



Dimensions of University Governance and Community Relations in Ghana

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Abstract

This article examines the dimensions of university governance and community relations among five public universities in Ghana. It focuses on how the universities exercise their corporate social responsibility within the communities where they are located. Place building theory was used for analysis. Key informant interviews were conducted within the research areas. Findings from the study show that there are agitations from the universities' host communities demanding greater social responsibility and engagement. However, whereas some of the universities have developed an interdependent orientation, others have adopted an independent perspective with respect to their surrounding communities. The article recommends that a multi-stakeholder approach involving the universities, surrounding communities, government institutions and other third sector organisations is required to address the developmental needs of the communities.

Keywords: public universities, Ghana, governance, community relations

Résumé

Cet article examine les dimensions de gouvernance universitaire et les relations communautaires dans cinq universités publiques du Ghana. Il étudie la manière dont les universités exercent leur responsabilité sociale d'entreprise au sein des communautés où elles sont implantées. La théorie de construction des lieux a été utilisée dans l'analyse. Des entrevues avec des informateurs-clés ont été menées dans les lieux de recherche. Les résultats de l'étude montrent une agitation latente dans les communautés d'accueil des universités qui réclame

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davantage de responsabilité sociale et d'engagement. Cependant, alors que certaines universités ont développé une orientation d'interdépendance, d'autres ont adopté une perspective d'indépendance à l'égard de leurs communautés environnantes. L'article recommande une approche multipartite impliquant les universités, les communautés environnantes, les institutions gouvernementales et d'autres organisations du secteur tertiaire dans la réponse aux besoins de développement des communautés.

Mots-clés : universités publiques, Ghana, gouvernance, relations communautaires

Introduction

This article focuses on university governance and community relations in Ghana. It examines the extent to which public universities in Ghana address questions associated with their social responsibility towards the communities where they are located in order to ensure peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit. Universities, just like all other organisations, have an environment in which they operate, that is, local community stakeholders, whose interest must be important to the university. This is so because, unlike in earlier times when the basic functions of universities were mainly teaching, learning and research, modern universities have an additional obligation to render services to their host communities (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008; McLaughlin 2006). In line with this new agenda, some universities have established strong business and social partnerships with the surrounding communities, while others have extended community engagement through a variety of support activities. The new direction is premised on the assumption that the ivory tower fever of universities has been superseded (Weinberg and Kistner 2007; Cross and Ndofirepi 2016).

Currently, there are nine public universities in Ghana. At the time of the establishment of these universities, the local communities where these institutions are located had high expectations that the proximity of the universities would offer them opportunities for upward social mobility and socio-economic development through access to higher education and more rewarding job opportunities. This was also premised on the fact that the establishment of universities in Ghana came at a high cost to these local communities that forfeited their land for such grand projects (Kwarteng, Boadi Siaw and Dwarko 2012; Kaburise 2003; Agbodeka 1998). In many instances, local communities willingly forfeited their land because they had the expectation that university engagement with community businesses and industry would improve the local economy. Moreover, the acts establishing the universities had community engagement and development embedded in them.

In many instances, however, there have been tensions between Ghanaian universities and their host communities. Host communities have accused universities of exclusion, neglect and renegeing on their social responsibility. In some cases, host community members have perceived the universities to be distant and elitist, thus serving the interest of only the privileged in society. In recent times, these issues have generated tensions and conflicts between universities and local community members in Ghana. Due to the many faces of the universities, this article focuses on governance issues and addresses the following questions: What governance systems and practices have been put in place by the universities to address the needs of the local communities? What form of relations/engagement exist between the universities and their surrounding communities? How do these relations/engagement lead to the improvement of the socio-economic wellbeing of the local communities?

The main objective was to examine the dimensions of the relations between public universities in Ghana and their host communities and the implications of such relations. The focus was on the kinds of engagements that universities have developed with their host communities and whether or not these engagements address the needs and expectations of the host communities. Specifically, the article analyses the governance systems of public universities in Ghana and how they accommodate and address the needs of their host communities.

The article is structured in five main parts. Part one focuses on the theoretical framework. This is followed by the methodology in part two. In part three, we look at the profiles of the public universities under examination. Part four of the work focuses on university governance systems and approaches to community engagement. The article ends with findings and conclusions.

Theoretical framework

This article is grounded on the place building theory advanced by David F. Thomas (2004) to assess the corporate social responsibility of organisations. The theory ‘explains the degree to which an organization values and invests in its social and geographical location, and its “local community”’ (Kimball and Thomas 2012:19). According to this theory, an organisation’s perspective on the place in which it is physically located goes a long way to determine its attitude towards the place, how it exercises its corporate social responsibility and the level of impact it makes on the place.

