees, increasing numbers were mature students who had missed the opportunity in earlier years; workers who could only undertake part-time study; applicants interested in non-degree programmes; and mid-career business people and senior public servants requiring short executive courses and other forms of in-service training. There were also applicants able and willing to pay full cost for both regular and special programmes. The effect of all this was to bring into play a variety of student categories seeking types of programmes, courses and delivery modes beyond what the conventional institutions provided.

...the demand...

Apart from a diversified student population and new kinds of courses and delivery modes, the institutions had also to address new knowledge needs. In addition to continued demand for basic research in all the established disciplines, the new knowledge needs were more applied and required in most cases, consultancies and policy advice. This placed emphasis on a wider range of knowledge services to be provided by the universities.

... the supply ...

This *expansion and diversification of demand* coincided with two other related developments. One of these, namely, the over-stretching of university capacity resulting

from expanded enrolment without commensurate resource increases, has already been noted. The second factor was the rise of the ideology of the market, the retreat of the state from social provisioning and the institutionalisation of cost-recovery in the social sector. This combination of factors ensured that the existing public universities were in no condition to meet the extended scale and variety of demand for higher education and research now required of them. The principal response was the establishment of yet more public universities in virtually all countries. Figs. 8 & 9. However, this was not restricted to universities, as there were increases as well in both the public and private *non-university tertiary sectors*. In addition to this expansion in capacity of the conventional institutions *new institutional forms, new programme offerings, and new types of providers* came into prominence. The *institutional forms* included part-time and evening classes, vacation courses and an increase in distance education. Though these were not altogether new, the scale and spread of their use was quite dramatic. More recent innovations have included the use of technology-intensive approaches such as on-campus FM Radio for delivery of courses at the University College of Education, Winneba, in Ghana. Further to these new institutional arrangements, programmes of a new, more *vocational* type, both degree and non-degree were introduced. These were in such areas as tourism and hotel management; information technology; business studies; human resource management; hospital management; theology; purchasing and supply; marketing; media and public relations. Interestingly, these *new institutional forms and offerings* were occurring not only in the new institutions but also in established institutions, including the public universities. Makerere University, for instance, increased evening classes to more than triple the scale of regular day classes, and introduced courses in social sector planning, tourism and hotel management, while UCAD in Senegal admitted private fee-paying students to courses in accounting, marketing and other technical majors.

... and the providers

The *new providers* include *private universities*, both for-profit and not-for-profit, as well as *policy and research institutes* based outside the university. Also of importance is the increasing presence of *offshore provision* in the form of correspondence, directly and via Internet, as well as local franchises and branches of foreign-based institutions.

Against this general background of a diversifying higher education system, we take up for closer scrutiny two special issues: the coming of private universities and the notion of “the public good” in the current heavily market-influenced dispensation. The rise of private universities is the critical new force in this process of system differentiation. Because of their importance in many developing countries [34] and the accelerating pace of their establishment in Africa, it is necessary to devote a few paragraphs to a summary account

of their potential significance in the new configuration of African higher education systems. As to the idea of “the public good”, there is quite a debate about its meaning and place in the new times. After a review of aspects of this debate, we comment on one aspect, the idea of the university as a space for reflection and critical thinking, an idea under siege in the press for numbers and relevance, narrowly conceived.

Enter private universities

Private primary, secondary and other pre-university institutions have been a feature of the educational scene for decades. They range from mission schools to proprietary secondary schools, to trade and vocational training institutions. Much more recent is the phenomenon of private institutions awarding university degrees. All accounts indicate a sharp and accelerating rise in the number of such private universities and their enrolments during the 1990s. While this development was inevitable and foreseeable, few could have predicted the rate of increase within the decade. (Fig 9) Thus, a study of private universities in Ghana conducted by the Association of African Universities (AAU) for the Ministry of Education in 1995, showed that at the time Ghana had no private universities, although there were plans for establishing two or three (AAU, 1995). Seven years later, as many as twenty-one private universities have been registered with the National Accreditation Board, with eight currently in operation. Similar stories can be told of other countries, as indicated earlier (Fig. 10).

Table 1: Private University Enrolment as % of Total University Enrolment (Selected Countries)

Cote d’Ivoire	19
Ghana (2000/01)	6
Kenya	20
Senegal	?
Uganda	14

Source: Various

While the history and specific circumstances of private universities differ from case to case, and country to country, a number of common features may be identified. The first is the small size of their enrolments. As compared to their public counterparts, Africa’s private universities to date provide only a small (See Table 1), though rising proportion of university enrolment. Secondly, they provide a severely limited range of programmes and courses when compared to the public institutions. Cross-country evidence shows a decisive concentration on courses with a strong vocational and directly market-responsive character, and hardly any natural science or technology. Some institutions, especially those with church support, include more regular university degree programmes, especially Theology and other Arts courses, sometimes up to the Masters and PhD levels, though for the moment these are a small minority.

In part, both the small size and the limited range of programmes of the typical private university can be explained by the relative newness of the institutions, many not more than five years old. However, these features also reflect what appears to be inherent limitations on the size and growth potential of private universities under present conditions. The obvious explanation for the generally limited range of programmes has to do with the fact that mounting the full range of courses such as are run by the typical public university would require initial capital investments that are far beyond the resources available to even the most richly-endowed private proprietors. Besides, and this is probably the decisive factor, there is a limit to what can be considered effective demand for private university education, that is persons willing and able to pay for courses that lead to other than market-friendly qualifications. This will remain the case while average household incomes are so low, and while the salaried middle classes remain pauperised, as is the case in many African countries. For, in these circumstances courses without immediate employment prospects are a luxury few can afford to pay for. Not surprisingly, it is the institutions backed by religious organisations, Christian or Islamic, that therefore do not rely entirely on fee income, that show the most signs of moving in the direction of full programming and sizeable enrolments. Apart from issues of initial investment costs, the extreme market orientation of the private universities, especially the for-profits, is shaped by the need to cover their costs and be competitive. They only mount courses for which employment avenues are clear and sure, and that is part of their attraction for a segment of the student population that looks directly to prospects for employment in deciding on university entry.

The heavy representation of not-for-profit and religious institutions in the establishment of private universities is a third feature. Out of the eight private universities accredited by the National Accreditation Board and operational in Ghana, four are church-backed, while only one is fully dependent on fee income. The story is broadly similar in other countries. This predominance of non-profit proprietorship at the university level marks a very sharp contrast to the situation in the non-university tertiary sector where the majority, especially of the vocational institutions, are for-profit and charge full-cost fees.

In the fourth place, private universities rely very heavily on part-time faculty drawn mostly from the public institutions. This has very strong implications both for the quality of delivery at the private universities and for effective performance in the public institutions, as will be argued later. Note should also be taken of the strong presence of foreign backers and parent-bodies in the private tertiary sector. Where the local institutions are not franchises of foreign universities, many teach to the curriculum of foreign institutions and award their degrees. Other forms of affiliation with foreign institutions are in

operation. For instance, sixteen out of the 21 private universities registered with the National Accreditation Board in Ghana have links with foreign institutions. The rest are affiliated to local universities. These linkages, whether with foreign or local institutions serve the purpose, primarily, of providing legitimacy as well as programme and staff support for these young institutions. In principle this should help ensure that proper standards are maintained. How far this occurs in practice, however, is open to serious doubt.

... system implications?

In assessing the impact of the rise of private universities on the educational systems in Africa, a number of observations may be made. As a rule, today and for the foreseeable future, public universities remain the destination of choice in all countries. Their standing and prestige, the wide range of courses they offer and their relatively low cost to the student put them ahead of the competition. Private universities are, thus, not directly competitive with the public institutions for students, their role being primarily the supplementary one of absorbing the spill-over from the pool of fully qualified but unsuccessful applicants to the public institutions. Exceptions to this may be in respect of special categories of students or specialised programmes, reflecting special vocational needs. Thus, institutions specialising in computer studies may be preferred by applicants narrowly interested in careers in computer applications, etc., while institutions emphasising distance education and part-time study will attract students who cannot afford the time and resources for full-time residential study. Again, persons interested in careers in the Islamic or Christian faiths would tend to prefer the Islamic or Christian-backed institutions. In these specific instances, private institutions can be said to be direct substitutes for the public institutions. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that where frequent closures and general instability on the campuses of public universities lead to unpredictability and undue prolongation of courses, private universities have become alternatives of choice. In general, whether they complement or compete with public institutions, the existence of private universities widens the range of choice in the university sector.

A second effect is that by bringing into being new categories of university proprietors - from businesspersons to religious and community leaders - the arrival of private universities has expanded the pool and the range of stakeholders in the higher education policy arena. In respect of issues common to public and private institutions, this means an increase in the voice and policy weight behind advocacy for the interests of higher education. On the other hand, where the interests of the public and private proprietors diverge or indeed conflict, the policy debate on higher education may be enriched by the contestation of views.

A third and very significant feature is what appears to be an improvement, on average, in the gender balance of enrolment in private institutions as compared to public institutions. The story from institutions for which we have some data is that, (i) with two outliers – University of Swaziland on the public side, and Mbarara College in Uganda on the private side - the percentage of women in total student enrolment is in the 20s and 30s for the public institutions, and in the upper 30s into the 50s in the private institutions; and (ii) in all countries the average was higher in the private than in the public institutions. (Table 2) The explanation for this difference is said to lie in the generally lower entry requirements in the private institutions, their concentration on the “softer subjects” in the humanities and the vocational area, and the greater flexibility of their programming, which tends to accommodate the special needs of women with families. There is need for more systematic compilation of data and more rigorous analysis of this very promising phenomenon.

Table 2: Women As % of University Enrolment in Public and Private Universities
(selected countries and institutions) (%)

	Public Universities	Private Universities.
Congo		
Marien Ngouabi	24	
Paradox Institute (1999/2000)		57
Business Admin Inst.		50
Ghana		
Univ. of Ghana (2002/03)	36	
Private universities (average)		37.5
Kenya (averages)	30	54.5
Mozambique (1999) (averages)	25	43
Nigeria (1998)	35	
Bayero (2001)	27	
Senegal		
Université Cheikh Anta Diop (1998)	26.5	
Uganda		
Mbarara (1998/99)		28.6
Makerere (2000)	34	
Nkumba		56
Uganda Martyrs		50
Swaziland		
University of Swaziland (2001)	51.9	

Source: Various

While expansion of the private university sector has generally been welcomed, it has caused concern in some quarters. The first issue relates to the dominant presence of faith-based proprietors, which is seen as a threat to the culture of diversity and free expression that, by and large, characterises the public university scene. While it is true that universities founded by religious bodies play an important role in higher education

systems in many parts of the world, the question in Africa is the relative weight of the religious presence, especially of the charismatic variety. The point is not to prejudge the likely impact of this dominance but to sound a note of caution. This is particularly timely because the presence and effect of the charismatic churches on the student body and faculty on many campuses in the public system already is cause for concern.

