

Development Aid and Higher Education in Africa: The Need for More Effective Partnerships between African Universities and Major American Foundations

Introduction

Since Africa's independence, improving education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels has constituted a major policy goal for African governments. However, education in general and higher education in particular continues to face many crises that affect the quality of teaching and research in universities and other institutions of higher learning throughout the continent. Due to the series of crises, especially from the 1980s onward, there was a tendency among international donors, the World Bank in particular, to put higher education on the backburner in order to focus more on basic education. The rationale for such a shift was that higher education was a luxury for most of Africa and that African countries would benefit more by investing on the lower levels of the educational spectrum. However, it did not take too long before the same international agencies began to realize that higher education should remain a high priority in Africa's development agenda. As a result of the high costs associated with higher education and the inability of African governments to respond to the multiple challenges associated with it, it is fair to say that higher education has received considerable attention in aid initiatives to Africa. Nonetheless, an assessment of the impact of aid to African higher education is both timely and highly necessary.

This article focuses on the various partnerships between major United States foundations and African universities, and the millions of dollars spent over the last ten years in efforts to support the development of higher education and improve its quality. It is premised on the argument that initiatives for improving the quality of higher education in Africa, whether internal or donor-driven, should be based on more integrated and holistic plans rather than on isolated short-term projects for immediate solutions. In addition, such interventions should not

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lose track of the fact that, as a result of the process of self-criticism and re-organization that occurred within the African continent in the 1990s on, major internal developments occurred from within that sought to bring solutions to the many challenges universities and higher education institutions were confronted with. The article analyses some of the accomplishments that were possible as a result of partnerships between US foundations and African universities. It also examines the extent to which these partnerships have been able to build on African universities' capacities and strengths, their interests and needs. Through an examination of the lessons learned through these partnerships, the study proposes better ways to engage with African universities in order to make partnerships much more effective and sustainable.

Aid Initiatives to Higher Education in Africa: From Nationalisation to Globalization

The origins of higher education in Africa can be traced back to the pre-colonial period and predates western colonization. The continent boasts of a tradition of indigenous, Christian and Islamic higher education institutions that included libraries, museums, monasteries and Islamic mosque universities. Yet, the roots of almost all modern higher education institutions date back to the colonial period, and support for these institutions came entirely from churches, philanthropic organizations, and later from colonial governments. African independence during the 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by great optimism and an urge for self-reliance in development in all areas including education in general

and higher education in particular. In many newly independent African countries, building universities was indeed a symbol of self-reliance. As Zeleza (2006) describes it, despite the fact that colonizers left very few universities and that some African countries did not even have a single university:

across Africa the growth in higher education after independence was nothing short of phenomenal. The new states embarked on ambitious development programs in which universities were seen as central for training a highly skilled labor force, creating and reproducing national elite, and enhancing national prestige. The new universities were quite diverse and flexible in their structures and models. On the whole, they were much larger in size than their colonial predecessors, broader in their missions, and they expanded their disciplinary and curricular offerings from the arts and social sciences to include professional fields of study such as business, medicine and engineering, and they incorporated graduate programs (p.4).

The massive expansion of higher education was also noticeable in figures. According to a UNESCO survey of 34 African countries, 11 had a university in 1950. By 1962, that number had almost tripled to 28. During the same time, the number of universities nearly tripled, growing from 16 in 1950 to 41 in 1962. In 1960, often referred to as the year of African independence, there was an estimated number of 120,000 students in African universities. The same survey shows that the total number enrolled in higher education institutions grew from 2,270 in 1950/51 to 16,580 in 1961/62, an increase of over 600 per cent. These statistics do not even include North Africa, South Africa, or the former Portuguese colonies (UNESCO and United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa, p. 273). Compared to an earlier period during colonial rule, there was therefore a new context for African higher education whereby an expansion of education laid

the foundation for a stronger institutional base in national universities and provided the impetus for major improvements in human capital and knowledge production. Given the pressing need to replace foreigners in the civil service by qualified Africans in a context when the economic sector was expanding, there was an increase in the demand for higher education. This was an era of optimism and great hopes about higher education and its role in Africa's nation-building and development project. From the 1950s through the 1960s, governments made substantial allocations for higher education because they believed in its potential for national development. This period also coincided with a context in which African governments and policy makers could look beyond their former colonizers to establish new universities and attract more support. Besides former colonial powers, African higher education was opened to and influenced by the wider international community including the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and several countries in Eastern Europe. For the purposes of this article, the focus will be primarily on American foundations' support towards African higher education.

