

Announcements

CODESRIA to Launch New Higher Education Initiative (HEPI)

With funding support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) will from early next year launch a new Higher Education Policy Initiative (HEPI). The initiative will involve research, and research capacity building interventions aimed at strengthening the governance and leadership of higher education institutions in Africa. The broad goal of the project is to contribute to realizing academically strong higher education institutions in Africa. In the context of the post-2015 global development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 have focused on higher education with calls for renewed investments in the system. The objective is that high quality university research should provide governments and donors with data and analyses that could support evidence-based policies to drive the post-2015 development agenda. This can only be possible through a quality-focused higher education system that informs policy with research evidence, and through graduating generations of new leaders and skilled professionals. In the context of Africa, the push for governance reforms was meant to result in the emergence of a higher education system in the continent that would contribute to the continent's vision of development and enable the continent to meet development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 global development agenda.

HEPI will build on the results and gaps emerging from the CODESRIA Higher Education Leadership Program (HELP), which the council has been implementing since, 2011 and also supported by the CCNY. Studies commissioned under HELP document the diverse changes in governance that have taken place in a number of African universities, the new entities that have been created to provide gover-

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nance oversight in the form of National Councils, new procedures for constituting university councils and senates and the challenges that face entrenchment of the reforms in the institutions. In crafting the new governance frameworks, governments and policy makers hoped that the new governance regimes would contribute to improving the quality of university education in the continent as new internal and external entities were formed to oversee how university leadership was exercised. The extent to which the new governance frameworks are shaping the management and academic life of the institutions; including what and how new relationships with external stakeholders are being forged and the extent to which new management cultures that embody greater transparency in the use of resources are emerging or not in the institutions need to be documented. Documenting these trends will contribute to an understanding of the impact the reforms are having on the academic life of the institutions.

Besides, and despite the reforms, the institutions continue to suffer from a crisis of quality. The main motivation for the reforms was to have the institutions re-establish more strongly in their academic engagements and relevance to the development needs of their societies. The HELP studies do point out that some aspects associated with the reforms may be contributing to this crisis of quality and causing negative perceptions of the institutions among external stakeholders. The new leadership has focused more on revenue generation and increasing student numbers without regard to quality processes. The focus of the reforms has largely been in expanding student enrolments while ignoring to pay attention to

the governance of the academic aspects of the institutions. Large class sizes and shorter semester durations have become a common strategy for most institutions to increase student intakes and generate revenues. The ratio and quality of the teaching staff in the institutions have deteriorated as quality assurance practices have focused on benchmarking the efficiency with which a lot more students are brought into the institutions and processed through than on core learning outcomes.

Some old governance challenges in the form of subtle forms of political interference also still remain; while new ones are emerging in terms of having the reforms deliver the expected outcomes of strong academic institutions. In a sense the reforms have brought into operation more institutions (both public and private); increased enrollments and programs on offer; but also a multiplicity of players outside governments. In other instances, higher education policies have been designed without exhaustive deliberation among the broad range of stakeholders-private providers, academics, students, governments, alumni and university management; in other instances policy implementation and entrenchment has faced resistance from internal sections that feel threatened by loss of influence, while in other cases new forms of institutional autonomy have opened up competition and erosion of standards in ways that have justified excuses for a return to the era of state-driven policy and administrative command.

Results from the HELP studies also need to be disseminated as widely as possible to a wide array of external stakeholders to help secure their support for the reforms and provide accountability mechanism on how the universities are managed. A number of governance frameworks, for example, have provided for the alumni of the institutions, representatives of the private sector and in some countries the

labor movements to have direct engagement in the manner the institutions are governed. But the design of channels for engagement is left to be the responsibility of university senates. Within the universities, academics who head departments, academic and non-teaching staff union leaders and student representatives have also not been a focus of research or training, yet they perform critical functions in the governance and management of academic programs. Since the quest for governance reform targeted recreating conditions to realize strong academic institutions, new research, both in terms of data for policy and dissemination also needs to focus on this group.