There are three key components underlying place building theory. These include: place building dimension, agent perspective, and place building profile (Thomas, Kimball and Suhr 2016). The place building dimension

of the theory examines how an organisation values the place where it is physically located based on five items, namely: nature; social relationships; material environment; ethics; and economic relationships. Nature includes everything about the natural environment where the organisation is located, including land, natural resources, landscape, fauna and flora and how the organisation values, relates and contributes to nature and the environment. The social relations dimension focuses on the spectrum of interaction between the organisation's staff and stakeholders with other organisations and the local community members and its institutions, culture and values. The material environment dimension, also referred to as the 'built environment', includes all man-made assets of the organisation such as office space, building and road infrastructure. The value placed by the organisation on these structures in relation to the local community reflects how the organisation values its host community. The ethics dimension of the theory focuses on the organisation's business practices and how they implicitly or explicitly affect its social contract with the people and how it establishes its legitimacy within the community where it operates. The economic relationship dimension focuses on the level of investment by the organisation in the physical wellbeing of the community (Thomas 2004; Kimball and Thomas 2012; Thomas, Kimball and Suhr 2016).

The agent component of the theory focuses on how the organisation perceives itself in relation to the local community. The agent perspective 'encompass[es] not only how organizations conceptualize themselves in relation to place, but also the meaning they give to a place, which then influences their goals, contributions to place and all variety of their behavior' (Thomas, Kimball and Suhr 2016:21). In line with this theory we have interrogated how the universities in this study conceptualised themselves in relation to the community either as interdependent or independent. If they conceptualised themselves as interdependent, they would certainly consider themselves members and integral parts of the surrounding communities and therefore mutually dependent on each other. Thomas Kimball and Suhr suggest that such 'organisations consider themselves responsible for the well-being of the place, view their success as intimately tied with the greater well-being of the place, and actively seek a variety of opportunities to invest and contribute to the multiple aspects of place' (2016:22). If they position themselves as independent, on the other hand, they regard themselves as mere occupants of the place where they operate. Such organisations focus mainly on achieving their institutional goals, satisfying their shareholders and not as directly or indirectly responsible for the wellbeing of their

communities. Independent organisations behave as mere occupants of place. They demand legal protections from the state and their only contribution to the place is provision of jobs and payment of taxes or royalties.

There are four place building profiles of an organisation which are determined by how the organisation expresses its agent perspective and place building dimension. They are transformational, contributive, contingent and exploitative. Transformational organisations identify themselves as change agents and act to improve the wellbeing of the people in places where they operate. Contributive organisations invest and contribute towards the wellbeing of the places where they are located. Contingent organisations, on the other hand, view themselves simply as ‘participants’ in the place where they are located, while exploitative organisations also position themselves as independent agents that have little or no obligation towards the place where they are located (Thomas, Kimball and Suhr 2016).

In line with place building theory, this study examined how public universities in Ghana orient themselves in relation to the places where they are located. The article examines whether the universities take interdependent or independent agency roles in relation to the communities and the manner in which the universities promote peaceful co-existence with the communities.

The proposition/hypothesis is that, universities that accommodate and address the needs and concerns of their host communities are more likely to succeed in delivering on their mandate than those that do not incorporate the needs and concerns of their host communities. This proposition is tested by examining the governance, management structures and practices of the universities studied in line with the key components of the place building dimension, agent perspective, and place building profile.

In this article, university–community relations encompass all the relationships and networks that universities develop with the wider community where they are located. Community is viewed as a social space where there are interactions and interconnections at interpersonal and institutional levels among members. In this sense, members are expected to demonstrate concern, or systems are supposed to function, for the wellbeing of others in order to advance the common good and to ensure that there is community life. It involves a geographical space which, for the universities, can be seen on three levels, namely: local, national and international community. By university governance and community relations we refer to all policies, structures, activities and initiatives put in place to ensure constant interaction between the university and the wider society.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, making use of data in the form of words to generate descriptions and explanations (Bangura 2019). A narrative design, focusing on a single phenomenon and the setting of participants (Shisanya 2019:55), was used. The design enabled us to focus on the perspective of engagement and relations between the university and host community members. The design also allowed for the creation of a platform for in-depth discussions of the issues in order to gain insights regarding the effectiveness of university–community relations.

Primary data was obtained through 73 in-depth interviews with key informants. These took place within a period of six months (from June to December 2018) on the campuses and in the communities of five public universities. These include the University of Ghana (UG), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Cape Coast (UCC), University for Development Studies (UDS), and the University of Education, Winneba (UEW).

The first stage of the research involved mapping of the communities and identification of participants for interviews. A purposive non-random sampling technique was adopted for selection of participants and sites. For communities, land ownership and proximity were the determining factors, while for the interviewees, key informants who held some form of authority in decision making within both the communities and universities were sampled. Because some of the communities that gave out land to establish the universities are located far from these institutions, while others are located within the environs of the universities, we ensured that these two categories of communities were represented in the sample. For UG, six out of ten communities were sampled. These include Okponglo, Shiashie (located close to the university), and Ogbojo, Agbawe, Frafraha, Oyarefa and La (located far from UG). For KNUST, 19 communities were identified in all and four were sampled for interview. They include Ayigya and Bomso (close to the university), Boadi and Awomaso (distant from the university). For UCC, interviews were conducted in Amamoma, KwesiPra, Kokoado, Apewosika, Akotokyir and Kwaprow, all of which are located within the environs of the university. In UDS, interviews were conducted in Sanerigu, Dungu in Tamale Township, and Nyankpala. Interviews in UEW were limited to Winneba Township.