The United States, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and three major private foundations, namely Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Carnegie Foundation, became a major player in African higher education. One of the largest US contributions in the field was the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in 1960, a USAID project. During this period, support from the US also included the creation of scholarship programs for African students to continue their education in American universities and colleges. For instance, two very influential African political leaders of the time who benefitted from these programs were Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria. Azikiwe was in fact the catalyst for the creation of UNN. The scholarships programs included the African Scholarship Program of US Universities (ASPAU), which awarded 1,594 scholarships and lasted for almost a decade, from 1961 to 1970. Another important scholarship program was the African Graduate Fellowship Program, a partnership which involved 60 American universities. As for the large private American foundations,

their support to university development in Africa focused on four major areas in various African institutions of higher learning: institutional support, faculty development, library development, and setting up of postgraduate degree programs. Each foundation was however to focus on a specific priority based on what they thought were the most pressing needs of new African universities. Rockefeller was to pay special attention to strengthening faculty development in the Social Sciences, Ford had the mandate to focus on Social Science Research and strengthen infrastructure, whereas Carnegie Cooperation was to focus on education more broadly.

Why invest in African higher education? Whether then (1950s-1960s) or now, this question will be a recurring one throughout this article, as external support to higher education in Africa was and is never conceived or provided in a vacuum. Through the years, it has always been tied to and is best understood within the various and evolving US foreign aid policy frameworks.

US support to education in Africa and other developing countries gained momentum from the 1950s onward as a critical priority, and was driven by the need to spread US hegemony after 1945 and in a Cold War context and by the necessity to foster pro-US values, methods and research institutions. This was reflected in the legislation passed in 1950 under President Truman which declared:

The economic development of underdeveloped areas was a national policy of the United States. Based upon a mixture of humanitarianism, national security, and economic self-interest, it marked the first formal articulation of the principle of the moral and imperative of development assistance, which rapidly became part of an emergent new international ethic (p.11).

Alliances had to be formed and cultivated abroad, especially in newly independent nations, including African nations. Such an important agenda was pushed forward via a general framework of "support to democracy" and for that matter, education had a key role to play in that mission. In a letter from the president of the American Council on Education to the president of Carnegie Corporation, this was the rationale for supporting higher education in Africa:

The present all-out world struggle between communism and democracy

surely will soon have Africa as one of its major areas. The nearly two hundred million people in the African countries are a major prize, to say nothing of the as yet untapped and scarcely unknown mineral resources they may possess...Africans in the rank and file may understand the difference between communism and democracy (p. 57-80).

In fact, the primary purpose of the scholarships programs was to train a "rank and file" or an African elite likely to take on leadership positions once back in their home countries. In some instances, aid initiatives to African universities were undertaken thanks to the connections of individuals just as in the case of President Azikiwe who sought support from USAID to build the University of Nsukka, Africa's first land-grant university, modeled after the US land grant system (Samoff and Carroll 2002). However, such a project was a strategic move and was primarily motivated by American interest in Nigeria, and as such, it fell squarely within the framework of US policy abroad of that time. This policy orientation was not just adopted by national aid agencies such as USAID. Even the philanthropic organizations whose support to higher education in Africa had a longer history, had a similar agenda. Ford aid initiatives went primarily to Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zaire and the University of East Africa. Rockefeller and Carnegie also focused on Nigeria and University of East Africa. According to Berman (1983), between 1958 and 1969, Ford Foundation spent approximately \$25 million in Nigeria. It is quite impressive that this figure represented almost two-thirds of Ford's total expenditure in the entire West African region.

As early as the first years following independence, African leaders had concerns about the missions and objectives of universities in Africa. The notion of a developmental university was pushed forward and there was general recognition that universities had a significant contribution to make in the promotion of economic and social development, and therefore, had to be linked to national development strategies and the perceived needs of newly independent African countries.

At a 1962 joint UNESCO and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) conference in Tananarive, Madagascar, the focus of leaders and policy makers was on the renewed mission of African universities

and the role of higher education in the social, cultural, and economic development of the continent while maintaining international standards of academic quality. Participants also raised the multiple challenges African higher education was faced with such as problems related to Africanizing African staff and faculty, financing, and the everlasting issue of relevance of the curriculum. On the question of relevance of African higher education, Julius Nyerere came across as one of the strongest supporters of a developmental university that responded to Africa's multiple needs and challenges:

I believe that a university in a development society must put the emphasis of its work on subjects of immediate moment to the nation in which it exists, and it must be committed to the people of that nation and their humanistic goals. This is central to its existence; and it is this fact which justifies the heavy expenditure of resources on this one aspect of national life and development. Its research, and the energies of its staff in particular, must be freely offered to the community and they must be relevant (Nyerere 1966).