We have referred to the fact that the typical private institution draws the bulk of its faculty from the public universities. From the point of view of the faculty member, this provides a source of extra income which may be all there is to keep her operating at the public institution. Thus, the public institution is able to retain staff that otherwise would be tempted away from university service to better-paying work elsewhere or abroad. For the private institution, this enables it get faculty at less than full cost, since it only has to pay for the marginal price of the faculty member. Additionally, it derives legitimacy from having on its books the names of established faculty. Nevertheless, this is not without cost to both institutions. For the private institution, the part-time faculty are rarely able to devote the attention and time required to create a learning environment of the appropriate quality. For the public institution, usually already struggling with under-staffing and an ageing faculty, this “moonlighting” compounds the problem of poor teaching, poor research and weak mentoring of young faculty.

As already noted, private universities, especially the for-profits tend to concentrate on the low-cost, directly marketable courses and programmes, including short-duration tailor-made courses. They, thus, avoid all the expensive but essential general courses in the humanities and the lab-based sciences, which the public institutions as full-scale universities are obliged to provide. By thus concentrating on a limited number of market-responsive courses, the private institutions are able to out-compete the public institutions in respect of a category of high-paying courses and programmes that the public institutions could use to augment their income earning capacity. Of particular significance is the consideration that this reduces the means available to the public institutions for possible cross-subsidisation of essential but less “marketable” programmes and teaching modes.

The last feature we would note is the potential of private institutions to introduce a different set of values into the higher education picture. On the positive side, their market-responsiveness in terms of both programmes and pedagogy, and their cost-cutting measures, can set examples for public institutions. There is no doubt that public institutions, spoilt by decades of public subsidisation, need to sharpen their responsiveness to changing conditions and improve their management systems and capacities. Competition from, and the example of private institutions could help here. On

the other hand, private institutions bring with them a set of negative features, such as extreme forms of vocationalism, a playing down of the development of the mind as an end of education, and the complete absence of research as a necessary part of the higher education enterprise. In national systems where the public universities are already weak and vulnerable, these negative features could have an exaggerated distortionary effect.

What about “the public good”...?

Higher education confers undoubted benefits on individuals and families, and plays a crucial role in national economic growth and development. At the same time it clearly constitutes a “public good”, serving broad social purposes going beyond individual or economic development benefits. Other potential benefits include (a) the improvement of social justice through fair access; (b) the pursuit of knowledge for more than commercial ends; (c) the spread of a broad range of skills and capabilities across the entire population; and (d) the education of a democratically informed and critical citizenry. (Taskforce, 2000; Singh, 2001; World Bank, 2002) It is instructive that from the early years of independence it was accepted in Africa with hardly any question that university education was predominantly a “public good” and thus a proper charge on the public purse. This decisive “public good” perspective was influenced by the consideration that, given the situation of relative underdevelopment of most countries immediately after independence, education, including university education was seen as a key instrument for accelerated development and catching up with the rest of the world. This perception has continued to influence public expenditure patterns, with the result that in 1995 African countries spent annually on each university student, on average, about four times their per capita Gross National Product (GNP), as compared to a world-wide average of 77% and a figure of 36% for Europe and Central Asia [Fig. 6](#). In the 1980s a number of factors tended to bring into question the undoubted support and the level of subsidies for higher education. The first set of factors turned on the strained economic conditions in most African countries. As previously indicated, this led to a substantial reduction in the amounts available for social sector expenditure. Against the background of the rapidly increasing university enrolments and the demand of other sectors for public resources, it became clear that the state could not continue to provide for university education at the levels of the 1960s and the 1970s.

These material factors were reinforced by strong ideological and policy shifts. The first was a more general reflection of the neo-liberal agenda, which called for the retreat of the state from social provisioning and for increasing contributions from the direct beneficiaries of social services. The ideological dimension embraced the commodification of knowledge and the treatment of education as a service, educational expenditure as a “cost” rather than a social investment. This ideological posture was reinforced by the

technical arguments 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 second was a concern to expand and strengthen basic education under the principle of giving priority to “education for all” and, therefore, reducing the relative share of higher education in the public budget.

Thus the internal economic decline combined with strong external ideological and policy pressure tilted the balance decisively towards the view that university education was primarily a “private good”. The result was the reduction of public expenditure on Africa’s universities in real terms, but especially in terms of the unit cost per student, and the extension of the policy of cost-recovery to higher education. Public subventions for the running of the universities were severely cut, and a range of subsidies for students was removed, as we have already indicated. The resulting situation was contradictory. On the one hand, there was no reduction in what society expected of the universities and their graduates, nor was the pressure to expand enrolment lessened. While this *social* purpose was evident from the persistent increase in the number of public universities as well as the rise in their enrolments throughout the period, the pressure to privatise and vocationalise the universities reflected the increasing conception of students and their families as the principal *private beneficiaries*. In the process, the “public good” dimension of university education has tended to be put aside in all but rhetoric. What this called for was vigorous debate aimed at delineating the key issues and choices that needed to be made and developing a consensus around the nature and essential requirements of national development, including the proper goals of higher education, and to use that as a yardstick for specific policies and actions in relation to higher education reform. In the absence of such clarity and consensus about the issues, and under conditions of fiscal stringency and a political economy dominated by market ideology, narrowly economic bottom-line considerations of efficiency and value-for-money have tended to dominate the reform effort. In the process the more complex social purposes have tended to get lost in the shuffle – sometimes with the explanation that those purposes could be addressed as economic conditions improved - a version of the “trickle-down” theory.

As previously noted, 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 noted above. Africa’s university leadership and their apex organisation, the Association of African Universities (AAU) have consistently argued against this policy of neglect. 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. There were also some countries and donor agencies that maintained strong support and advocacy for university education throughout the period. These included the Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries (now SIDA/SAREC), the governments of the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, and for a period, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Private foundations like the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations continued to support regional organisations for research and training.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been increasing realisation that the policy of neglecting Africa's universities had led down a blind alley. The report of the Task Force set up by the World Bank and UNESCO in 2000, made a careful analysis of the contribution of higher education, not only to economic development but also to the general social and cultural development of Africans struggling to keep up with the knowledge society. For its part, the World Bank, which had for almost a decade played down the importance of university education, has now reversed itself almost completely. Starting with its "World Development Report 1998", which had acknowledged the indispensable role of Africa's universities in the revival of her economies, the Bank has now presented, perhaps the most persuasive and cogently argued case for the role of higher education in development. In addition to other areas, it makes the observation that:

"In fact, it is doubtful that any developing country could make significant progress toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for education – universal enrolment in primary education and elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education – without a strong tertiary education system".

More recently the case for the "re-insertion of the public good concerns into the agenda of higher education transformation" has been forcefully argued by analysts of the higher education scene in Africa. (Singh, 2001; Jonathan, 2001; Sawyerr, 2002).

As has been argued by Ruth Jonathan and the present writer, the determination of the public good and the mode of its advancement through higher education are, however, far from simple. (Jonathan, 2001; Sawyerr, 2002) The point of departure is

"... the recognition that the rightward shift in the paradigm of higher education that animates the reform process is but part of a more general ideological position that, consciously or unconsciously, regards "the market" and its logic as the driving forces in social and economic policy. The result is "the privatisation of the public sphere", with the diminution of the role of state and community in social and economic and management, and policies of cost recovery for social services." (Sawyerr, 2002: 27) [35]

Against this background, the emphasis on the social ends of higher education would seem to run counter to general drift of policy. This puts into question the efficacy of mere advocacy for the restoration of the "public good" in higher education, without addressing

the roots of the problem in political economy. We return to this issue in our concluding comment.

It is, therefore, important not to equate advocacy for broader objectives for the reform process with that for the re-insertion of the “public good” in higher education transformation. Since notions of the “public good” turn on particular assumptions about the proper ends of social development and the most effective and just means for attaining them, advocates of the primacy of the market in social and economic affairs can make the case that market efficiency in all areas is the most effective means of generating the resources for creating the conditions of social and economic well-being, and therefore of serving the “public good”. In a word, the “public good” is not the monopoly of those opposed to the current over-emphasis on the market!

From this perspective, the debate shifts from whether the current reforms serve “the public good”, to one of determining “what public”? whose “good”? “by what means best attained?” and as determined by whom? These important conceptual and policy questions highlight the often forgotten fact that the “public” whose interests are to be served by policy is not a unitary homogenous entity with one set of determinate interests and values on every key issue. Rather, it consists of constituencies with different, sometimes conflicting interests on any number of issues. Thus, assertions of the “public good” must always be tested from the perspective of: what public? what good? as determined by whom?

As higher education provides both social and individual benefits, difficult questions arise about what should be the relative weight of public and private contributions to its maintenance. Put at its simplest, those who favour the primacy of public support argue that higher education is a “public good”, and so, notwithstanding the benefits that individuals necessarily derive from it, it should be a charge on the public purse if it is to achieve the broad range of social purposes that it serves. The other side argues that it is essentially a “private good”, even allowing for the obvious social gains, and so primary responsibility for financing it should lie with the direct beneficiaries. This is an important but old debate, into which we need not enter. Of interest to us are some of the complications that the “public good” position has to negotiate. These have been admirably summed up by Ruth Jonathan. (Jonathan, 2001)

It is necessary to distinguish the notion of the public good, as such, from particular conceptions of what it entails in terms of public policy actions and measures in specific social settings at a particular time. There are those who consider that that under current conditions, Africa’s best policy is to push for the maximum economic efficiency and value-

for-money, on the assumption that the increased productivity and wealth that is generated will ensure the welfare of all. On this view, the higher education policies drawn from the recent rightward slant in conventional political economic wisdom - cost-recovery, the orientation of curricula to perceived labour-market demands, and the infusion of the culture of business into university management - are all in the right direction. On the other hand, if the advancement of the “public good” is seen as calling for more than economic efficiency, if it requires, as well, broader social and economic transformation towards a more just and socially coherent society then, clearly, this could not be left solely to “market forces”. It would require more direct emphasis on the development and implementation of policies consistent with the social purposes of higher education, namely, the equalisation of the life chances of talented individuals irrespective of their social background and financial capabilities; the generation of knowledge in as wide a variety of fields as possible and the development of different skills and competencies, not just those “needed” by the market today; and the deepening of democracy by producing and making more widely accessible critical social knowledge. (Singh. 2001: 11-12)

This, more socially-focussed conception of the public good does pose some problems in respect of higher education. Among them, that of establishing the proper balance in the expenditure of scarce resources as between higher education and the lower rungs of the education ladder. How can one justify the expenditure of multiples of the cost per secondary school pupil in educating one university student, who thereby stands to improve her or his life chances to a much greater degree than the secondary school graduate? This is a difficult question whose answer lies in taking a holistic view of the education system and establishing the proper social and economic balances among its various components and categories of beneficiary.