The interviews sought to unearth the relations, both structural and social, that exist between the communities and their respective universities. In addition, historical documents, reports and commissioned studies, the statutes and acts of the universities were examined to tease out the legal and policy frameworks of the universities that shape university–community relations. In

other to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms have been used to identify them in this work. Themes were generated from the data for analysis.

Profile of study areas

UG and its communities

UG was established in 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast. It was affiliated to the University of London until it gained full university status in 1961 (Agbodeka 1998). Its mission is 'to create an enabling environment that makes it increasingly relevant to national and global development through cutting-edge research as well as high quality teaching and learning' (UG 2014:9).

The university was sited at a hilly location called Legon, which in Ga language means the Hill of Knowledge. Land for the establishment of the university was acquired by the Colonial Government from the La Traditional Council. At the time of its establishment, the university's location was far away from Accra township and the other Ga communities. It was in later periods that towns and communities began to develop around it.

Due to Accra's position as the capital of Ghana, and later becoming a centre of learning for higher education in the late 1940s, the city began to experience rapid population growth as a result of large volumes of people migrating to Accra to seek white and blue collar jobs, higher education and to engage in trade and other forms of economic activities. These happenings led to rapid development of new settler communities in Accra and surrounding towns. In the light of this, new communities began to sprout around the surroundings of the University of Ghana. Today, these communities are East Legon, Okponglo, Haatsu, Shiashie and Atomic Junction. Some of them, such as East Legon, Haatsu and Shiashie are elite settlements while others, such as Okponglo and Shiashie, constitute some of Accra's poor neighbourhoods. Some of these communities have in recent times been at loggerheads with the university over land disputes and access roads which have in some cases ended up in court.

KNUST and its surrounding communities

KNUST was established in 1951 as the Kumasi College of Technology. It officially opened in 1952 when 200 teacher trainee students were transferred from Achimota in Accra to form the nucleus of the new college (Pitcher 1976). The mission of the university is to provide an environment for teaching, research and entrepreneurship training in science and technology for the industrial and socio-economic development of Ghana, Africa, and other nations.

The university is located at Kumasi and its lands were offered by the Asante King, the late Otumfuo Sir Agyeman Prempeh II. In all, about 11 square miles of land, belonging to several communities stretching from Bomso to Awumaso, was involved. The communities include Kwamo, Fumasua, Ayeduase, Kotei, Ayigya, Ahinsan, Kantinkrono, Oduom, Deduako, Awumaso, Benimase, Bebre, Jinyase, Bomso No. 1, Domeabra, Boadi and Kronpong. The traditional authority of the afore-mentioned towns and villages received an offer of £3,500 as 'drink money' for the acquisition of the site for the Kumasi College of Technology. However, from 2002 the communities staged series of protests against the university demanding equal access, extension of social amenities, greater social responsibility and recognition. In addition, the university has since encountered land litigation issues with some of the community chiefs and individuals. These events have forced the university to reorient its relations with the communities and set up what is known as the Surrounding Villages Committee (SVC) to oversee the university's relations with the communities.

UCC and its surrounding communities

UCC was established in 1962 as a University College and placed in a special relationship with the University of Ghana, Legon. It attained the status of a university in 1971. Its original mandate was to train graduate professional teachers for Ghana's second cycle institutions and for the Ministry of Education, in order to meet the labour needs of the country's accelerated education programme at the time. However, with the expansion of some of its faculties and the diversification of programmes, the university has since extended its mandate to meet the demands of other sectors of the economy, apart from education.

Unlike the UG and KNUST, UCC shares the same geographical space with several poor rural communities. They include Amamoma, KwesiPra, Kokoado, Apewosika, Akotokyir, Kwaprow, Abora, Ankafor and Nkofofor. Greater portions of the university's student population and staff live in these communities. This has put a lot of pressure on land usage, estate, and social amenities of these communities. These communities are at the centre of various forms of litigation with the university over the ownership of the land. The original intention of Kwame Nkrumah, the founder of the university, was to expropriate the communities' lands for the university and relocate and/or compensate them, but this was never materialised until his overthrow in 1966 (Kwarteng, Boadi Siaw and Dwarko 2012). As a result, the communities and the university share the same geographical space. However, due to

the university's ownership claim over the lands, the communities have not been able to expand. Poverty levels are high and the traditional economic activity of the indigenes, which was farming, has largely been curtailed by the presence of the university. This has generated a great deal of tension between the university and these communities.

UEW and its surrounding communities

UEW was established in September 1992 from seven pre-existing diploma awarding institutions 'to train competent professional teachers for all levels of education as well as conduct research, disseminate knowledge and contribute to educational policy and development' (UEW 2019:3). It has four campuses, located in Winneba, Ajumako, Kumasi and Mampong.

Like UCC, the Winneba campus of the university where this research was conducted is located in the heart of Winneba Township. The university has four further campuses in other parts of the country. Traditionally, the main economic activity of the people of Winneba is fishing. However, with the establishment of the university, several businesses including trade, hostel services and transport services are booming. But due to their dependence on the university, they are faced with several degrees of seasonality challenges. Businesses boom only when school is in session. Living standards among the local community members are generally low and the town is also known for being one of the epicentres of child trafficking and child labour in Ghana. As a result, NGOs such as Challenging Heights and Plan Ghana have developed in the community to address this menace. The Winneba lands on which the campuses are located were compulsorily taken by the state during Nkrumah's regime. In 2017, a native of Winneba took the university to court to challenge the legality of the university's governing council. He further accused the university of renegeing on its social responsibility by denying the local community members fair access to university jobs and admissions as well as contracts to local companies.