A pertinent question one needs to pose is 'to what extent were African countries able to create institutions of higher learning that would be socially relevant and financially feasible when their survival was so much dependent on international aid and their functioning so tied to donor/client relationships?'. In fact, another important issue on the agenda of the conference was the impact of international aid on African universities. It is actually quite interesting that in much of the literature on higher education in Africa of the 1960s through the 1980s, the term 'international aid' is much more used than the term 'partnership'. In *Creating The African University* (Yesufu, ed., 1973), which was commissioned by the Association of African Universities (AAU) following a workshop on emerging issues in African universities held in Accra in 1972, contributors called for a redefinition of African universities whereby their challenges would be "located, identified, analyzed and solved by Africans...." (Yesufu, p.7). The then Chairman of the Overseas Liaison Committee of the American Council on Education, Carl K. Eicher, strongly advocated a total shift from donor agencies to African scholars and policy makers in the decision making process of

setting up goals and priorities in vital areas of research. He identified three areas of vital importance, namely the imposition of family planning, the imposition of agricultural research systems, and educational expansion in the context of growing unemployment, and argued that African scholars should avoid intellectual dependency by forming a solid base of empirical evidence on a country-by-country basis in order to guide their nations in such vital areas. On the issue concerning the imposition of family planning, he argued:

During the mid-1990s there was an almost overnight consensus among foreign donors that there was a population crisis in developing countries, and that substantial aid resources should be channeled into population research and family planning. Aid resources for population programmes experienced a quantum increase from a few million dollars per year in the mid-1960s to over one million dollars in 1972. The 'rush to judgment' on the population issue and the over-emphasis on research on a wide range of population problems, may have been counterproductive in Africa (p. 28).

With respect to the imposition of agricultural research systems, he noted:

Over the past fifty years Africa has been the testing ground for a wide variety of experiments in organizing agricultural research. The national research systems which were set up by the British, French and Belgians in the 1920s and 1930s gave way to the regional systems in the 1940s and the 1950s, such as the West African Institutes for Palm Oil, Cocoa, Rice and Social Science Research. The regional institutes were nationalized in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Over the last five years, several international and regional institutes have again been established in Africa and an International Livestock Research Institute is being considered for Eastern Africa. Throughout this trial and error process, the African University has occupied a residual position in decisions about the design of agricultural research systems and the location of regional and international institutes (p. 29)

As for the question of educational expansion in the context of growing unemployment, Elcher writes:

Over the past decade, donor agencies have contributed substantial aid to education in Africa. Also during this past decade, my fellow economists have gradually asserted their primacy over educational

decision-making through manpower planning and decision tools, such as benefit-cost analysis. However, most economists will now admit that although the costs of educational investments can be quantified, it is extremely difficult to compute the benefits from education. As a result, decisions on individual investment projects in education are often rather subjective and are justified as 'institution-building assistance' (p.29-30).

In light of Elcher's analysis, it is evident that donor aid initiatives for higher education in Africa, from the beginning till now, came with strings attached. In the absence of a strong empirical research base, African universities and scholars were not able to play a significant role in setting up research priorities and agendas. In some instances, and as Elcher explains, by establishing specialized research institutes on key development questions they deemed important outside of the university, donor agencies were able to maintain control over what was researched and how it was researched. Their focus was really on what was politically expedient in the field of education rather than on what was socially relevant.

If the 1960s or decade of independence was accompanied by real optimism concerning the role of higher education in national development, until the 1970s, it is very evident that there was a narrow approach to higher education and development among donor agencies and policy makers that had really deeply taken root in the field of education. For how long would such an approach prevail? We will now turn to the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite all the challenges associated with Africa's higher education, there is general agreement that the first decade following independence was marked by optimism among African intellectuals and in Africa's higher education circles. According to Mkandawire (2005), this period coincided with the promotion of the first generation of African intellectuals. They accepted the developmentalist agenda of the political elites and joined the nationalist mission to put an end to the continent's numerous challenges. However, views differed as to what should be the paths and means to achieve development, as well as on what should be the focus and priorities of higher education. By the mid-1980s, it was clear among some scholars and within some higher education organizations that the term "development" was nothing but

a buzz word used by states and international donors to justify irrelevant policies and thus overshadow key issues in Africa's development such as human rights, gender, equality, and culture, which forced an organization CODESRIA to remove the term from its programmes and initiatives in 1986. Much of the distrust toward the ideology of development also stemmed from that fact that under its banner, scholars felt silenced, and anti-democratic policies imposed by governments and Western donors easily justifiable. Africa's higher education institutions were seen as still having the potential to carry out the developmental mission. External funds for support of that mission were also seen as being necessary, especially starting from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, when most countries in the continent went through series of structural adjustment policies (SAP's) as a result of deepened economic crises and deterioration accompanied by political unrest and the decline of state structures. The economic distress of SAPs affected African societies in many ways, and universities were not immune to its negative effects and the sharp financial constraints imposed upon them. Public recurrent expenditure per tertiary student fell from \$6,461 in 1975 to \$2,365 in 1983 (World Bank, 1983, p. 13), leading to a sharp decline in economic and social conditions in university campuses. In fact, universities became arenas of social struggle and protests against government policies. As Samoff and Carrol put it:

Major student protests occurred in 29 countries between 1970 and 1990, and between 1980-1989, some 25 countries experienced riots. Between 1985 and 1990, there were 46 incidents of riots, strikes and protests by many others. Many governments responded by becoming increasingly hostile towards universities...In contrast to the early independent period when there was widespread support for higher education, many governments, weakened by ongoing economic crisis, came to see universities as a threat to stability (p. 12).

During this period of crises, the World Bank became a major actor in education in Africa in general and higher education in particular. However, the implications for higher education were much bigger than in the lower levels of the educational spectrum. Following the publication of several policy documents commissioned by the Bank, there was growing

disillusionment with higher education in Africa and its role in promoting development. The World Bank concluded that African higher education was, in many ways, ill-conceived, over-expanded and a luxury for many African countries. The increasing number of unemployed graduates was used to support such evidence. For the Bank, such evidence was enough to cut back drastically on higher education and invest more in basic education. The Bank's interventions, as well as governments' and other stakeholders' initiatives towards education were often based on isolated short-term projects for immediate solutions, while what was needed were more integrated and holistic interventions that addressed various levels and dimensions of education. The movement for basic education also received considerable international attention and was on the agenda of several international conferences.

In the 1990s, basic education came to the forefront in the development debate, starting with the Education for All (EFA) movement that was launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, where the World Conference on Education was held. Representatives of 155 countries and 150 organizations made the commitment to provide basic education for all children, youth and adults. Human resource development through education and training was recognized by development planners as a vital element in the overall strategy for sustainable development. External support for basic education came at the expense of higher education. Universities continued to be the scene of a series of student and faculty strikes. Libraries were outdated, and buildings were dilapidated. Most academics who stayed at African Universities were underpaid and overworked while others were lost to the brain drain, mainly to countries in the North.

By the mid-1990s, and despite international commitment to basic education, the crisis of higher education in Africa became so pronounced that within the continent, many scholars and institutions felt obliged to go through a process of self-criticism and then reorganization. As Mkandawire (2005) put it:

There was a great deal of self-criticism among intellectuals. For some this self-criticism called for a re-engagement with society in the light of lessons learned; some

were left unfazed by criticism and simply chose to serve whoever was in power or had money; still others withdrew into a kind of self-preoccupation and navel-gazing. The question of the relevance, appropriateness and meaningfulness of what they were producing touched a nerve among African scholars and was 'a source of considerable soul searching among the social science community' (Bujra 1994). African intellectuals have been under enormous pressure to 'account for themselves' (Mafeje 1993).

Outside the continent, there was also a realization that higher education needed to be put back on the agenda, as it was once again seen as an essential and leading component of the education system and a necessary condition for development. What was seen as a luxury whose rates of social return were supposedly lower than those of primary education, received increasing attention. The revitalization of higher education became a recurrent theme and a high priority for donor agencies. In *A Consultation for Higher Education in Africa* (1991), Trevor Comb notes:

The universities remain great national storehouses of trained, informed, inquiring and critical intellects, and the indispensable means of replenishing national talent. They have considerable reserves of leadership and commitment on which to draw. Impoverished, frustrated, dilapidated and overcrowded as they may be, they have no substitutes (p. 34).

The same argument was also echoed by the World Bank itself and UNESCO in their report of the Task Force on Education (2000):

As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. Countries need to educate more of their young people to a higher standard – a degree is now a basic qualification for many skilled jobs. The quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness (p. 52).

This increasing focus on knowledge as critical for national development was also echoed in debates about higher education in this current phase of globalization. Trends associated with globalization such as the new information and communication technologies, the expansion of transnational provision for higher education, and trade in educational services under the General Agreement on

Trade in Services (GATS) have transformed higher education into a commodity marketed across borders. Higher education in Africa faces serious challenges as the demands of globalization, namely profit considerations and market forces, often take precedence over social expectations, national concerns and priorities. In this context, the challenges facing African universities become more serious, especially as we see a renewed interest by funding agencies in higher education in Africa. We shall now turn to the current US partnerships for higher education in Africa, in particular, the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2000-2010.