Other difficult questions arise from the consideration that higher education is an inherently privileging experience. We have already seen that, even with formal equalisation of opportunity to access it, not all can enjoy the direct benefits of university education, as the socially-advantaged stand a better chance in the competition for university places. The situation is compounded by the very nature of university work that tends to encourage “meritocratic individualism” by pushing for and rewarding individual merit and achievement. Thus, even though its broader social purposes include the equalisation of life chances, higher education tends to pull in the direction of individual competitiveness and the reproduction of privilege – a contradiction that needs to be addressed by those who advocate the treatment of higher education as a public good.

Clearly the answer does not lie in de-emphasising higher education in favour of basic education, as has sometimes been proposed. What is needed is to recognise the

contradiction and seek to counteract the tendency by measures internal as well external to the university. Within the institution, what curricular changes are necessary in this regard? How can community service be integrated into the regular curriculum, and a democratic culture built within the institution so as to balance the tendency to privilege? Even more significant, what changes in ideology and public policy are needed at the level of the state to create general social conditions that directly counteract the social handicaps that prejudice the capacity of the majority of citizens to access higher education, and reward so disproportionately higher education graduates as against those who do not make it to beyond primary or secondary school?

... and the notion of a “haven of reflection”?

In bringing up the question of the “public good” in higher education, we would like to focus on one among the many general purposes of the university, namely, the provision of a haven for reflection. As part of its core function of the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge, a university is expected to promote systematic enquiry and reflection on all aspects of social life, pushing established knowledge to its boundaries. This is done through research, reflection and the creation of a supportive learning environment for all, not just students, nor only in formal classes or tutorial sessions. The constant features of the intellectual engagement are the insistence on scientificity in the quest for truth, and respect for opposing views and ideas, which are to be treated strictly on their merit. This is a pre-condition for the inculcation of habits of critical enquiry, as distinct from imparting a specific body of knowledge or set of skills to students. There is no suggestion that all universities succeed in achieving this condition all the time. The point is rather that the best universities aim at doing so and, to the extent that they succeed, they fulfil their true mandate and make a unique contribution to society. Further, that every society – even the poorest – is entitled to access to such a resource if it is to derive full benefit from the world’s vast reservoir of knowledge resources.

In the early years of Africa’s independence its leading universities were able to attain elements of this ambience. Without seeking to romanticise or mystify the past, it is difficult not to acknowledge that those years had their fair share of productive scholarship and an academic environment that housed unorthodox views and produced genuine academic role models. One might here mention the Universities of Ghana, Sudan, Makerere, Ibadan, Dakar (Cheikh Anta Diop) and Dar-es-Salaam in the 1960s and the 1970s. By all accounts, the campuses of these universities and some of the others provided a rich learning environment that was conducive to the study of a variety of disciplines in the natural and social sciences, in the arts, and in basic and applied research, and served as bases for learned and socially enlightening discussion of national and global issues. The

problems of the late 1970s and the 1980s brought much of this to a dramatic stop, even though the erosion had begun before that.

To these “old” problems, the mid-1980s and early 1990s added new restrictions. These related to the drive to commercialise the production of knowledge, new definitions of “development” and “relevance”; the insistence on vocationalisation, the importation of a managerial ethos, and a fixation for the “bottom-line”. One of the new features, the pressure for universities to generate more and more of their own revenues, had a number of consequences. Among these were new internal organisational arrangements made in the quest to accommodate the outside pressures: free-standing business schools, dedicated short course units, research institutes, technology transfer units, etc. The resulting fragmentation of the “universum” (the fundamental notion of the university as a place for bringing all forms and sources of knowledge together) poses a more serious threat to academic quality and long-term sustainability than the variety of outside agencies engaged in knowledge production and dissemination. In the words of Peter Scott, while none of these initiatives is necessarily bad, their cumulative effect is to

“... create intellectual dissonance ... [and] to transform the organisational character of the university – and not only its organisational character: its normative structures also.” (Scott, 2002:86)

Another important new factor is the degradation of the relationships between local academics and their foreign counterparts. No doubt, sound collaborative relations for research and training have persisted between African scholars and external collaborators throughout the period and even today. Unfortunately, the deterioration in conditions of service and the quality of local academic support has meant that many African university faculty have been reduced to the state of exalted data gatherers in supposedly collaborative research projects with external partners, and consultants to NGOs, donors and governments both at home and abroad. While this may be lucrative for the individual scholars and perhaps helps to retain them at post, it is intellectually enervating and dysfunctional to the local academy, which requires the consolidation of local intellectual communities and the preservation of the university as a place for learning and creativity.

It is instructive that in the current drive to reform Africa's universities, the focus has tended to be less on the substance and core of the university enterprise, namely, curriculum, pedagogy and research, and more on funding, governance, management, access, equity, etc. While it would be naïve to ignore latter these matters, especially the need for a living wage for university staff and the call for social accountability, it is nevertheless suicidal and utterly subversive of the university enterprise to make a wholesale concession to these general pressures, to the extent that many on the university campuses are not even conscious any more of the notion of the university as a

place for reflection and the generation of contending visions and ideas. The progressive diminution of the intellectual agenda reaches a bizarre peak when the key criteria for the appointment of Vice Chancellor are considered to be their business plans for the university and track record in fundraising, with only ritual obeisance paid to their academic credentials and agenda!

Against this background, it is absolutely vital to rehabilitate and preserve the notion, and to fight to reclaim the reality of the university as a place of learning, reflection and debate. While it would be asking too much to press for this in all of Africa's universities, it is indispensable that some such spaces be retrieved, nurtured and defended. For this to happen, however, university leadership must take the initiative and resist the pressure to concede the core values of the university in the quest for the "survival of the institution". In this the first line of defence is the university Professoriate, which has to persuade the academic community generally, especially senior university management against conceding everything in the quest for survival. The next, and perhaps more difficult task is for the academy to persuade the public and policy-makers that there are values beyond teaching and the production of skills for the job market, that indeed, the longer-term interests of society are best served by the university as a thinking and learning space.

Coping, Innovations - - - but Transformation?

In the face of these challenges the university communities have been compelled to adopt a variety of strategies for coping. As previously noted, academics have had to find means of supplementing their incomes and of handling large classes with inadequate infrastructural and other facilities and supplies. Equally difficult has been the situation of the managers of the universities. They have become fixated on importuning government departments for subventions, and external donors for additional resources. In addition to these established sources of support, managers have increasingly turned to other less conventional sources. These include private business and alumni, both at home and abroad.

Another set of measures relates to internal efficiency and cost-saving arrangements. These include the contracting out of municipal services such as cleaning, maintenance of grounds and facilities, vehicle repairs, etc., as well as getting out of the cafeteria business. These measures have helped reduce non-educational overhead costs, although they have also involved the laying-off of large numbers of non-academic staff and much inconvenience to members of the community. In addition, many universities have introduced charges for such services as the use of photocopiers in the library, etc. These and similar measures have been introduced or intensified in virtually all of Africa's universities although, as noted above, universities in Francophone Africa have had

particular difficulty in enforcing those measures whose effect was to reduce benefits enjoyed by students and faculty.

A number of more special innovations have been introduced in individual universities. We mention here but an indicative sample. At Bayero University in Nigeria a subsidised computer training scheme was introduced for all staff, using facilities of the University Computer Centre. Secretarial staff are entitled to a 75% – 80% discount for short-term training, while other staff get a 25% discount. (Jega et al., 2002) The University of Ibadan also in Nigeria has introduced compulsory computer literacy for all staff and students. Universities in Ghana have been encouraged to introduce long-term partnerships between departments and faculties across universities for resource sharing, course delivery, collaborative research and graduate training. Already, the Departments of Geography and Resource Development of the University of Ghana and of Geography and Tourism of the University of Cape Coast, respectively, have been working in close collaboration. (Manuh et al., 2002)

Experimenting with new modes of delivery has been one of the means of accommodating enrolment pressures. Among these is the greater use of distance education. At the University of Ghana, the increased use of the pre-existing External Degree Centres, which are spread all over the country, has meant that in the academic year 2001/02, 10% of enrolled students were registered at those centres. Similarly, the University College of Education, Winneba (UCEW) has 30% of its enrolment either in Distance Learning Centres or in sandwich programmes, which bring them into residence for short periods only. In addition, as previously noted, UCEW has begun using FM radio for delivering some lectures on campus, supplemented by face-to-face group sessions. (Manuh, 2002) Other innovative measures involve increased university-industry linkages as a means of providing service to the community, raising income for the universities and providing hands-on experience for students. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), which has a long history of working with local mechanics at the nearby Suame Magazine, is also actively involved with the Cocoa Processing Company, which provides the University's Department of Chemistry with both experience and income, while helping a major national industry with research and development. (Manuh et al., 2002)

At a more general level, several universities have introduced more vocational and "relevant" programmes and courses, intended to meet particular social or job market needs and to attract students looking to future employment. In this vein, Makerere has introduced courses in Local Government and Social Sector Planning, targeting the newly introduced decentralised governance arrangements in Uganda. (Musisi, 2003) In Senegal

the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) is reported to have introduced accounting, management, and other technical majors, while the Université Gaston Berger offers private training options in network and computer studies. Examples could be multiplied across the continent.

Again, a wide variety of affirmative action measures, which aim at improving the representation of disadvantaged groups on the university campuses have been introduced. In Mozambique, these include special scholarships for women, residential preferences for out-of-Maputo students at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), special means-tested scholarships for residents of deprived areas – full scholarships for the poorest and partial for the better-off - all upon agreement to serve in deprived areas upon completion of studies. (Mario *et al.*, 2003:32-33) At Makerere University, women are admitted with grades 1.5 points below those of men.