UDS and its surrounding communities

UDS, unlike the other public universities, was established with a peculiar focus of helping to address the development challenges of the regions in northern Ghana. As a result, the university was strategically designed to blend academia with communities. Established in May 1992 by PNDC Law 279, the university began its academic work in September 1993 with the first batch of 39 students admitted into the Faculty of Agriculture at

Nyankpala. The vision of UDS is ‘to be a home of world class pro-poor scholarship’. In accordance with this vision, ‘the University’s principal objective is to address and find solutions to the environmental problems and the socio-economic deprivations that have characterized northern Ghana’ (UDS 2017:6; Manuh, Gariba and Budu 2007:166). By its vision, the university provides an important example of interaction between the university and society with the view to improving the latter. In the light of the above, the university runs a university–community interface academic programme, which is a combination of academic and community-based field practical work known as the Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP). Currently, the university has four satellite campuses spread out in the three northern regions of Ghana.

Our fieldwork was limited to the campuses in the northern region, namely Tamale and Nyankpala. The Tamale campus has Sanerigu and Dungu as well as Tamale Township as its immediate communities whereas the Nyankpala campus has Nyankpala and Kumbugu as its immediate communities. The land on which the Nyankpala campus is located was acquired by the state and used as the site for the then Agricultural Mechanization Centre and later for the Nyankpala Agricultural College before being transformed into a university. However, the campus in Tamale, which hosts the main administration of the university and the Medical School, was freely given for the establishment of the university by the Chief of Sanerigu, the paramount chief of the traditional area. Generally, living standards in these communities are low, just as is the case in most communities in northern Ghana.

Governance systems and place building perspective of the universities studied

In this section, we examine how the universities position themselves with regard to the surrounding communities, i.e. whether they perceive themselves as independent or as interdependent, and the emerging kinds of relationships as well as the implications for the two parties – the institutions and the communities. In doing so, we pay particular attention to the presence or absence of enabling governance arrangements, administrative structures, the key stakeholders involved in them and their roles, positive or negative efforts from the universities towards building their places and strengthening common spaces with their communities, or in other words, the level of permeability of the university to community members (Etzkowitz 2012). We scrutinise the achievements in this regard and prevailing perceptions about them.

Perspective of independence, unilateralism and mistrust/tensions

Sifuna (2014) has argued that after independence African universities were designated as ‘development universities’, with the task to help advance the socio-economic development of their home countries. Sifuna observed that these kind of ‘expectations stressed the key responsibility of the university as an institution serving its society in direct, immediate and practical ways that could lead to the improved well-being of the people’ (2014: 127). However, most of the universities failed to ‘emerge as development universities’ due to the various degrees of internal, structural and political challenges that they faced over time. Perhaps one of the reasons also lay in the way the universities perceived themselves with respect to place.

In the case of Ghana, the governance system inherited by the universities from the University of London, whereby the universities derive their powers from the statutes and the acts establishing them, excludes local community engagement. Instead, a bicameral model made up of a council and academic board and their sub-committees has the prerogative in the governance of the universities (Agbodeka 1998).

Evidence from our study showed that some of the public universities stress their autonomy in relationship to surrounding communities. As a result, they have not put measures in place to engage their neighbouring communities as part of their social responsibility. This perspective was strongly evident in three of the five universities studied, namely UG, UCC and UEW:

our responsibility as a public institution has from the beginning been country-wide and not focused closely on the immediate environment.... We have a public institution that, I think in the minds of those who bequeathed it to us, was meant to equal any of the best in the world, and I think, as at the time that I was at the university, Legon ranked among the best in Africa and worldwide (KK, former registrar, UG).

The monies that we collect, immediately they enter the university coffers, they are public money. And so, anything that we were doing, we needed to be very careful. That’s the way I saw it ... frankly speaking, as I sit here, I don’t know what exactly it is that the university should do for such a community. Because our resources can’t cater for that. I’m not too sure that even Legon can do it. What sort of relationship should happen between Legon and Accra? Legon will be swallowed up (WW, former VC, UEW).

Well, I think that if the university decides to engage with the communities formally it’s going to run into a serious problem because there will be all sorts of demands which the university will not be able to meet. And another thing is that we are already providing education for the people of Ghana and not only for the people from the immediate communities (AA, senior academic, UG).

The general understanding among the senior university management staff we interviewed was that the universities are meant to perform a national agenda and to compete internationally, and for that matter it was not the business of the university to enter into community development projects. Another reason was the fear that the universities are likely to be overwhelmed with all sorts of demands once they open up to the surrounding communities. Therefore, not only do the three universities entertain an independent institutional approach with respect to the surrounding communities, but they hope to remain so.

