

ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT PLANNING MEETING

Mensvic Palace Hotel, Accra

December 17/18, 2001

SUMMARY NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Welcome and Introductions

Participants were welcomed by Professor Francois Rajaoson, Secretary-General of the AAU, who made a short statement about the AAU. (See Annexes 1& 2 for Programme and List of Participants) This was followed by participants introducing themselves and their institutional affiliation. Professor Sawyerr, Director of Research at the AAU and Coordinator of the Study Programme explained the rationale for the meeting, noting that after two phases (1993-2001) the Study Programme was due for a renewal. In preparation for this, Draft Proposals had been approved by the Scientific Committee of the Programme for circulation and further discussion. This meeting had been convened to give heads and representatives of social science research centres an opportunity to make an input into the Proposals.

The idea was to start with a general review of the major issues of higher education and research in Africa, as background to a discussion of the specifics of the Proposals.

Session 1: General Survey of Higher Education and Higher Education Research in Africa

Yann Lebeau reported on a 2-year survey of the state of social science research communities in Africa. The preliminary findings revealed a situation of *individualisation* of knowledge production, especially in social sciences, with little cooperation among scholars locally. At the same time, interviews showed the existence of extensive *informal* research activity, not linked to local institutions. Links were more with the outside. This kind of activity tended to yield a body of "grey literature" rather than formal academic publications and conference attendances.

Sam Moyo commented on features of the African research environment. He noted the expansion of research infrastructure - new sites, new institutional forms, new networks - during the "dead period" of the 1980s and 1990s. However, much of social science research during this period was aid-driven, tended to be applied and individual, and was, thus, able to contribute little to institutional research and capacity development. There was little systematic trans-disciplinarity or in-depth research, and many knowledge areas were neglected. A third feature was an increase in the competition for research grants. While this had a positive side, it posed real problems for junior scholars, who did not have the protection of institutional support. Finally, beyond basic training and research skills development, universities were no longer able to play the leading role in research.

Per Olaf Aamodt noted the essentially problem-oriented nature of HE research, and the fact that HE researchers studied their own institutions! This was later balanced by the **Ron Kassimir** and **Mala Singh**, who pointed out that HE research could deal with

theoretical issues such as: what kind of person does HE produce? does one need proficiency in basic in order to do good applied research? what kinds of skills do HE researchers need? how about social policy issues – who studied and analysed them? Also discussed were broad social science questions such as the role of HE in social reproduction and transformation and the promotion of public intellectuals.

Francois Orivel noted that since the start of the 1980s, there has been a worldwide shift in favour of private funding of HE, though the levels varied (0%-70% private). The introduction of fees has raised the proportion of private funding in the OECD countries from between 0%-5% to a current 20%. The comparable figure is higher in the developing countries, going as high as 70% in some cases. He emphasised the rather limited role of private HE, and the fact that globally, there has been no reduction in resources devoted to HE, though increased enrolments meant a per capita drop. It is significant that in the developing countries, the introduction of fees has tended to restrict access to HE to the top 10% of households by income. **Diery Seck** and other participants took up this issue, pointing out that, while the flat income distribution in OECD countries meant that cost-recovery in HE was relatively neutral socially, this was not the case in developing countries, given their high-income inequality. Cost recovery policies, thus, had major implications for social policy in the developing countries.

Mala Singh questioned the assumptions behind the direct linkage between HE research and policy, pointing to evidence that there was no linear connection between intellectual production and policy, even in the case of commissioned research. She cautioned against undue instrumentalisation of the relation between research and policy. The policy-research nexus assumes convergence of the agenda of research and policy makers. As satisfaction of the needs of policy tended to favour quantitative research, what happened to qualitative questions such as governance, equity, etc.? Other questions raised include: research for whom? to what social ends? how make research usable for policy purposes?

Addae-Mensah noted the different levels of policy makers – government, national councils/commissions of tertiary education, university councils and university leaders. He also pointed out the need to keep a socially-balanced view of the resource requirements of the university and pre-university levels of the education system.

In later discussion, other speakers emphasised the need to consider the policy needs and interests of sectors outside government, and extended the “policy community” to include leaders of HE institutions, politicians, civil society leaders, community and social activists, and the donor community.

Session 2 *Institutional Policy on HE and recent HE research*

Katri Pohjolainen-Yap outlined SIDA/SAREC strategy on higher education support, and brought up the question of the marketisation of HE and the forces driving it, as well as how knowledge systems developed, while **Marianne Peters** described the HE policies and approach of the Netherlands government.