A particularly interesting instance concerns the development of franchising relations *among* institutions in Kenya. To capture some of the over 5000 students who seek higher education outside the country each year, it is reported that some of the public universities are establishing franchise arrangements with the “middle level colleges”, that is institutions not equipped or certified to deliver degree or diploma courses in their own right. Thus, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) is reported to have established franchise agreements with middle level colleges to produce its certificates, diplomas and even degrees in Information Technology as well as Management. (Ngome, 2002) In Senegal it is proposed to introduce competitions for government research funds, leading to full contracts, performance bonds, etc. The expectation is that this would encourage universities to form partnerships with other research institutes, industry and public laboratories, thereby establishing development research networks and facilitating interaction within the national knowledge system. (N'diaye, 2002) Particularly far-reaching among the innovations has been the reservation of space at public universities for fee-paying students. This has happened at UCAD in Senegal, the University of Ghana and the KNUST in Ghana, and some of the universities in Kenya. However, the best known of all has been the dramatic developments at Makerere University over the last ten years. To this story, we shall return at the end of this section.

The introduction of many, though not all of these innovations has been linked to the development of university strategic plans. The idea of strategic planning for universities has caught on in the last decade, with very strong encouragement from donor agencies and the Association of African Universities (AAU) which, in collaboration with the Working Group on Higher Education of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa

(WGHE/ADEA) conducted a workshop on it in 1995 [36], provided finance for the development of strategic plans in several universities and commissioned a survey of strategic plans at selected universities in Africa. [36A] At the moment, the Working Group is financing the study of innovations in higher education in Africa, and providing seed money for follow-up activities on strategic plans at selected universities.

While the process of developing strategic plans has value in itself, especially if it is undertaken on a truly consultative basis within the institution and involves outside stakeholders, the record of such plans as a basis for strategic choice-making is more mixed. Many of them consist of rather grand vision and mission statements and what amounts to a wish list of desirable activities and outcomes. In most instances, there is little relation to realistic estimates of available resources and delivery capacities. Apart from such internal weaknesses of the plans themselves, a number of factors external to the institutions constitute major limitations on the effectiveness of such planning. The first of these is the enormous political and social pressure to increase enrolment. Given the extreme difficulty of resisting such pressure, the enrolment assumptions, which constitute key planks in the plans, are quickly falsified. Secondly, limitations on available resources and, in particular, the uncertainty of their availability leads to desperate coping strategies which culminate in systematic “short-termism”, thereby undermining any notion of *strategic* choice-making. The most significant limitation, however, is the absence of a coherent policy framework at the national or system level, within which the strategic plans of individual institutions could be located. The result is that the implementation and effectiveness of most strategic plans are rendered even more contingent and unpredictable than would otherwise be the case. The absence of a national framework means, further, that the initiatives of the institutions are largely “unguided”. The significance of this lack of guidance is that, given the general atmosphere of neo-liberalism, the hegemony of the market and donor dominance, the initiatives of the institutions tend to be economic, donor-driven, and donor-dependent. The overall result is a general drift to the right and a loss of focus. I would argue that the story of Makerere University in the 1990s illustrates many of these dilemmas and problems. For that reason, we summarise the story here.

The Makerere Story – Miracle or Cautionary Tale?

The story of Makerere University in the 1990s contains elements of both a miracle and a cautionary tale. Until the 1970s Makerere was among the top four or five universities in sub-Saharan Africa, with a history going back to colonial times and a record of excellence in a number of fields. In the economic and social debacle of the 1970s and 1980s in Uganda, the university suffered to an extent matched by few elsewhere. It became “a place of bare laboratories, empty library shelves, chronic shortages of scholastic

materials and overcrowded halls of residence” (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003). Demoralised and underpaid lecturers left in droves, research ground to a virtual halt, and public confidence in the university fell to its lowest. (See [Box 1](#)) Among the critical factors behind this sad tale, was the chronic under-funding of the university resulting from dramatic declines in government subvention, upon which it was totally reliant. To redress the situation, the university undertook a number of measures aimed principally at generating income independent of government sources. Key among these was the establishment of a quota for fee-paying students over and above the number supported by the government subvention. This involved the running of extra classes and the use of otherwise under-utilised facilities, and special payments to lecturers who taught those courses. The idea was that the income generated from the extra students would be used to restore and maintain essential teaching and learning facilities, and improve faculty working conditions. True to expectation, as the numbers of fee-paying students increased, their fees, together with income from other sources had a dramatic effect on the finances of the university, and therefore the status of its facilities and staff morale. As described in the Task Force Report,

“... Makerere moved from the brink of collapse to the point where it aspires to become again one of East Africa’s pre-eminent intellectual and capacity building resources, as it was in the 1960s. It has more than doubled student enrolment, instigated major improvements in the physical and academic infrastructure, decentralized administration, moved from a situation where none of its students paid fees to one where more than 70 per cent do. Where previously the government covered all running costs, now more than 30 per cent of revenue is internally generated. Among varied uses of this revenue, the most important is application to academic infrastructure and the retention of faculty, permitting them to devote themselves full-time to the teaching and research they were trained to do. Funds gained from non-government sources have been allocated, according to prescribed ratios, to library enrichment, faculty development, staff salary supplementation, and building maintenance, including some construction. The most important impact of increased institutional income has been on staff salary structures and incentive schemes. Professors can now earn over US\$1,300 per month with the possibility of added supplementation on an hourly basis from evening classes. The consequence has been to slow the exodus of academic staff and remove their need to undertake a range of activities outside the university. Makerere has also introduced evening classes, boosted income from services like the bookshop and bakery by running them commercially, and established a consultancy bureau with staff where a portion of the generated revenue goes back into the university.” (Task Force, 2000: Box 4)

This positive assessment of developments at Makerere during the 1990s has been repeated in several accounts. [37] There can be no doubting the significance of the transformation effected at Makerere, given the choices that faced the university leadership at the beginning of the 1990s. From the perspective of reversing the declining finances of the university and improving the average income of the faculty, Makerere had indeed wrought a virtual miracle. Through fee income and the small profits from commercialised units, added to the considerable donor support (estimated at around \$5million per annum during the period) the university had succeeded in reducing its dependence on government subvention; average staff incomes had risen above a “living wage”, facilitating staff retention and, indeed, the return of some who had left the

university during the difficult days. In respect of programmes, the curriculum had been expanded and diversified mainly in response to demands arising from the economic and social environment, as earlier noted. In other respects too progress had been made. Of particular interest was the continued improvement in the gender balance of the student body. Though the trend started before the reforms, it was encouraged by the affirmative action of a 1.5 points add-on for women applicants. In the result, the ratio of women in the student body had increased to 34% by 2000.

As should have been obvious – and this is not sufficiently emphasised in the many accounts of the “Makerere Miracle” – in the real world, miracles come at a price. So what have been the costs of the Makerere experience?

Before dealing with that question, more on perhaps the crucial aspect of the experiment. Throughout the 1990s the student enrolment picture was undergoing developments that can only be described as bizarre, especially for a public university. In 1992 government allowed the 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 1062 private students, the situation metamorphosed to a total enrolment of 14,239, made up of 1,923 government-sponsored to 12,316 private students within six years (see [Fig. 12](#)) [38] - with no significant increases in the resources available to the university.

This rapid and obviously unplanned expansion led to growing criticism that Makerere had suffered a decline in standards and quality. As observed in the study by Musisi and Muwanga, from which much of the material on Makerere is sourced, “[D]espite the impressive advances in institutional reform at Makerere, there are a number of areas that need substantially more progress to make reform sustainable and meaningful” (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003: 41). A listing of what the study considered “unfinished business” is most instructive.

In spite of the increase in own-generated funds and substantial donor support, Makerere continues to depend on government for over 60% of its funding, and is still short of the requirements for sustaining the quality of teaching and learning for its much-expanded student population.

The study notes "...growing concern from a cross section of the university's stakeholders - including faculty, students, government officials and donor agencies - that increased enrolment may have jeopardised the quality of learning". According to material provided in the study, the situation is clearly more dire than this delicate statement would suggest. There was unbearable pressure on space, facilities and staff, as "there ha[d] 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[d] academic quality." (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003: 43)

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."

Evaluations carried out by a joint university-government committee set up by the Vice-Chancellor showed that two small private universities, the Uganda Martyrs College and the Islamic University, provided better quality education than Makerere University! [39] This has to be a massively worrying outcome.

Income generated in the new ways goes to benefit the faculties/units that generated it and their staff. Thus, as "[l]aboratory-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", those "underachieving" faculties have gained little from the improved financial situation of the university. 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 what Uganda needs?

The funding of university research continues to rely on the traditional sources of government and the donors. The Musisi study notes that research is "seriously under-funded", as government subventions for research have been around 10% only of what the university has estimated for it. A proposal to alleviate the situation by levying an annual charge of \$7 per undergraduate and \$13 per postgraduate to underwrite university research had not been implemented by the time of the study. Given the heavy teaching loads and the fact that extra teaching and consultancies bring extra income while

research does not, there is room for very serious doubt if the motivation and the time for research were there, in any event.

There were major student welfare deficits.

“... it is 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. In addition to the insufficiency of learning facilities ... , student living conditions are particularly notorious”. (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003: 49)

There was a gender dimension to these welfare deficits. While, one of the positive features of the new reforms has been the continued improvement in the numbers of women students, as noted above, Musisi and Muwanga, observe that:

“... poor living conditions are particularly pronounced among female students. ... Living off campus and attending evening classes or staying late at the library present security problems for female students. Incidents of assaults and rape on campus have increased in the last year, raising serious concerns over the safety of female students on campus.” (id.: 50)

Reference was made to stories in the media about a few female students engaging in “immoral activities” in order to defray the very high living and accommodation charges, even for those on government subsidies.

The last point of note is the familiar one of enrolment expansion without broadening. As put by the study:

“An oft-cited danger of the introduction of fees at Makerere is an increase in the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ in access to higher education. Large numbers have been admitted, but access has not broadened. The view that access to Makerere is the preserve of the elite still prevails despite the reforms.” (id.: 51)

To sum up, the reforms of the 1990s brought Makerere “back from the brink”, enlarging access, improving staff conditions, increasing the social relevance of some of its courses, while reducing its dependence on government subvention. However, this has been achieved in a manner that seems to threaten the quality of the teaching and learning environment, and remove the focus from research and reflection as part of the university enterprise.