Due to agitations from the surrounding communities, these universities have, in their various capacities, instituted some interventions to mediate the situation. For UG, some protocol admissions have been offered to the La chiefs. UCC has also established a committee known as the Joint University–Community Consultative Committee, made up of representatives from the communities (most of whom are traditional leaders) and staff of the university. However, people in the communities regard the committee as ineffective and manipulative. It is seen by them as serving the interest of the university at the expense of the communities. Some believe these representatives are used by the university to communicate its decisions and policies to the communities, without actually engaging them. These concerns were buttressed by the following narratives by some community members:

We have the chief and his elders here who are members of the committee, but we don't know if they are able to dialogue with the university and I don't think they do because if they did, we would know what the outcome has been (Yaw, retired educationist, Amamoma).

Our members on the committee are supposed to meet the community and tell them the discussions that they have with the Vice-Chancellor and his people, but very often that doesn't happen (Kofi, former assembly member, Apewusika).

UEW, on the other hand, has responded to agitations by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the local community. In addition, the paramount chief of Winneba has been appointed onto the university's governing council. However, some of the senior university staff interviewed held that once the universities formalise their relationships with the surrounding communities, they are likely to run into problems. In this sense, therefore, remaining independent could be seen here as a governance and administrative strategy by the universities, but this posture also generates various degrees of mistrust and tensions between the universities and their communities.

Perspective of interdependence, engagement and mutual benefits

Two of the universities studied, namely UDS and KNUST, have developed an interdependent orientation with respect to the surrounding communities. For UDS, this is mainly found in their curriculum and community outreach programme which is tied to the main vision of the university, to transform the economies of northern Ghana. KNUST on the other hand, adopted community engagement initiatives from 2002 after agitations from the surrounding communities.

UDS has an outreach training programme known as TTFPP where the communities are used not only as field laboratories but as beneficiaries for the training of students. The objective and substance of the programme was explained during an interaction with a senior university staff as follows:

The thinking behind the TTFPP is that, usually, people see university as an ivory tower that is sitting somewhere far from the rest of the community... So, the essence is that the community is also important and not going there for the sake of going there. We can learn from them and they can also learn from us as a university. You know, the students go there to learn. It's a field laboratory for students. The students who go into the community come from different disciplines and they go in groups.... The motive is that, community issues are multi-faceted, so you send people of different backgrounds and they are able to tease out these issues better and everybody will look at a particular issue with regard to his or her own lessons based on the background. The idea is that before they come out, they might have looked at the community in a holistic manner and the information they get will be comprehensive enough. They conduct background studies, profile the development challenges of the communities and develop interventions to solve such challenges. Some of the reports have been shared with institutions and have resulted in solving water problems and the provision of infrastructure in some communities. In short that is what is happening (Director of the TTFPP).

There is a department which coordinates the UDS outreach programme headed by a professor. The programme ensures that students not only learn from the communities, but are also able to initiate interventions to address identified development challenges with the community members (Kwoyiga and Apusigah 2019). The goal is to integrate host community needs in university education while at the same time helping to build good relations and training students who will be sensitive and responsive to community issues, be development agents and have the capacity to help improve living standards in society (Kwoyiga and Apusigah 2019; Kaburise 2003). The UDS approach is similar to what was practised at Saint Francis Xavier University at the beginning of the twentieth century, which later

came to be known as the Antigonish movement, blending adult education, cooperatives, microfinance and rural community development to help small resource-based communities improve their economic and social circumstances (Irving 2014).

Similarly, KNUST has initiated series of engagement initiatives with the surrounding communities under the oversight of the Surrounding Villages Committee which was established in 2003. The committee constitutes 20 village representatives (Chiefs and Queen Mothers) and is chaired by a senior academic, who is also a paramount chief and an employee of the university. It was established as a result of agitations from the communities demanding greater social responsibility from the university:

In 2003, the university had problems with the surrounding villages. They were agitating for support from the university. They felt the university was not doing much to support their communities, so we had some attacks from one of these communities where they spoil some flower pots as they marched to the main administration. The Vice Chancellor at the time asked for my opinion. I said the people do not have a forum or channel where they can freely express their concerns.... He had this discussion with me in the morning, the following day he asked me to constitute a committee for surrounding villages of which I was made the chairman (AA, senior academic staff, KNUST).

Besides the committee serving as a medium for community heads to channel their grievances to the university, it has also enabled the university to initiate several social interventions in the communities, including protocol admissions, extension of electricity supply, construction of access roads, provision of ICT equipment, cordially agreed security and safety measures, and many others.

KNUST has since 2006 appointed the Asante Monarch, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II as chancellor. Only in the case of KNUST do we have a traditional ruler being appointed to the highest governance position in a Ghanaian public university. For the university, his appointment was strategic to enhance university–community relations:

The Academic Board, Council Select Committee ... preferred his candidature because of the link between himself and the government, and, at the same time, the link between himself and the traditional authority here. That is why I said earlier that it was strategic. If this decision was not strategically considered, we would have run into a host of problems (AB, former vice chancellor, KNUST).

