

Addressing the Trilemma of Educational Trade-offs on Africa's Terrain for Sustainable Development

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, having individuals who are globally competitive is an asset (CODESRIA, 2014; Fakwata, 2017). That is why the process of imparting or acquiring knowledge, skills, beliefs and values to develop the capacities of the individual to skilfully navigate the issues of life and contribute meaningfully to the society cannot be overemphasised (Tuning Africa, 2016). Moreover, intense debate surrounds the balance – “between the private benefits of a university degree (higher salaries and class mobility) versus the social benefits of an educated population (higher tax revenues, an engaged and informed citizenry), etc” (Higher Education Funding Panel, 2016). Furthermore, it is argued that, “all fee regimes are a Trilemma of Trade-offs: public (government) investment – enrolment – private costs. And the trade-offs are influenced by a combination of what different political groupings think the role of

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higher education is in that society and which constituencies' interests are dominant” (Higher Education Funding Panel, 2016). Nevertheless it is generally acknowledged that graduates often secure lucrative jobs; improve taxpaying numbers; enhance democratic participation; live relatively healthier lives; are less inclined to criminality;

and exhibit heightened civic engagement. These attributes relate with the continent's development aspirations.

The creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 was premised inter alia on the goal to foster “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena” inter alia (Source?). Furthermore the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Agenda 2063 (The Africa We Want), are both blue prints that are being used to steer the continents sustainable transformation; envision an Africa that proactively engages the world economy as an equal partner along definitive terms of engagement (NEPAD, 2016). Such noble goals call for marshalling all the segments and resources of the continent to facilitate inclusive prosperity premised on shared values and a common destiny (NEPAD,

2016). One such vital sector is the educational sector.

From hieroglyphs and papyrus, through the Library of Alexandria in ancient Egypt to Timbuktu of the Songhai Empire, until recently, Africa has been a key player in the knowledge economy (History Magazine, 2001; Timbuktu, 2017). Egypt was the quintessence of innovation in recording, transferring and communication of knowledge whilst Timbuktu was the epitome of a global center for scholarship in the Songhay Empire (History Magazine, 2001; Timbuktu, 2017). It is noteworthy that those times of a globally competitive African higher education space coincided with equally robust African economies. However, many African universities do not have such luxury in contemporary times (Tuning Africa, 2016). This has come with implications on the quality of research and innovation coupled with graduate employability and entrepreneurship (Tuning Africa, 2016).

Although its role and significance on the knowledge production landscape has seen a chequered history in contemporary times, there are fascinating attempts to revive the global reputé of the continent's scholarship and its place in the knowledge economy. This paper contributes to the debate on efforts by African institutions to modernise education on the continent to be more globally competitive. The study is premised on workshop participation, stakeholder interviews and literature review to realise its aims. The two workshops are South Africa/European Union (henceforth, EU) seminar on education and training at the Stellenbosch University, South Africa (May, 2017) and the 50th

Anniversary of the Association of African Universities, Ghana (June, 2017). Between them the two events brought together approximately 500 practitioners to deliberate on reforming research and innovation to drive continental and international development (EUROPA, 2017; GUNI, 2017). This was coupled with the shifting role of the educational provider in addressing socio-economic challenges and its social responsibilities. The stimulating debates from these fora can be crystallized around three core thematic areas:

Funding: Funding was a common narrative at both fora in a bid to enhance affordability and quality education simultaneously. German higher education is largely gratis as it is considered a *public good* with 84% of funding attributed to government (i.e. 1.1% of Gross Domestic Product, henceforth GDP) (PWC, 2017). In the United States higher education system, which is considered as costly by global standards, the state provides 34% (0.9% of GDP). South Africa, which is the continent's economic powerhouse invests 0.75% of its GDP (PWC, 2017). The general dearth in educational funding translated into Africa accounted for only 0.06% of overall global expenditure in research and development. But recent agitations amongst the student community at the University of Cape Town, which morphed into the FeesMustFall (FMF) movement, has echoed in other parts of the continent and the globe on cost sharing and more sustainable funding models. Diverse models of institutional and student funding along the lines of differentiated funding and fees; to makes costs sharing between university education beneficiaries (mainly government and students)

more effective are being explored. Expanding the reach of education across the social strata to ensure equity and facilitate inclusive development (University World News, 2016). This is another reason for providing grants and loans to marginalised groups. It helps avoid education becoming a preserve of the elite in society (EUROPA, 2017; GUNI, 2017). Some of the models discussed include the *access-equity-cost-sharing model* which posits reducing the financial hurdles to higher education while guaranteeing equity in cost sharing as per stakeholders capacity to pay (University World News, 2016). The *contextualised formula-funding model* sponsors universities based on individual socio-economic circumstance giving everyone a fair chance at good higher education. The *host-proprietor-university-user funding model* suggests the entire spectrum of stakeholders partake in the financing of tertiary education. This model assumes a blended approach to merge sponsorship across the community, university and the government (University World News, 2016). Universities are also undertaking their own initiatives to shore up the finances by providing services to meet the needs of their immediate communities. These included contracts to supply solar systems and other appropriate technologies, fortified nutrition foods, accommodation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support, waste recycling amongst others to as bottom up efforts to complement state efforts.

Teaching and learning: Phrases such as *africanization*, *decolonisation*, *transformation*, *co-creation* and *indigenous knowledge systems (IKS)* in education, have become rallying points on making curricu-

lum relevant to the African context (CHET, 2017; HSRC, 2017; Bergman & Westman, 2014). Innovative pedagogy employs these issues to enhance positive self-worth and identity as well as promote socioeconomic growth and sustainable development (HSRC, 2017). This makes it imperative to explore best practices in teaching, learning, assessment and blended learning to harness students' skills and innovation for society's benefit. This also concerns resourcing the teaching career to enhance competences and become more attractive (EU-ROPA, 2017).

Cooperation between higher education institutions and infrastructure: The Africa-led EU programme 'Tuning' is helping to streamline the educational curricular across the continent (Tuning Africa, 2016). This is coupled with the HAQAA (Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation) Initiative, to synergise quality assurance and accreditation system from the local to the Pan-African continental level (HAQAA, 2017). These are helping address the challenge of skills mismatch between graduates and the labour market by facilitating the redesign of university programmes to be better tuned to the prevailing socio-economic realities (Tuning Africa, 2016). Such collaboration can serve as vehicles for regional innovation eco-system and co-innovation to enhance graduate entrepreneurship, employment as well as sustainable development (EUROPA, 2017).

Conclusion

From the social justice perspective, enhanced education is a public good as the ensuing income and

critical human resource benefits the entire society. Thus, education in Africa requires funding framework that guarantees its sustainability while simultaneously facilitating equitable access to ensure the continent's sustainable development. In addressing the trilemma of educational trade-offs on Africa's landscape, there is the need for a skilful/delicate balance between the associated interests to inform policy that adequately mobilises support for research and development. Such excellence in research and development is needed inter alia to accelerate sustainable development on the continent and the goals of Vision 2030 (the Africa We Want) simultaneously.

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