It is difficult to believe that the Vision supposedly guiding the entire reform process is

“To be a centre of excellence, providing world class teaching, research and service related to sustainable development for Uganda.” (“The Makerere Vision”, *Strategic Plan 2000/01 – 2004/05*)

The leadership of Makerere University is not only aware of these problems, but is taking measures, some of which have been mentioned above, to alleviate the problems. [40] It has not had much success so far, hence the consistent addition of a rider on “unfinished business” to most analyses of the situation. Whether one considers these challenges as

“unfinished business” or as reflecting basic flaws in the reform strategy itself depends of one’s view of the fundamental logic of the process. An acknowledged factor in the success so far of the process has been the general buy-in by the university community. Whatever the initial basis for this, the driving force behind the momentum currently appears to be the direct material gains made by Faculties/units and individuals – improved facilities and working conditions, and enhanced personal incomes – all depending primarily on the hours of extra teaching, service provision, and the like. How else could one explain the phenomenal explosion of the numbers of fee-paying students, and in fields of study that do not reflect any social policy or priorities? The incentive system is, thus, only indirectly related to the core functions of the university and its Vision and Mission Statements, if this reading is correct. For, while teaching is a core function, teaching without regard to the quality of learning is not. Where research is under-funded or crowded out, where time for tutoring students and mentoring young faculty is reduced to a bare minimum, an effective teaching and learning environment ceases to exist, and the notion of a space for reflection and the cultivation of critical thinking is completely out. Prospects for providing “world class teaching research and service”, as the Makerere Vision has it, are, at best, dim.

In the absence of a coherent national policy framework, emphasising the broader social goals of higher education, and given what appears to be the inability of the Vision and Mission Statements of the Strategic Plan to provide specific guidance, the logic of the market economy will reinforce the internal incentive system in muting even further the balancing effect of those broader goals. From this perspective, what appear to be challenges or “unfinished business”, are really signs of a decisive move towards the privatisation of a public institution, not unlike the generalised privatisation of public enterprises that is official policy in Uganda as in many other African countries. They prefigure a fundamental, perhaps irreversible diversion of the university from its broader social purposes. Perhaps we are here confronted, not with unfinished business, but a *different* business.

END COMMENT

As has been shown, by the beginning of the new millennium the institutional demography of African higher education was undergoing marked change – new forms of demand, new stakeholders, new modes of provision and new providers. At the same time, relations among the various categories of institutions, and between them and the state have also been evolving in unpredictable ways. This situation of institutional complexity and policy dynamism poses the challenge of how to treat the higher education system as a system,

and so structure it as to recognise and accommodate the new needs and new forces, while playing to the strengths of the different components and preserving the enduring social and economic goals of the system.

It is against this background that the challenges facing Africa's universities and their various attempts to survive and thrive must be assessed. In this connection, two points may be made.

- (a) It is necessary to emphasise *the complexity of the environment* within which higher education reform has to be undertaken. To the historic problems that need to be overcome - low participation rates, inequitable access, reduced resources available to both state and institutions, and limited capacity of the state to make its own policy choices – two more have been added, namely, the novel demands of the knowledge society and what I would call, more generally, “the immediacy of the external”, that is, the absence of insulation from the direct and immediate impact of global factors, including pressure from powerful transnational commercial interests.
- (b) The second, and related point is that, *there are no easy choices*. To say this is not to counsel despair, but to caution the many in government and the donor community who have all-too-often insisted upon one-sided, simplistic, usually economic prescriptions for dealing with these hugely complex problems. The determination of the proper mission and the mandate as well as the operational modes of universities in such a wide variety of historical and material conditions requires very thorough and realistic assessments of history, material circumstances, political/economic conditions and prospects, against the general background of global movements. This calls for a combination of humility on the part of experts and openness to all ideas on the part of policy-makers and leaders of institutions, on the one hand, and on the other, a preparedness of political and institutional leadership to mobilise and act decisively once social consensus has been established.

Having said this, a number of broad guidelines may be put forward. In thinking about establishing an appropriate policy framework, three key elements may be recommended.

- (i) It is absolutely essential to reassert the primary, irreducible responsibility of the state for the establishment and maintenance of an adequate higher education system, including universities.
- (ii) A key plank of the revitalisation of higher education in Africa and the derivation of the maximum social benefit from it has to be the restoration of the “public good” dimension of higher education. It needs to be fully appreciated and taken into

account at every stage that there are values in university education and practice beyond the market and beyond immediately quantifiable products. In this the primary responsibility rests with the university community, particularly the Professoriate to persuade itself and to justify to the public this important but easily ignored truth.

- (iii) There needs to be negotiated and established a systems-level policy framework for the guidance of the strategic choices that have to be made by all players in the entire education sector. [41] It is absolutely crucial that in the process, pivotal issues be confronted, openly discussed and the necessarily hard choices made. Among such issues one could name: the proper balances between the various components and levels of the educational sector; rational and equitable arrangements for access and financing at the different levels; rational and function-determined differentiation among the categories of higher education institutions; and the proper balance between enrolment and quality at the university level. The many attempts at this framework formulation - national conferences, consultations and fora, and committees of investigation and recommendation, etc., over the last 20 years – attest to the appreciation of this point by all. It has to be said, though, that many of these attempts were flawed, either by the inadequacy of the consultation process or the poor preparatory work, the failure of key players to participate or accept the outcome, or simply the lack of legitimacy of the process and the atmosphere of intolerance that existed in many countries in the pre-democratic era. But even if this were not the case, the process we are suggesting is a difficult one to deliver, if only because of the hard social policy choices that need to be made, and the often-conflicting interests of the various stakeholders.

Despite previous failures, however, the timing may be right for a renewed attempt. This is not because the problems have become easier, nor the differences amongst contending interests and visions any less deep-seated. What is new is the acknowledgement by virtually all players that the present situation is untenable, that the conditions of yesteryear cannot now be replicated or restored, that no one has the simple correct answer, and that if appropriate, good faith effort and concessions are not made by all, the situation can only get much worse. A second factor is the renewed interest of both governments and key members of the donor community in the revitalisation of higher education in Africa. A word of caution, however. Despite its potential for good through the provision of additional resources, this renewed interest would not yield a positive outcome unless it is grounded in the fundamental consensus that would arise from the policy consultations suggested above. Autocratic decrees by governments, self-serving technical and policy advice by experts and agencies, and selective funding initiatives by

donors cannot be part of a long-term solution to the problems of higher education in the present circumstances of Africa.

Box 1: Makerere University in the 1970s and 1980s

Funding Cut-backs

“Makerere's financial resources from both public and external sources declined dramatically in the 'seventies and 'eighties. ... at the same time that the university was experiencing increasing pressure to expand enrolment. Makerere responded by admitting more students, but with fewer resources than it had had previously for smaller numbers.

“The most obvious consequence of the decline in financial resources in the 1970s and 1980s was a sharp deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning. Makerere became a place of bare laboratories, empty library shelves, chronic shortages of scholastic materials and overcrowded halls of residence.

“The financial crisis had a major impact on teaching staff. Lecturers were demoralized by salaries that were not only meagre but often came late. ... Many lecturers took other jobs, both within and outside of Uganda. ... The lecturers who remained, moonlighted as tutors, taxi drivers, or went into business in order to survive, using university facilities as their operating bases. Although many gave the odd weekly lecture, they had little time for seminars, tutorials or one-to-one student contact, let alone research or intellectual debate.

“... there was virtually no application of information technology to either teaching and learning or institutional management during this period. ... students remained without exposure to advances in information technology, and overall impact on the faculty was minimal. Administration and management processes remained almost totally manual.

Impact on research

“The university's research infrastructure and output suffered substantially The university had built up a substantial research infrastructure whose outputs received international acclaim. In the first years after independence (1962-1970), political stability and the hopes created by independence brought new research initiatives to the university. Of particular note were the East African Institute of Social Research, which became the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), the University Farm at Kábanyoro, the Medical School research programme at Mulago Hospital and the Faculty of Science, especially in Botany, Chemistry, Physics and Zoology. Under [the regime of President Iddi] Amin, most expatriate scholars and researchers left the country, donor agencies and other external financiers disengaged themselves, and collaborative research projects between Uganda and regional or overseas institutions were terminated. ... government's preoccupation with economic rehabilitation and suppression of internal civil strife left research institutions and programmes running on a maintenance-only basis. By the mid-to-late 'eighties, a few active research programmes came to life with the sporadic return of external support, notably at the Veterinary Faculty, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry and Faculty of Education. However, this was funding for specific projects, generally in areas of the particular donor's interest, which did not improve the research situation of the university as a whole. ...

....

“Small allocations for research resulted in poor facilities, limited access to publishing facilities, a limited research database, low output and absence of a research culture. Other consequences ... were lack of appreciation of the importance of research, lack of skills to undertake research, lack of experience in research, low priority given to research at the university and in other public institutions, lack of centrally initiated and managed research and emphasis on financial gain as a motive for undertaking research.”

Excerpt from: Musisi, et al. (2003)

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Notes

1. The following colleagues read earlier drafts of this paper and made most constructive comments: Ron Kassimir, Yann Lebeau, Amina Mama, Esi-Nana Sekyiamah and David Szanton, as did Judith Sawyerr. I wish to acknowledge, too, research and other technical back-up from Adeline Addy and Ransford Bekoe of the AAU Secretariat.
2. There is a much longer history of higher education in Africa dating back to Karawyyin in Fez, Al Ahzar in Cairo, both in the 1st Century AD, and Timbuktu in the 13th Century, and including Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, Liberia College and some of the South African universities, in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. The major colonial universities were established by Britain in the Sudan, Nigeria, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Zimbabwe) and Uganda; by the French in Dakar and Tananarive; and by Belgium in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire), all between the mid-1940s and the end of the 1950s.
3. The analysis and discussion that follow will be limited to sub-Saharan Africa. Acknowledging that sub-Saharan Africa is not homogenous unit, even for present purposes, this limitation of scope should, nevertheless make it easier to make useful generalisations, pointing out differences where necessary. The cost will be the loss of the richness of material from North Africa and South Africa. Further, it is recognised that the problems features to be described are not necessarily peculiar to Africa. There will be elements common to most developing countries.
4. Even as late as today (2002), there were none in some of the smaller countries: Cape Verde, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mayotte, Sao Tome' et Principe and the Seychelles.
5. The colonial powers for their part saw the few universities they set up after the Second World War first as needed to run the colonial machinery, and later as part of the preparation for eventual independence of their colonies.
6. It bears remembering that, except for East Asia and Latin America, the vast majority of university students the world over are enrolled in public institutions. The figures for Western Europe and the US are 95% and 80%, respectively.