Additionally, KNUST has introduced adult education programmes, some of which are targeting traditional heads of the communities. For example, the Centre for Cultural and African Studies has designed new academic

programmes aimed at building the leadership capacity of traditional rulers. These include MPhil, MA, Postgraduate Certificates, and Certificate of Participation in Chieftaincy and Traditional Leadership Studies. These programmes are highly patronised by traditional leaders. For instance, the Chief of Boadi and the Queen mother of Bomso whom we interviewed had enrolled in the programme. Also, the Bureau of Integrated Rural Development unit of the university was established purposely to identify and address the development deficits of rural communities. Moreover, some departments of KNUST use the surrounding communities as their training laboratories.

Theory and evidence from the studied areas

Place building theory identifies five areas, namely: nature, social relationships, material/built environment, ethics, and economic relationships where organisations have to make interventions as part of their corporate social responsibility. However, some authorities of the public universities argued that it was not within their mandate to venture into infrastructure development in the communities.

In addition, it appeared that public universities in Ghana have divergent motivations for extending relations to the communities. Whereas for some, the main objective for engaging with surrounding communities is for the purposes of place building, for others it is to ensure healthy and peaceful co-existence. Areas where we found the universities extending their services to surrounding communities included education, employment, outreach and privileges given to traditional rulers for various reasons and motivations.

Access to education

Etzkowitz (2012) has observed that making university boundaries permeable to community members is one of the key tenets of university–community relations and services that universities render to society. Moreover, in the case of Ghana access to university education remains a strong concern due to limited facilities (Kwarteng, Boadi Siaw and Dwarko 2012; Manuh, Gariba and Budu 2007; Gasu 2018). Therefore, in response to tensions and conflicts between universities and their neighbouring communities, some of the universities have instituted admission quotas and scholarships to the benefit of local community members. Among the five universities, KNUST and UG run an admissions quota system for their local communities, whereas the rest do not. However, the motivation for doing so is not the same for the two institutions. In the case of KNUST, which provides four admission slots to each traditional ruler of the surrounding

communities during each academic year, these are to maintain cordial relations and to address the needs of the disadvantaged in the communities. Also, the university, through the MasterCard Foundation, has established a scholarship scheme to support needy but brilliant students to enable them to complete their studies. The main purpose is to ensure educational inclusion. In the case of UG, which provides 15 admission slots to the La Traditional Council every academic year, the main purpose is to placate the La Traditional Council in response to their claim over some university lands:

Okponglo is a recent development. Before Okponglo we had Bawaleshie and of course we had the La, Osu people who had sovereignty over the lands. So much later we developed some association with the people of La largely because they were being a little prickly or trying to milk the university for funds; that is, financial resources. At one time we tried to 'encash' our land area by letting portions out for commercial development: gas filling stations and so on, and the La people came up with all kinds of 'legal arguments' on these lands. Even though it is our right as the land was properly acquired and gazetted. They came up with very serious argument that they gave us the lands to establish an educational institution and not for commercial purposes. So, we entered into some dialogue [with them] and reached some arrangement whereby we would grant them a small [admission] quota (WW, former registrar, UG).

Another area of importance concerning access to university education is the basic schools that are established and run by the universities. Indeed, apart from UDS all the other four universities run basic schools. Because of their nature as university basic schools, they keep higher standards and children who gain admission into these schools have greater chances of progressing to the university. In the KNUST basic school, admission is open to children from the surrounding communities. In addition, the school's strategy is to ensure that there is inclusion and due recognition given to community demands. This was clear during an interaction with the director of the KNUST basic school:

because the school is situated in an environment of some towns, we work with them. During admissions we consider them not actually saying that we are giving a quota to people of this nature or that. Sometimes you get the chiefs coming in saying 'this is from my palace or this is somebody in our community we value so much. We wish that the person will get admission in your school'. And after our normal entrance exam even if the person doesn't pass we find a way of admitting the child (Director of Basic School, KNUST, Kumasi).

However, at the UG basic school, a quota is applied for children of surrounding communities. Apart from that, non-university staff and parents from the surrounding communities pay more for their wards than university staff. However, this was the reaction by one of the chiefs:

University primary? You can't even get admission there. ... Their children are the ones going. The people of Okponglo don't get admissions over there (EK, traditional leader, Okponglo).

For the UCC basic school, we found that admission was open to community members, but, surprisingly, the school has five different streams, from 'A' to 'E', where students are placed based on performance. As a result, stream A constitutes the best performing students and it is the best performing Junior High School in the central region, whereas stream E of the same school is made up of the least performing students and is, thus, one of the worse performing schools in the region. At UEW, even though the basic schools are christened as 'University Practice Schools', they are managed by the Ghana Education Service through the Municipal Education Office, except the Pre-School at the North Campus. As a result, the university has not helped to raised standards in its Practice Schools. Therefore, with regards to the university basic schools, we see that only KNUST has developed an inclusive approach. The approaches of both UCC and UG represent a segregationist mentality of distancing universities from communities.