The persisting challenge in most of Africa remains on how to secure greater stakeholder engagement in the governance of higher education for the public good, and how best this can be achieved without causing disruption to the running of the institutions. The reforms had anticipated that universities would reach out to diverse constituencies as a strategy for broadening their resource bases and confirming the relevance of their programs. Beyond being sources of funding and relevance, universities depend on these diverse constituencies to enhance their institutional reputations and accountability. Much of the work that has been done in the context of the recent governance reforms has only documented efforts by university management to forge university-industry linkages and other partnerships aimed at securing more financial resources to the institutions. Even this aspect of engagement, research on the nature of relationships remains recent and exploratory, with the majority of studies only featuring conceptual approaches or adapting theories from other fields to explain this dimension, which is still relatively unknown to both academics and those responsible for university management. Studies on initiatives aimed at strengthening university-industry linkages in Africa indicate that African universities face considerable constraints that affect their economies, political environments, and institutional research capacity, and most institutional leaders surveyed emphasized the importance of additional opportunities to learn from those institutions with a strong history of engagement. The challenge to broadening the governance aspect and the nature of institutional conditions that should facilitate this engagement therefore needs evidence from research to

facilitate policy interventions. Besides, the reforms so far undertaken still presuppose that the university is the property of university management and the faculty, while funding arrangements that have evolved imply that the institution belongs to the society whose diverse membership would contribute to its management and governance in varied ways.

The legitimacy of universities to society in Africa, like elsewhere, should increasingly be evaluated by the level and quality of the institutions' commitment to the community of stakeholders, who should also play an important part in validating the academic processes of the institutions. In most of Africa, and despite the recent reforms, university management has not wanted to engage external communities beyond soliciting for financial contributions. Research is therefore needed to provide evidence for policies that would secure the active engagement of a diverse community of stakeholders in the governance of universities. Within the universities, research needs to show how best data can be collected, stored and shared among the various stakeholders to facilitate more transparent leadership and management systems.

The focus of the HEPI initiative resonates with other research and training initiatives that CODESRIA has been engaged in, which have focused on supporting universities to work more efficiently and produce better academic outcomes that can have positive impacts in shaping public policies. It also mirrors other efforts to revitalize higher education in Africa in the context of the Post-2015 Social Development goals. The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa, 2016-2025, for example focuses on reorienting Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development. Among the principles the strategy proposes to achieve this objective is through promoting *good governance, leadership and accountability in the management of the education sector*.

Specific Objectives of the HEPI Initiative

- a) To generate research on critical governance and leadership related issues that face higher education in a subset of African countries to inform policy

- b) To enhance the capacity of social science academics in a sub-set of African countries to conduct research on higher education;
- c) Enhance the capacity of higher education leadership in a subset of African countries to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.
- d) Enhance the capacity of higher education institutions to use varied data for institutional management and accountability
- e) To disseminate research results from the project to a broader range of higher education stakeholders in Africa; including the academic and non-academic stakeholders.

Themes for Research and Training

The following themes will form the basis around which research and training themes will be constituted

Broadening stakeholder engagement in Higher Education governance

Research here will focus on examining what the leadership of the institutions is doing to enhance the reputation of the institutions in terms of initiating collaborations and partnerships and embracing informal mechanisms such as engaging with civil society to enhance accountability to the public and enhance institutional reputation. Besides reputation, research here will focus on how such engagements can be used as a resource mobilization and curriculum enhancement strategy by the institutions. The thrust for research here would be to examine what university leadership is doing to ensure the institutions are engaging with their stakeholders nationally and internationally, and delivering education and research which is responsive to their needs, and ensuring that stakeholders' opinion of the University's reputation for teaching, research, knowledge transfer and partnerships with business is strong. This will be important as it will generate knowledge on how the new governance structures are enabling the institutions in terms of building their reputations through attracting and retaining staff, student recruitment practices, developing the ability to engage with the diverse strategic partnerships with commercial and philanthropic institutions; civil society and other associational groups who claim a stake in the manner in which higher education institutions are governed.

The nature of data for governance and its utilization:

There is a sense in which good governance and leadership in higher education is related to quality systems for collecting, accessing and using data both for institutional planning, as a benchmark of compliance to oversight requirements and as a way of communicating effectively to stakeholders to get buy-in. Data is also important for benchmarking leadership performance and improving overall accountability. It is important for research to focus on this aspect of university governance and leadership at this point in time for various reasons. Student and staff demographics in the universities are changing rapidly, while the institutions are trying to invest in technology management. At the same time, universities need to be open to communicating with a wide variety of stakeholders across the higher education, business, community, and government spectrum.

Data and the evidence it provides for policy will facilitate positive communication and engagement between university leaders and various communities and to craft messages that appeal to a variety of audiences. University leaders seeking to fundraise from different sources, for example, need to have a collection of data points that appeal to a diverse group of individuals who could potentially support the institutions. Data governance in the institutions will entail processes that the institutions have in place to collect data on diverse student profiles and academic programs, procedures for data and information privacy, data security, quality, access and use. How recourse is made to such data in terms of university planning and management decisions is also important. Data storage and use is also an important measure of the institution's mechanisms of accountability, reporting and compliance with oversight policies. Research has not focused on these aspects of higher education governance in Africa. Even the aspect of innovative teaching pedagogies can only be implemented in situations where all data related to a students' profiles and academic progression is analyzed for the purpose of better understanding students' needs and their performance level in order to support their learning process better at all levels of the institution.