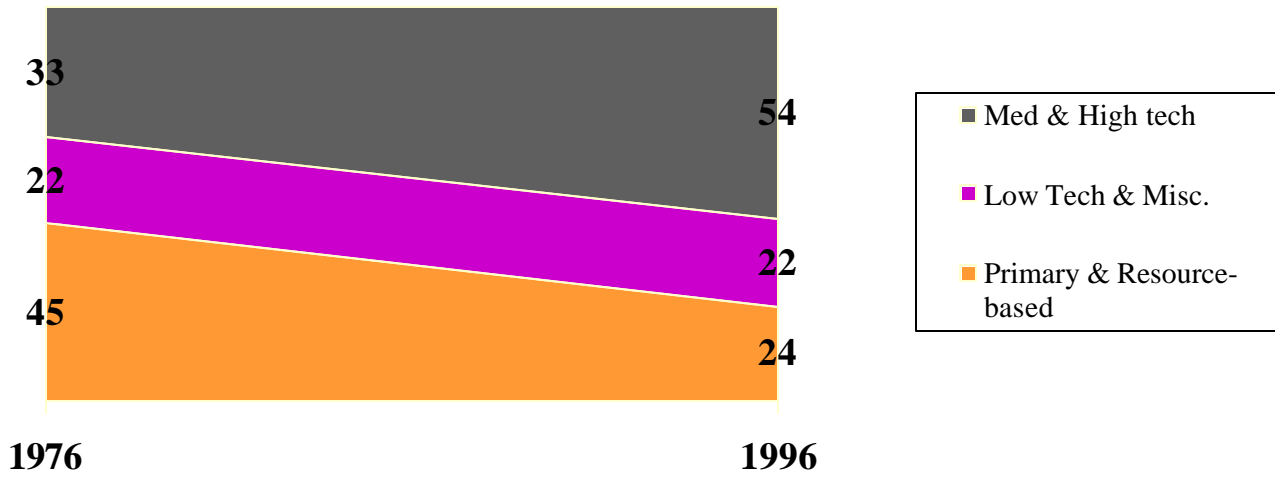
7. For decades, state subsidies constituted over 90% of the budgets of many African universities. Though this has been reduced, sometimes drastically, in the last ten years, it remains the case in several, mostly Francophone countries like Senegal.
8. Similar disturbances have attended every effort, whether ultimately successful or not, to remove these subsidies. Current examples in Anglophone Africa include Botswana and Swaziland. In most other countries a variety of publicly-subsidised student loan schemes, scholarships and bursaries have been substituted.
9. The material in the following paragraphs is drawn from an earlier paper: Sawyerr, 1999.
10. "Gross under-funding", the constant refrain of almost all African universities is reflected in movements in public expenditure on education, including universities, in the structural adjustment years. In Uganda, the share of the national recurrent budget spent on education went from 21% in 1983/84 to 12.2% in 1988/89 (Musisi and Muwanga, 2003); in Ghana, government subvention to the universities is estimated to have declined by 60% in real terms between 1991 and 2000 (Manuh, 2002). The story in Nigeria is similar, with allocation per student going down from 3424 Naira in 1975/76 to 409 Naira in 1989/90 (in constant Naira) (Jega, 2002). All this was happening at a time when university enrolment was climbing in all three countries!
11. The figures on the number of institutions and enrolment used in this paper have to be taken as very rough approximations, as firm data are very difficult to come by. Our own and other investigations of specific country situations would suggest that published official figures (IAU/UNESCO, 2001 and UNESCO/IAU, 2002) are substantial underestimates. Particular difficulties relate to (a) distinguishing between universities and non-university tertiary institutions, as these are classified differently in different countries, and (b) when an institution becomes a fully accredited university. Thus, any aggregation of universities, necessarily involves a large measure of interpretation, with the result that different analysts will end up with more or less different lists and totals. For our purpose, however, the estimates in the text give the correct orders of magnitude and relativities.
12. A series of World Bank papers starting from 1971 and culminating in the very controversial, but influential 1988 policy paper (World Bank, 1988) played a lead role in this.
13. This policy prescription has been heavily criticised from within and outside Africa. In addition to challenges to the technical bases for the rates of return analysis and conclusion, the attacks focussed on the virtual decapitation of African society implied in the denial of funding to the already weakened universities. (See Report of Association of African Universities meetings in Harare, 1986 and 1987; Buchert *et al.*, 1995; Task Force, 2000). It is ironic that the World Bank, which by its studies and reports, provided the ideological and technical bases for the attack on the higher education in favour of basic education in Africa, has now found, not only broad policy grounds for a more balanced approach, but also technical evidence of "rising returns to university education". (World Bank, 2002: 26-27).
14. Apart from new World Bank loans for higher education development, potentially the most significant of these was the agreement in April 2000 of the Presidents of four American Foundations (Carnegie Corp. 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, the "4Foundations Partnership", proposes to provide up to \$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. Incidentally, Manuh *et al.*, 2002; Mkude and Cooksey, 2003; Musisi and Muwanga, 2003; and Mario *et al.*, 2003, important studies on which I have drawn extensively in this paper, are some of the first products of the case study programme of the 4Foundations.

15. A cautionary note is in order here. First, the enormous variation in the histories and specific features of higher education systems on the continent - from centuries-old institutions to recent establishments; from mega-universities to one-thousand-enrolment institutions; from the Francophone and Lusophone to Anglophone systems – call for great caution in generalising about African higher education. Secondly, serious data limitations pose particular problems for description and analysis of African phenomena. Much of the data are out-of-date, unreliable or inadequate, and often are not in forms comparable across the continent.
16. For instance, the proportion of the average household income spent on education is estimated at 50% in Uganda and 26% in Mali, in contrast to the OECD countries, where it is 10%.
17. Important issues that will not be covered include such as the flows of staff and students across national borders, creating an important regional dimension to higher education development in the continent, as well as the whole question of the place of higher education and higher education institutions in war-torn and conflict zones. In relation to the latter, a pilot project jointly organised by the Social Science Research Council, New York, and the Association of African Universities should provide useful information and insights. Further details of this project can be obtained from Ron Kassimir (<kassimir@ssrc.org>) or Akilagpa Sawyerr (<asawyerr@aau.org>).
18. The figures on the number of institutions and enrolment used in this paper have to be taken as very rough approximations, as firm data are very difficult to come by. Our own and other investigations of specific country situations would suggest that published official figures (IAU/UNESCO, 2001 and UNESCO/IAU, 2002) are substantial underestimates. Particular difficulties relate to (a) distinguishing between universities and non-university tertiary institutions, as these are classified differently in different countries, and (b) when an institution becomes a fully accredited university. Thus, any aggregation of universities necessarily involves a large measure of interpretation, with the result that different analysts will end up with more or less different lists and totals. For our purpose, however, the estimates in the text give the correct orders of magnitude and relativities.
19. A further 13 institutions are registered with the National Accreditation Board, awaiting accreditation. Yet, the World List of Universities (IAU/UNESCO, 2002) still lists no private universities for Ghana.
20. Curiously, enrolment at the Université Marien Ngouabi, the one public university is reported to have begun to fall after 1997!
21. Forty-seven per cent of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa was 15 years old or less in 1998, a figure estimated to drop to just over 42% in 2015. Comparable figures are: East Asia and the Pacific- 27% and 21%; Latin America and the Caribbean - 32% and 26%; OECD countries - 21% and 17%. (UNDP 2001: Human Development Indicators, Table 5).
22. More technical support for the rationality of these choices is provided by the consideration that in most systems, while a person with a university degree may not get the kind of job he or she considers appropriate to their qualifications and deserts, they would generally get better-paying jobs than if they had not gone to university. The same is true, though to a lesser degree as between secondary and primary graduates.
23. 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.
24. In a study of Makerere University students in the mid-1990s, Mayanja (1998) found that children of educated parents took a disproportionate share of university places, which is by no means limited to Africa. For instance, referring to a study of reforms in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Coleman draws attention to the fact that “the children of the

- intelligentsia are over represented by about three times, and the more prestigious science faculties have disproportionate enrolments of persons of non-manual background". (1994: 345).
25. See Lebeau (2000: 154) and Dyhouse (2001: 827, 835, 839). On the basis of her study of the situation in England in the first three decades of the 20th Century Carol Dyhouse observes that education was often seen as "a central element in the creation and reproduction of cultural capital amongst the upwardly mobile" (819). While this is generally true, the avenues for upward mobility in most of Africa are so much more limited than elsewhere that the role of education, especially higher education in this matter is exaggerated. Indeed for women, traditionally excluded from high level industry and commerce, this is particularly significant.
 26. See also Coleman, 1995: 345
 27. It is instructive that in Mozambique, scholarship awards are more targeted –special means-tested scholarships for natives of deprived areas: full for the poorest, partial for the others. In the result only 10% of students in government higher education institutions are reported to be on scholarship or to live in subsidised accommodation or get help with books. (Mario *et al.*, 2003).
 28. Ajayi *et al.*, 1996; Mazrui, 1978
 29. While there are grounds for questioning the ideological direction and social commitment and relevance of much of the work of the immediate post-independence universities, few dispute the quality of teaching, research and publication in the best of them.
 30. When the author took over as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana at the beginning of 1985, the subvention from government was disbursed monthly, in *arrears*! Many were the months when the disbursements fell below the actual expenditures reported!
 31. The phenomenon is reported from the OECD countries too: 28%, 37% and 50% of full-time faculty in the UK, Australia and US, respectively, are over 50 years old, while over a third in Ontario, Canada, are between 55 and 65. (The news service for the network of Vice-Chancellors and Presidents in membership of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, No. 30, September 2002).
 32. Musisi (2003) reports that research output at Makerere University declined by 53% between 1977 and 1987.
 33. See also Coleman, 1994: 352– 353
 34. In Brazil 70% of university students are enrolled in private universities. The figures for Korea and the Philippines are 75% and 80% respectively.
 35. The material in the following paragraphs is taken from Sawyerr, 2002
 36. Report of AAU/UNESCO/CHEMS Workshop on Strategic Planning, 1995. (Unpublished)
 - 36A. Ekong and Plante, 1996
 37. See e.g., Court, 1999; Mayanja, 1998; Musisi, 2003; World Bank, 2002.
 38. More recent estimates put the figures at over 21,000 public and under 5,000 private students!
 39. [@Mak](#), *Decentralization: Human resources Demand Assessment* (cited in Musisi and Muwanga, 2003).