Local economy and employment

The fact that large tracks of land were required to establish each of the public universities has denied many local community members the land upon which, being originally peasant farmers, their livelihood depended. The communities that have been affected most include those of UCC and KNUST. However, the presence of the university has also opened a lot of economic opportunities including estate development and hostel services, petty trading, food vending, provision stores, transport services and other forms of businesses. The economy of Winneba, for example, is largely reliant on the university. This was evident during the interviews:

We have been depending solely on the sea for our livelihood.... The only thing we had which supported the economy of Winneba and the nearby towns was the Pomadze Poultry Enterprise which Nkrumah started.... What also became prominent in Winneba was the Specialist Training College. Art teachers venturing into ceramics and that also made Winneba very popular. All 'chop bars' and restaurants were coming to Winneba to buy ceramic

bowls. Suddenly the Chinese brought their plastic bowls of various degrees of beauty and quality so the ceramics industry collapsed.... Fishing gradually is becoming an endangered occupation. Life in Winneba hasn't been so good ... poverty is significant in Winneba. Fortunately, University of Education, Winneba (UEW) was established. UEW became the primary employer (Traditional head-1, Winneba).

The right of access to university jobs was one of the most contentious issues existing between the public universities and their local community members. The nature of some university jobs is such that only highly qualified persons can access them, though one can argue that it is the same universities which have the responsibility to train and develop people to enable them to have the needed qualifications to access such jobs. In any case, some community members felt the fact that the university was located in their neighbourhood gave them rights over others to access university jobs:

I was employed by the University because I qualified. It was advertised, I applied, got interviewed and was eventually selected. People think being an indigene is a guarantee for employment even if they are not qualified (Kwame, Winneba Municipal Assembly).

In order to address the situation, each of the five universities has a different recruitment policy or practice in relation to their local communities. In most cases, there is some level of informal discrimination in favour of indigenes, particularly for jobs that need lesser or no qualifications. Yet in most cases, community members are not satisfied with university recruitment practices. At UDS, for example, the director of works indicated that about 60 per cent of the casual workers are recruited from its surrounding communities. This, he indicated, was meant to improve the living conditions of the people. However, sentiments of community members during the interviews were contrary to the views of the director as expressed in the following:

Some of our people work there, but how many are they? The chief has made us to write to them and we have even followed up on them but no way. Dungu chief should have been considered for a quota every year but there is nothing like that. The youth from here go there to seek jobs but they are not given. But where they are was where we used to farm. We always get the information that they recruit their employees from elsewhere. This is a problem for us. You (researcher) have to let them know our stance. The youth must take care of the elders, but if their lands have been given to you and you will not also give them jobs to do, how can they take care of them? (Mahama, community leader, Dungu, Tamale).

At UCC, community members complained of lack of access to university jobs. Some complained university jobs for community members were

menial, demeaning and the least rewarding. The following interviews elucidate the point:

Because most of our people are illiterates, they don't employ us. They say we don't have the qualification ... so, for jobs, no. Even labourers who weed, we are not given the opportunity to work in the university. Anyway, there are a few who work there as labourers and cleaners. But is that what we call jobs? You can't tell anyone that you work in the university as a labourer or cleaner and they will respect you. How much will they pay you? Very small salary when they are taking fat, fat salaries and buying big cars and building big houses (Kwaku, Akotokyir, UCC).

Now, many of us don't have work to do. The little piece of land that some people are able to get is what they use for their subsistence farming. The university even fails to employ majority of the young people from this town.... Some of those in authority at the university bring people from their hometowns to employ them. They claim that our people do not like to work (Kojo, community leader, Amamona, UCC).

Some community members mentioned that one reason why they are unable to access university jobs is the stereotypical perceptions that the university authority has developed about the indigenes. This is shown in the interview below:

The UCC farm unit, the agriculture department, has not helped at all.... They employ labourers all the time from other places and yet they refuse to employ common labourers from this town. Meanwhile farming is what people do in this town for a living. It is very bad. I went there to challenge them. What they told me was that people from this village will steal the farm produce when they go to work there (Kwaku, Akotokyir, community leader, UCC).

Among the public universities studied, it was at KNUST where community members expressed favourable sentiments about the university regarding access to employment. The following are the views expressed by some of the community leaders:

Oh, I have presented a lot of them. For instance, security, cleaners, etc. ... You can work in the office if only you qualify. Over there, your CV and certificate speaks on your behalf since the university is made up of highly educated professors and doctorate holders (Queen mother, Bomso, KNUST).

Yes of course. Many people from the surrounding communities are working at various levels and sectors of the university. For instance, one Mr Mike who was a neighbour was working in the university. He has passed on, but one of his children has been employed after his death (Nana K., Ayigyaa, KNUST, Kumasi).

It should be added that the communities that are located close to KNUST have benefitted a great deal with respect to the development of small and medium size businesses, and hostel services, with the exception of Ayigya, which, unfortunately, has not experienced much transformation over the years. Some of the universities also engage in various forms of outreach programmes, which do not necessarily have the surrounding communities as their main focus. At KNUST, for example, there is a periodic health outreach to offer health screening, education and treatment to communities. The Department of Planning through the Spatial Planning for Regions in Growing Economies (SPRING) programme helps communities in selected districts to prepare their development plans as part of the training of students on the programme. Students pursuing health and engineering related programmes also undertake hospital and industrial attachments in the communities. These actions are also replicated at UG and UCC for students in health sciences. UEW also has a one semester internship programme for its final year students. However, these initiatives are more practical training programmes for students than clear social intervention strategies of the universities.