Adebayo Olukoshi noted the key motivational role of CODESRIA’s Multinational Working Groups (the model for the Core Projects in the Proposals) in combating the fragmentation of social science research and researchers, especially during the 1980s and early 1990s. Among the current challenges, he identified the need to go beyond

mobilisation and collaboration in research to produce true comparative knowledge. This called for new instruments besides the case study mode.

Takyiwa Manuh gave a brief account of the “4 Foundations Initiative” (involving Carnegie, Ford, McArthur and Rockefeller), and described the Ghana Case Study process. She noted the danger of a return to the situation of the 1960s, with the recapture of the initiative in HE reform by donors and other external bodies.

General Discussion

The presentations led into a general discussion, from which the following were among issues that emerged:

- The reported increase in informalisation and individualisation of social science research is linked to the quest for non-government funding following the decline in public support, and raises questions about the incentive systems: does social science research fit into society’s project so as to be adequately resourced, or are researchers having to struggle to survive?
- The recycling of the discourse on cost-recovery in the absence of supporting evidence pointed to the urgency of relevant research as basis for discussion.
- There was an urgent need for a re-visioning of HE (as had been done at the recent Durban workshop).
- How does one discuss the political economy of knowledge production, without overemphasising the instrumental aspect of research?
- The importance of the nature of the institutional location of HE research - in university departments or independent “Centres”.
- Are research networks and universities engaged in a zero sum game?
- Considering the diversity of the “policy community” beyond government, what should be the appropriate targets, modalities and occasions for dissemination of the research product for maximum policy impact?
- Should policy makers be involved right from the beginning of research design and execution? In what specific ways?

PROPOSALS FOR PHASE 3

Session 3 Presentation, Critique and Comment on Proposal

The Proposals for Phase 3 of the Study Programme were then briefly presented and discussed. This was followed by critique, comment and group work on the components of the Proposals. (See Annex 3 for Groups) A final discussion session brought the meeting to a close.

Presentation

The Coordinator of the Programme, Akilagpa Sawyerr, explained that the origin of the **Study Programme** in 1993 lay in the concern of the AAU and its member institutions to raise the level of understanding of higher education issues in Africa and the fundamental changes to which it is subject. In the absence of local research-based knowledge, the prime objective of the Programme was to help build up a cadre of indigenous researchers capable of generating the knowledge and policy prescriptions required to guide the functioning and development of African higher education. After the first two phases, some progress has been made. Through the award of research grants and the

conduct of supervised research under supervision, altogether 93 researchers have been involved in over 63 projects. A recent survey of Study Programme researchers and research shows that almost all researchers are currently engaged, one way or another, in higher education work in their countries. While most are still in their university positions, others have formed or joined non-governmental think tanks. Forty-three research reports and 39 essays based on them have so far been produced. In addition to publications in refereed journals and monographs, the **AAU Research Paper Series** has published 10 of the essays. These publications are listed on the AAU Website (http://www.aau.org/studyprogram/dbfiles/AAU_Study_Program_Database_1.html), and the **Series** are available on-line, as well as being distributed to all member institutions of the AAU in hard copy. A database of Study Programme researchers and projects is available at the AAU Website.

Summing up the main features of the new phase of the Programme, Sawyerr pointed out that a central feature would be the use of existing research capacity to generate and disseminate the new knowledge and insights on African higher education issues. Substantial research projects will constitute the core of Phase 3, while dissemination of research results will assume greater prominence than in earlier phases. Secondly, the research talent and skills identified and developed over the last eight years will be put at the disposal of African higher education institutions, as well as the many on-going governmental and donor initiatives for supporting higher education in Africa. Thirdly, the core research projects will also serve as vehicles for enhancing the professionalism of the researchers so far trained under the Study Programme, as well as others who will join the project teams. Finally, it is expected that linking the projects to existing centres or other structures and arrangements such as consortia, working groups and networks, will contribute to the creation of a solid institutional basis for higher education policy research and training on the continent. (The detailed proposals had been circulated in draft in advance of the Meeting)

In immediate response, the following issues were raised:

- The Programme appeared complicated and over-ambitious, raising the question of manageability.
- It was too focussed on policy, which is treated almost as a technical matter. Note should be taken of the fact that the knowledge/research-policy nexus is mediated by interest, power, etc.
- There is need for a strategy for identifying policy targets.
- The Programme should be set against the background of the AAU's strategic vision for HE and research in Africa.