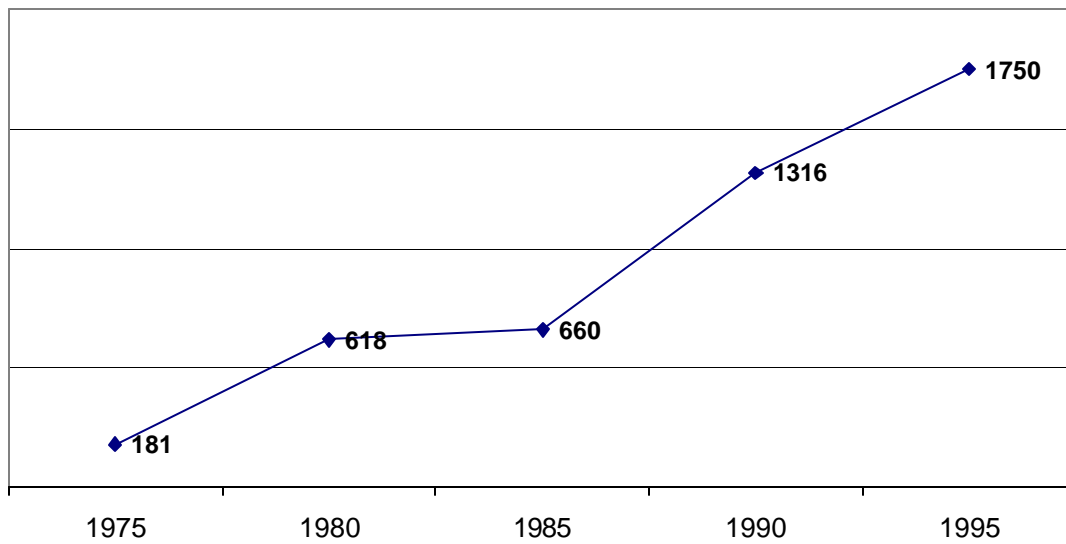
40. Other measures include the setting up of a committee to see to quality assurance; moves to cross-subsidise the “underachievers”; and plans for new buildings, etc.
41. Such frameworking exercises have been undertaken in many countries, including Australia, France, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain and the UK.

Fig 1: Technological intensity of goods in international trade (%)



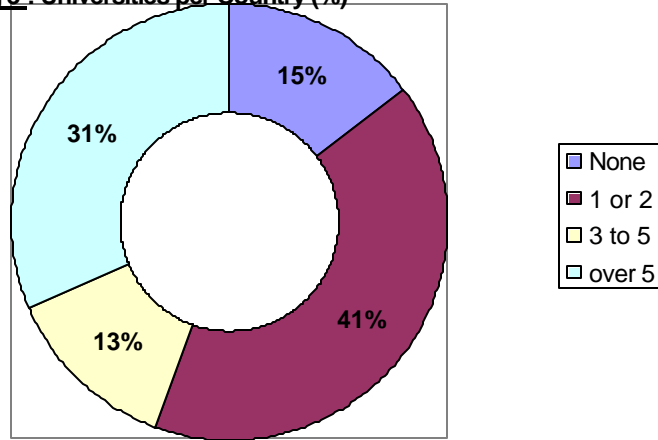
Constructed from data in Fig. 2.2, World Bank 1998

Fig 2: Enrolment in African Universities ('000)



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1999, and other (set out in Task Force, 2000)

Fig 3 : Universities per Country (%)



Source: UNESCO/IUI (2001); IUI/UNESCO (2002) and personal investigation

Fig 4 : Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (%)

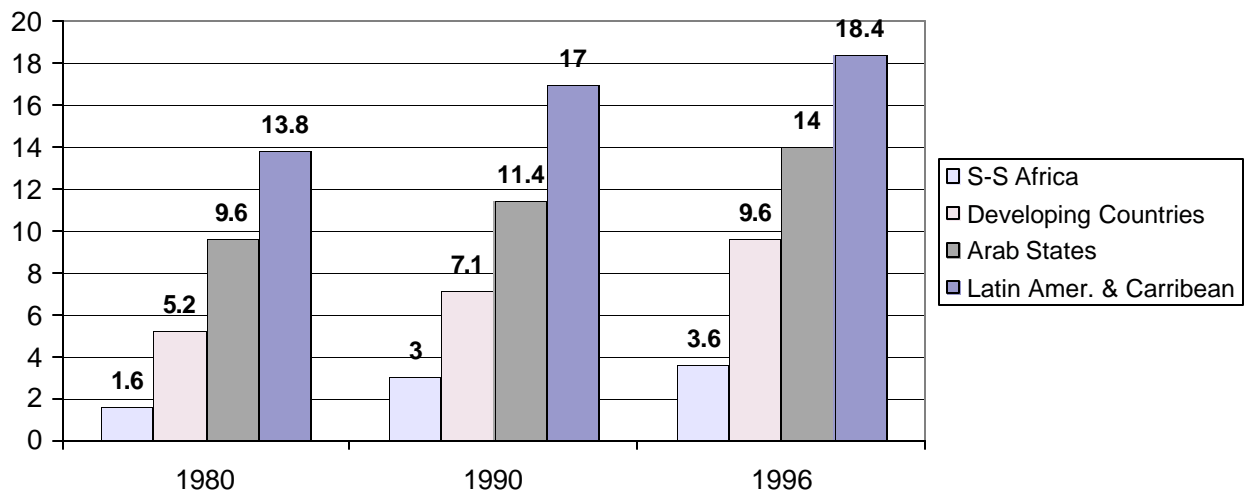


Fig 5: GDP per capita (\$)

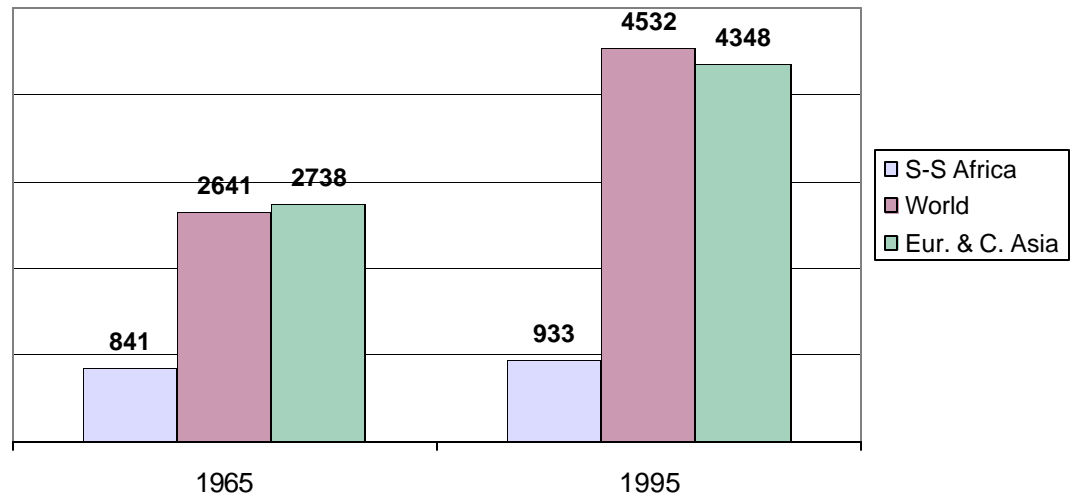
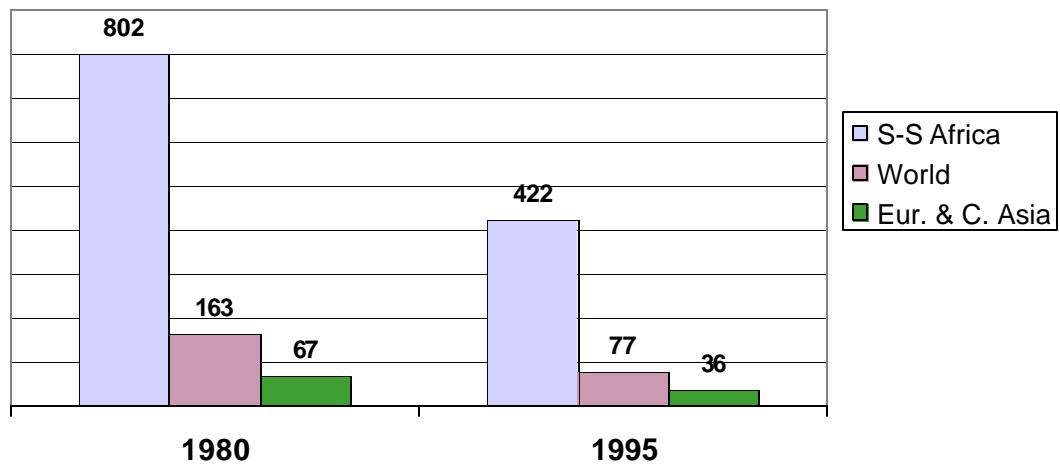


Fig 6 : Tertiary Expenditure per Student as % GNP per capita



Source: UNESCO 1998; World Bank 1998 (set out in Task Force, 2000)

Fig 7 : Adult Literacy Rate (%)