Leadership and Innovative pedagogies

Research under this theme will focus on generating knowledge on innovative pedagogical interventions in the institutions, including curriculum review, teaching and learning conditions, student assessment and grading and postgraduate studies. Understanding how reforms in governance have led to changes in institutional policies related to innovation in faculty teaching practice is crucial for the success of reforms and building a quality culture. Innovative pedagogies are an important measure of the quality of a higher education process and have the capacity to translate into positive long-term outcomes from a higher education system such as social justice, democracy and social engagement; the creation of more informed citizens, more tolerant societies and more participative communities.

Higher Education reform and role of middle level academics in university governance and leadership

This segment of the project will focus on academics who are not involved in senior university management and leadership roles but play an important role in the design and coordination of academic programs and teaching. They are therefore likely to provide more in-depth data on leadership related aspects that affect academic programs. The categories of academics to be targeted here are Deans and heads of departments, officials of academic staff unions and course coordinators. Indication from the HELP studies, which involved deans, did point out that their integration into the university administrative hierarchies tends to obscure their academic responsibilities. The concern is that with expanding enrolments and academic programs, universities need strong academic and administrative leadership at the middle levels to shape the institutions academic missions. So beyond the research on university councils and senates, which has already been undertaken, there is need to focus on what happens at the middle levels, at schools and departments, where academic programs are designed and managed, and examine how leadership is organized and exercised and the channels that the new university leadership structures are creating for this level of staff to contribute to effective university governance.

Specific Research Training and Policy Dissemination activities

- a) Setting up 6 research networks at the national and regional levels as well as comparative research networks on the four research themes discussed. The research will be carried out through CODESRIA'S national working groups (NWGs) and Comparative Research Networks (CRNs) in the six Anglophone countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa. The research groups will be capacitated through methodological workshops as a strategy to generate research on critical governance and leadership related issues, which face higher education.
- b) Holding of one inception methodological workshop for the research groups: All the research groups will be brought together for a methodological workshop before they commence fieldwork. The objective will be to have a better understanding of the broad goals of the project and focus data collection and reporting to the various objectives of the project.
- c) Two training institutes for middle level academics: We propose to hold two institutes, each bringing together heads of academic departments and deans' of schools, academic staff union leaders and directors of institutes. Each institute will comprise 30 participants competitively selected based on submitted proposals through a call for proposals. The institutes will focus on the broad theme of "Higher education governance and the role and place of middle-level academics in University leadership". Participants in these institutes will be different from those that will be participating in NWGs and CRNs. Engaging these cadre of academics in the institutes and the eventual publication of their work will partially respond to the first three objectives of this project as summarized in the project overview. A director identified, based on expertise on issues of higher education governance and leadership will conduct the institutes and each institute will run for two weeks. This initiative will target 60 academics and the output from the institutes will be publications in form of three policy briefs, two journal issues and two books.

d) Leadership profiles and contributions of 15 past higher education leaders: Understanding and generating research on critical governance and leadership related issues that face higher education is one of the objectives of this project. Past higher education leaders (Vice-Chancellors, Members of council and senates, government ministers responsible for higher education), in the sub-set of countries to be covered by this project have valuable lessons and experiences regarding the process of governance reform and how best to sustain and fully mainstream the reforms in the day-to-day leadership and management of the institutions. Feedback from these past higher education leaders

will be intended to show how higher education leadership would harness opportunities to enhance, and mitigate challenges to, management and oversight, including the development of, and building of capacity to utilize, new accountability tools to improve systems of governance, establishing effective stakeholder-driven governing boards through, for example, capacity-building programs promoting good governance in new universities. The aim will be to document the contributions and visions of these leaders on broad higher education policy issues and how the sector should be governed and managed. The output from this component will be 15 articles that will be published and disseminated

through newspapers and other electronic research dissemination avenues such as the "conversation", and one compiled book publication to be entitled: '*Chronicles of Higher Education Academic leaders in Africa*'.

- e) Final dissemination workshop: A final workshop will be held for the research groups to share their findings before they submit final manuscripts for publication. Besides researchers, representatives from the three communities identified in this proposal for purposes of dissemination will attend as a strategy to engage and interest more stakeholders to be involvement in higher education leadership.