Towards healthy university–community co-existence through a multi-stakeholder approach

Bender (1988) has noted that universities have had contrasting relationships with their surrounding communities over the centuries. Whereas at times universities have been defined and sustained by their host communities, in some situations, the very existence and survival of universities have been threatened by urban development. In addition, the key challenges confronting the public universities in Ghana include the definition of space, and the extent of engagement they should have with surrounding communities. Some of the institutions put their focus on national agenda as spelt out in the acts establishing such institutions, whereas others, depending on the exigencies of their times, have initiated some mitigating engagement initiatives with surrounding communities.

However, the growing pressure on the universities from their surrounding communities requires a strategy that could lead to a win-win situation for both the universities and their communities. Cox (2000:11) has argued that effective university–community engagement can address community development challenges, especially in the area of ‘housing, education, health, economic development, job training or leadership development’ through a multi-stakeholder partnership. The responsibility does not fall on the universities alone but it involves three sets of stakeholders. These, according to Cox (2000), include: (1) the community residents (people

who live in the communities and organised groups and associations which they have formed to represent their interests including: religious groups, schools, businesses, trade unions, property owners, and social services); (2) the university situated within the community; and (3) state institutions and other stakeholders that are or are not located within the neighbourhood (local government agencies and their leaders, state and regional development agencies and non-governmental organisations).

A multi-stakeholder approach will avoid a situation whereby the communities develop a dependency posture with respect to the universities. Rather, it will lead to a situation where responsibilities are shared among all parties involved in the process of community development. It requires a deep interaction between the faculty and students of the universities, the community members and relevant stakeholders, and the application of knowledge and ideas developed in the universities for the practical needs of society (Cross and Ndofirepi 2016).

Conclusion

In this article we sought to examine the kind of relationships that exist between public universities in Ghana and their surrounding communities. The study showed that out of the five universities studied, three have an independent attitude whereas two have an interdependent attitude with respect to their host communities. For universities that have an independent attitude, the general understanding among staff was that the universities are meant to perform a national agenda and that it was not their duty to enter into any form of engagement with the host communities. They also believed that by opening up to host communities, they are likely to be overwhelmed by demands that may adversely affect the universities' quest to achieve their mission and goal. However, universities that have taken such stance are saddled with several forms of tensions and conflicts with the surrounding communities that are demanding greater social responsibility from these universities. The strategy that the universities have adopted to manage the situation includes admission concessions to the communities, setting up of committees to oversee university–community relations, and the inclusion of prominent community leaders into governance positions.

Two of the universities studied, however, were found to have an interdependent orientation with respect to the host communities. These were UDS and KNUST. For UDS, the act establishing the university has played a key role in ensuring that it played an interdependent role with respect to the university. This is largely because the UDS was established with the mission to help transform the economies of communities in northern Ghana. As a

result, community engagement was built into its academic programmes and governance system right from the beginning. This has helped the university to directly engage the surrounding communities and impact on them. In the case of KNUST, three reasons account for its interdependent relations with the surrounding communities, namely, agitations for recognition and inclusion by the surrounding villages, the role of Asante monarchs, and the leadership styles of some of the vice chancellors of the university. In 2002, there were agitations by the surrounding communities which spurred the university to act quickly to address community demands. The university established the Surrounding Villages Committee to address the needs of the communities. This also shows that, as has been observed by Cox (2000), communities should not be seen as passive agents in university–community relations. Therefore, whereas place building theory appears to show that the organisation is the main agent of change (Thomas and Banning 2014; Thomas and Cross 2007), it seems to overlook, or sometimes underestimates, the agency role of the communities that can force organisations to alter their engagement perspectives in relation to the communities. Additionally, the roles Asante monarchs have played in the university have shaped the kind of relations that have developed between the university and the communities. At the time of establishing the university, the Asante king, Otumfuo Agyeman Prempeh II, took a personal interest in the project and appointed his nephew (a trained surveyor), who later succeeded him as Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, to lead the team for the survey of the lands meant for the university (Pitcher 1976). Today, the Asante King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II is the chancellor of the university. In addition, most of the emblematic buildings at the university, including its library, are named after members of the Asante royal family. Therefore, the role and influence of the Asante monarchs and the recognition given them by the university are the factors that have helped build ties between the university and the surrounding communities. Finally, the leadership style of some KNUST vice chancellors also played a key role in university–community relations. Domfeh and Imhangbe (2019) have observed that justice and fairness are the hallmark of an ‘ethical leader’ and it is such leadership that can make a positive impact in society. For KNUST, the late Professor K. A. Andam who was vice chancellor of the university from 2002 to 2006 is credited for establishing the Surrounding Villages Committee to engage the surrounding communities and for introducing other social interventions such as special admission concessions for children from ‘less endowed’ schools and the Mastercard Foundation Scholarship for needy students which have been replicated in some universities in Ghana.

Based on the above observations, our hypothesis that universities that accommodate and address the needs and concerns of their host communities are more likely to succeed in delivering on their mandate appears to hold. Such relationship ensures mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence between universities and their host communities. We therefore recommend a multi-stakeholder approach where all parties including universities, communities, government institutions and other stakeholders bring their resources together to help address their community needs in a win-win situation.

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