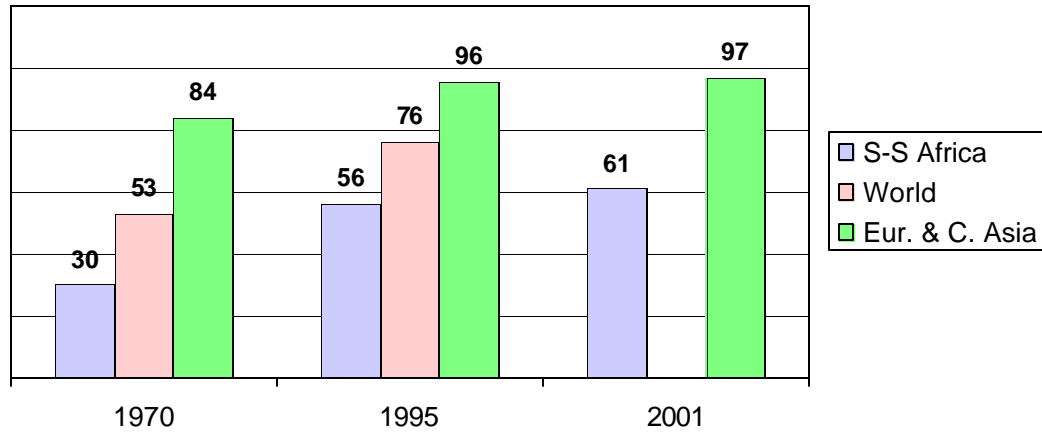
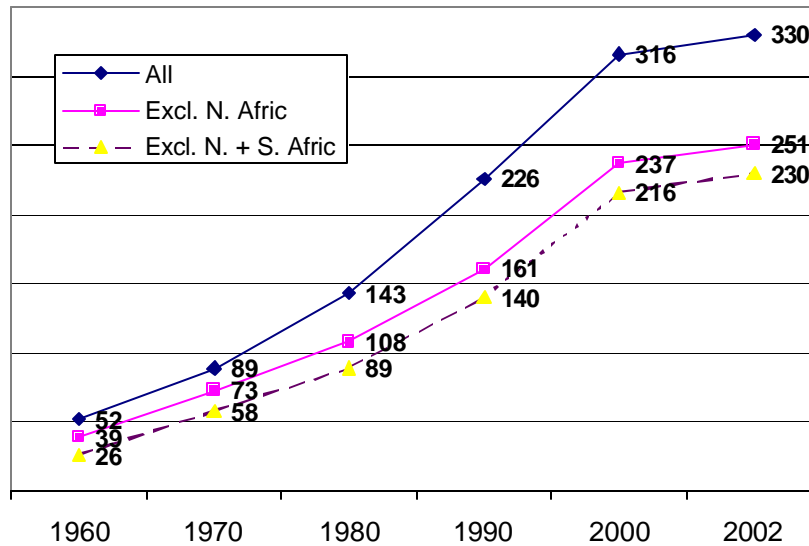
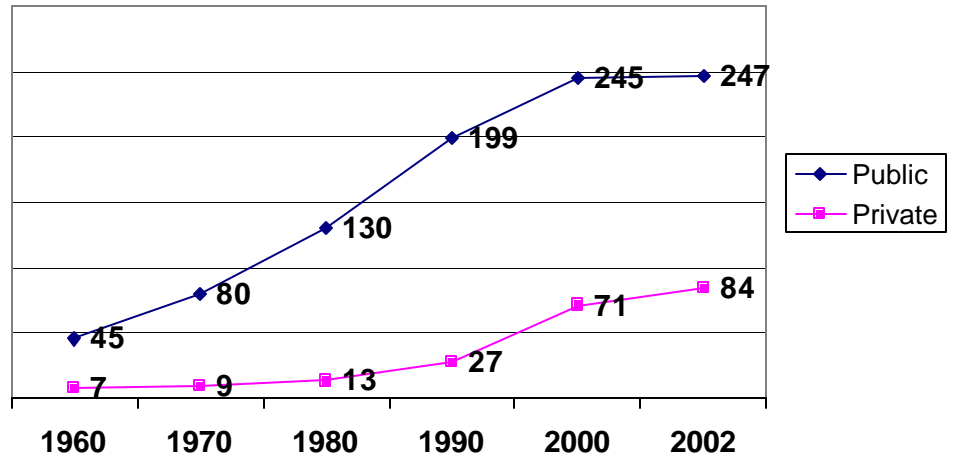


Fig 8 : Establishment of Universities



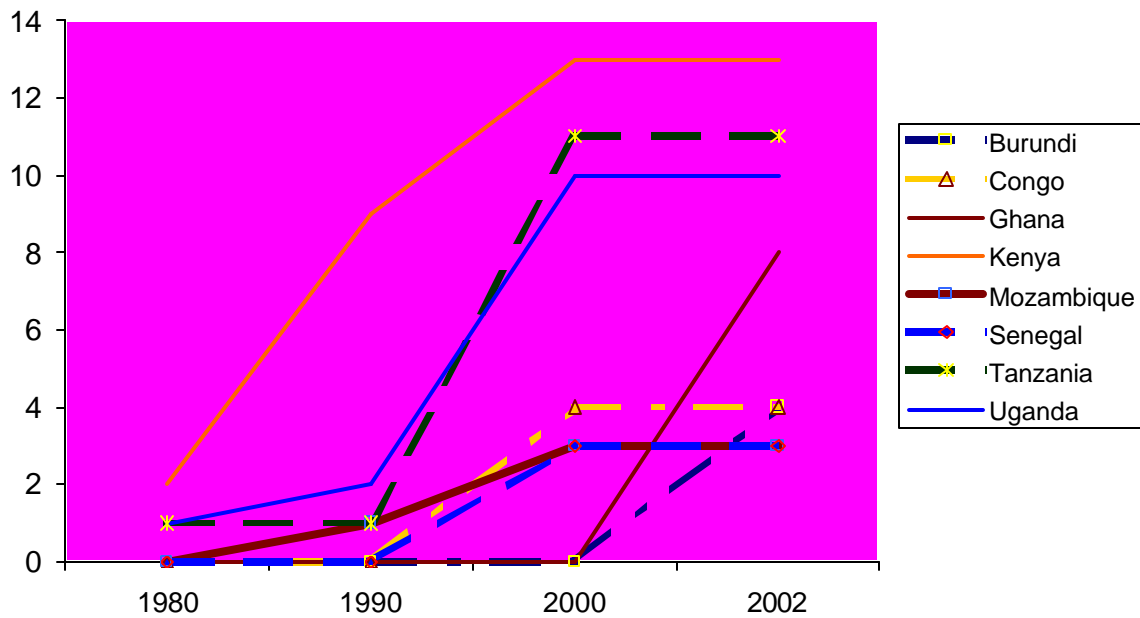
Source: UNESCO/IAU (2001); IAU/UNESCO (2002) and personal investigation

Fig. 9: Establishment of Universities in Africa



Source: UNESCO/IAU (2001); IAU/UNESCO (2002) and personal investigation

Fig.10: Private Universities: Selected Countries



Source: UNESCO/IAU (2001); IAU/UNESCO (2002) and personal investigation

Fig 11 : Universities of Ghana: Age Profile of Academic Staff (1998)

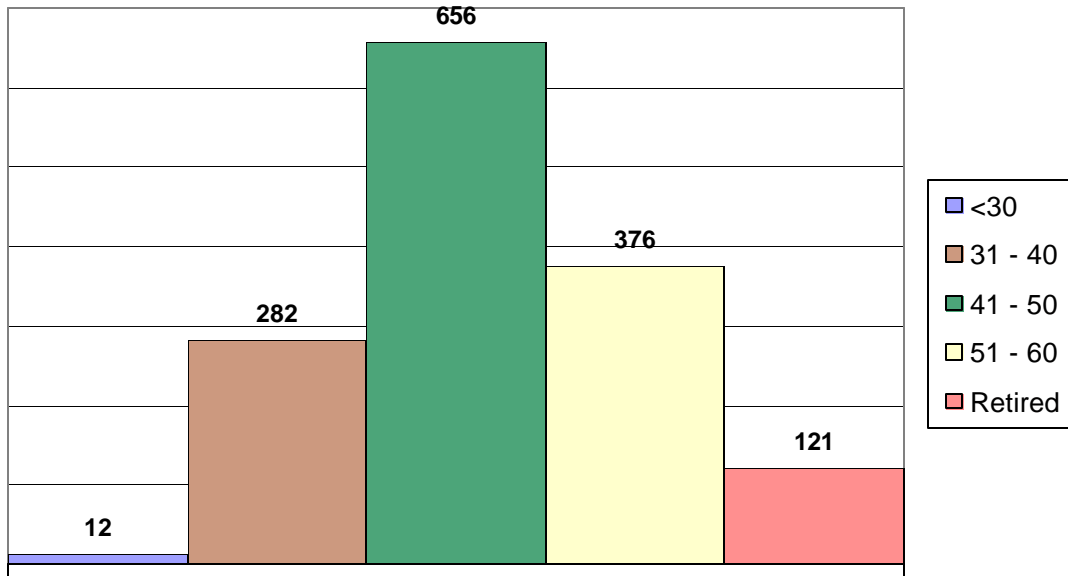
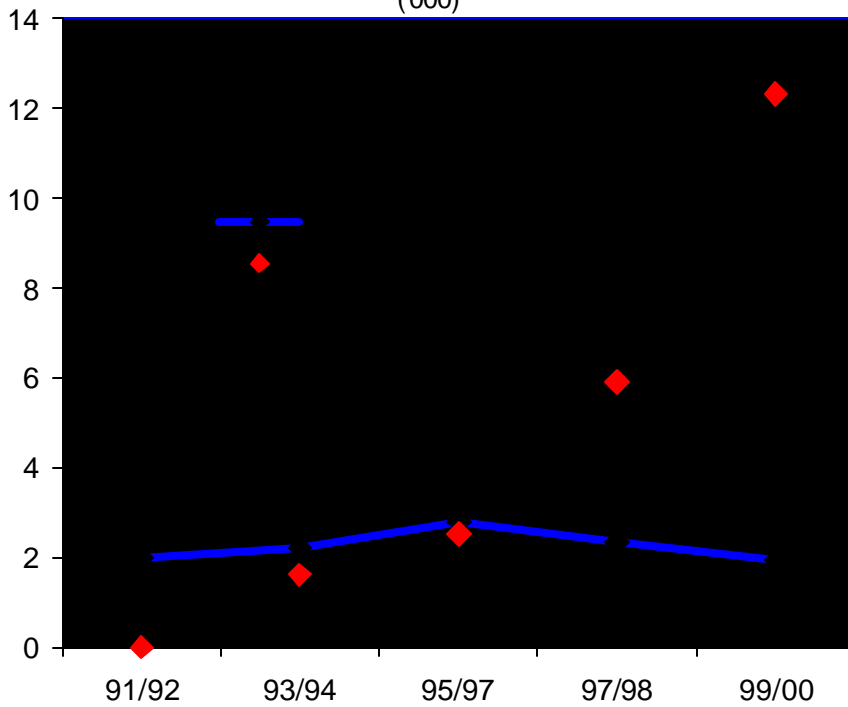


Fig. 12 Makerere Undergraduate Admissions ('000)



Source: Musisi and Muwanga (2003): Table 2