Critique and Recommendations

On the basis of individual comment (**Olukoshi, Kaijage, Schomburg, Moyo, Subotzky, Asenso-Okyere, Mama, Kassimir, and Seck**), a general discussion, and the results of Group Work, the following issues and suggestions on specific components of the Proposals emerged:

Core Projects

General

1. An overarching framework must be specified, to help focus the Programme and discipline the selection of projects: what are the target issues? the policy contestations, etc.?
2. The AAU should retain complete autonomy in defining priority issues, resisting the trend to external determination of priorities and themes.
3. The Proposals must further specify a process and provide clear guidelines for the choice of the priority issues and themes: what criteria? who is involved in making the selection?
4. The criteria for recruitment and participation must ensure that capacity-building featured throughout.
5. The budgetary implications of proposal must be carefully assessed, especially as they relate to the strengthening of the support system - human and material - within the Secretariat. This latter is an indispensable pre-condition for the success of the Programme.

Process/Structure

6. The AAU has a crucial back-up role to play – coordination, management, quality control (through the Scientific Committee?), documentation (as for CODESRIA's CODICE), information, logistics, - and that calls for strengthening and substantial resourcing within the Secretariat.
7. Functions/relations among bodies (AAU, Scientific Committee, Advisory Panels, Team Leader, Researchers) need to be fully specified, to ensure adequate oversight, monitoring and evaluation functions in AAU and the SC, without compromising the scientific autonomy of the research team.
8. The Scientific Committee has a crucial role to play in ensuring quality control.
9. To simplify structure and operation, the SC should be strengthened with specific expertise, as needed, *instead of having an Advisory Panel for each project*.
10. The calibre and role of the Team Leader/Coordinator - helping form the team, producing the lead paper, helping with project development and the organisation of the initial workshop, and providing leadership - are critical to the success of the Core Projects. He/she must, therefore, have (a) the capacity to provide *scientific* leadership and (b) minimum management skills. For this reason he/she must be selected at a very early stage, and the AAU must be directly involved in his/her identification in all cases.

Content

11. Effective inter-team work is important for developing crosscutting and comparative perspectives.
12. In place of “state-of-the-art” reviews to start off every project, solid Concept Papers would be adequate - this will expedite the process, and leave the possibility of overview papers being produced as part of the Final Report.
13. Prospective team members should be asked to produce abstracts based on the lead paper, for selection by AAU. Then, *in place of the proposed Conceptualisation Workshop*, it may be enough to have a workshop for team members to finalise the project.
14. The idea of a call for papers (whether open or limited) is useful in that (a) it helps raise the profile of the Study Programme; (b) publicises HE issues; and (c) encourages peer review and healthy competition.
15. A realistic estimate of the duration of projects, especially those involving large data sets outside universities, is 2-3 years

16. Watch out for the effect of differential capacities within a team – the danger of slowing down progress to the speed of the slowest.
17. Note should be taken of the importance of basic word processing and data analysis skills within the teams.

Training Institutes

General

18. The CODESRIA model has been good for introducing participants to new areas, and for catalysing other activities – e.g. research projects, networking.

Process/Structure

19. The venue and Director of the Institutes should be selected early.
20. Careful thought should be given to the character and minimum attributes of an adequate host institution, and the AAU should develop the capacity for monitoring its performance.
21. A tracer study should be conducted of “graduates” of the Institutes to see their career development and the sustainability of their HE research interest.
22. Links between the Institutes and the Core Projects must be carefully cultivated.

Content

23. In view of the heavy preparatory and logistical work and up-front costs, it would be realistic to (a) settle on *one location* and *one theme* for the life of Phase 3, and (b) limit the frequency of the Institute - to 2 instead of 3?
24. The Institute should adopt a *modular approach* – e.g. one-week-long modules (?) – allowing participants to choose any or all, depending upon need.
25. A special curriculum, going beyond technical methodology - proposal development, research methodology, data management and analysis, report writing, policy development, preparation of policy briefs, etc., - must be developed and, ultimately, incorporated in a special *HE Research Training Manual*.
26. The curriculum must aim at developing generic skills, useable beyond HE research – of particular interest to researchers not in full time HE research.
27. Of particular use will be ICT contact and facilitation before and after each Institute, and mentoring throughout.
28. A clear policy on disciplinary/gender balances of participants must be developed.
29. It would be useful to bring elements of the policy community (e.g., NGOs, civil society activists) into the programme, to join the researchers – but note the potential for of tensions arising from differing perspectives!

Policy and Dissemination

General

30. The Study Programme puts AAU at centre of the continental HE crisis, and must therefore be clearly located within AAU's strategic vision for African HE, and appropriately resourced.
31. While the policy dimension is important, the emphasis of the Programme should be on research.
32. It is important to recognise the existence of a wide variety of policy makers and advocates beyond government, who need research as a basis for policy and advocacy.
33. Successful policy influence turns on (a) the rigour, timeliness, relevance and completeness of the research; (b) the legitimacy of the source; and (c) the

“digestibility” of the product, e.g., carefully drafted and targeted policy papers and briefs.

Content

34. While it is important to sensitise researchers to the policy dimensions of their work, it is primarily for the AAU to arrange for the preparation of policy briefs, etc., and for policy advocacy. Some researchers (and others) may, nevertheless, be given special training in skills for “translating” research results into policy documents.
35. The Programme must extend beyond data building research, to the development of comparative perspectives and grappling with paradigm changes, etc.
36. Carefully-designed and linked strategies for policy and dissemination involving identification of elements of the policy community; formulation of appropriate approaches to, and involvement of, the community, etc., are needed right from the start of projects.
37. A useful innovation would be regular sessions with policy makers, preferably at their regular for a – Ministerial meetings, parliament, meetings of Vice-Chancellors and other university leaders, etc.

Institutionalisation

General

38. Networking is a means to an end, so attention must be paid to the appropriate incentives/opportunity costs for centres (also researchers/Resource Persons) to invest time in the proposed networks.
39. Networks require a minimum of organisational *structure* – to ensure coordination of activities, maintenance of databases and list serves, etc.
40. Ultimately, the AAU must serve as a central node for HE research, coordinating the activities of, e.g., Foundations, WGHE, SIDA/SAREC, CODESRIA, etc., in this area.

Content

41. Note should be taken of the different forms of networking:
 - Information networks (list serves + ICT training, etc.)
 - Research networks
 - Teaching networks
42. The forms of networking suggested in the Proposal are forms highly labour-intensive, though the proposed emphasis on community-building, as distinct from strict networking, is positive.
43. In the medium to longer term, networks are, therefore, best housed in established centres - but question:
 - how to match theme to centre?
 - what risk of capture/rent-seeking/gate keeping (as to agenda, resource allocation, etc.)?
 - how to strike the right balance between AAU coordination and network autonomy?
44. The requirements for successful hosting (of both projects networks) include (a) the availability of *free senior capacity* at the host institution, and (b) the integration of the activity into other work (research, training) of the institution.
45. Ultimately, institutionalisation and sustainability must involve the reinforcement of university-based centres.

CONCLUSION

In concluding remarks, the Coordinator of the Study Programme, expressed appreciation to participants for their acceptance of the invitation to the Meeting, and their enthusiastic and insightful contribution to the conversation on the Proposals. He expressed the view that so rich was the harvest of ideas that even if he were able to use but one/tenth of the suggestions, the Proposals would be the better for it. He reported that the Proposals, revised in accordance with some of the ideas generated at the Meeting, would be submitted to the Scientific Committee of the Programme for further discussion before final submission for funding. Meanwhile, the AAU would welcome any further recommendations for improvement, and, in particular indications of concrete ways in which the institutions represented at the Meeting could work with the AAU in making Phase 3 of the Study Programme successful.

On behalf of the AAU, the Secretary-General of the AAU thanked all participants for their contribution to a most productive set of discussions. He wished them well as they travelled back home.

ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT PLANNING MEETING

Accra, December 17-18, 2001

Tentative Programme

DAY 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

08.30–9.00 *Welcome & Introductions*

Chair: Addae-Mensah

09.00–10.30 *Gen Survey of HE & HE research in Africa*

Chair: Rajaoson

- Univs. & Social Science Research
- HE Research
- HE & policy

Sall/Lebeau/Moyo

Aamodt/Orivel

Singh/Addae-Mensah

10.30-12.00 *Institutional policy on HE & recent HE research*

Chair- Asenso-Okyere

- HE/research support policy
- MWGs & Institutes – CODESRIA experience)
- 4-Foundations Initiative, case studies, etc.
- Inventory on Innovation & fit with Phase 3

Pohjolainen-Yap/Peters

Olukoshi

Manuh

Subotzky

12.00-13.00 *Gen. Discussion*

Chair: Sawyerr

13.00- 14.00

LUNCH

PHASE 3 PROPOSAL

14.00-14.30 *Presentation*

14.30-18.00 *Critique and Comment*

Chair: Aamodt

- Core Research Projects
- Training Institutes
- Institutionalisation/Networking/Policy

Olukoshi/Kaijage/Schomburg

Moyo/Subotzky/ISSER

Mama/Kassimir/Seck

PM

DINNER

DAY 2

08.30-10.30 **Thematic Group Sessions**

11.00-14.00 **Report back/recommendations/wrap-up**

Chair: Pohjolainen-Yap

PM

OUTING AND DINNER

Refreshment Breaks: 10.00-10.30 & 16.00-16.30 (unless otherwise indicated)

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH - PLANNING MEETING
DECEMBER 17 - 18, 2001

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