The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), 2000-2010: Accounting for Its Own Successes and Challenges

The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA) was founded in 2000 in an effort to rebuild higher education and support the development of intellectual capital of higher education institutions and scholars in nine African countries, making it one of the largest international efforts towards African universities. Discussions around this major initiative are timely, as the initiative ended just about a year ago. They are also necessary, as it left behind quite a number of accomplishments and drawbacks, as well as lessons to be learned, thus making it extremely important for Africanists to give our assessments of the initiative, reflect on it, and propose strategies for better and more effective ways to engage with African universities.

Literature on the partnership is still extremely limited. Therefore, this paper relies heavily on technical reports produced by the foundations themselves, which constitutes a major limitation. The partnership consisted of seven American foundations that were involved either from inception to end, or sometime during the partnership. They included the Carnegie Corporation of New York (2000-2010), Ford Foundation (2000-2010), The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2005-2010), Kresge Foundation (2007-2010), The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (2000-2010), The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (2005-2010), and The Rockefeller Foundation (2000-2010). PHEA focused support by investing \$440 million in nine countries including Egypt, Kenya, Uganda,

Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. The following is a brief overview of each foundation and some of their key areas of focus, based on the recent joint report by all participating foundations, *Accomplishments of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2000-2010: Report on a Decade of Collaborative Foundation Investment*, 2010.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York was the largest contributor to the PHEA, with 29 per cent, although it was below the average 15 per cent joint grant-making. Carnegie focused on university revitalization and transformation as well as on gender equity, and invested in the following countries: South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana. "The Corporation also provided leadership in the areas of Next Generation of Academics, Improving Undergraduate Access, and Information and Communications Technology, including the PHEA Joint Initiatives of the Bandwidth Consortium, Bandwidth Management Training, and the Educational Technology Initiative (p.13).

Ford Foundation placed emphasis on advancing social change and "investing on the ground to advance the work of visionaries on the frontlines of social change." 92 per cent of Ford's grants went directly to universities in South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria. Ford also took a leading role in PHEA's project – Next Generation of Academics (NGA) – and provided initial support for the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) and its University World News Africa edition, which later became a Joint PHEA Initiative. In addition, the foundation invested 49 per cent in policy research initiatives, covered 24 per cent of the Bandwidth Consortium investment since 2004 and accounted for 25 per cent of the support for university bandwidth management training (p. 29).

Rockefeller Foundation focused on building African research capacity in several major disciplines, including agriculture, health and economics, and supported regional postgraduate training and research networks. Over \$37.4 million was awarded to seven African universities and colleges in Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. Makerere University in Uganda was the foundation's major university grantee, receiving \$23.9 million.

The foundation also contributed to the PHEA's joint initiatives, particularly in Information and Communications Technology such as the Bandwidth Consortium, Bandwidth Management and Training, and the Educational Technology Initiative. Besides, \$10.1 million of Ford's funds went to Eastern and Southern Africa for two regional networks: the African Centre for Crop Improvement (ACCI) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) (pp.84-85).

Kresge Foundation focused on areas of strategic planning, advancement/fundraising, and infrastructure development through matching grants. South Africa was the only "single-country" beneficiary of Kresge support, receiving investments totaling \$9.9 million. It supported strategic advancement at five of South Africa's 23 universities: the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Pretoria, University of the Western Cape, University of the Witwatersrand, and the Children's Hospital Trust. Kresge invested \$8.5 million in institutional development, representing 72 per cent of its overall PHEA grantmaking and in two sub-areas, namely, Higher Education Management, and Facility & Infrastructure Development (p.51).

The John D. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation focused on institutional strengthening of four universities in Nigeria and one in Madagascar. Among the nine PHEA partner countries, Nigeria was the largest 'single-country' beneficiary of MacArthur support, receiving investments totaling \$40.8 million. In the PHEA overall, Nigeria benefited \$61 million, making it the second largest 'single country' beneficiary after South Africa. Multiple countries including Uganda, Madagascar, Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania also received support ranging from 1 - 4 per cent of the total funds. Additional areas of emphasis included conservation and sustainable development, human rights, and population and reproductive health (p. 59).

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation focused on strengthening South African universities and the production of scholars. Emphasis was placed on academic and research program development, post-graduate training, faculty development, and the development of

archival collections. South Africa was the largest "single-country" beneficiary of Mellon support, receiving investments totaling \$38.3 million (p. 71).

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation invested in global programs focused on areas of population, education, global development and philanthropy. During its five-year membership in the PHEA, Hewlett invested primarily in training the next generation of African population scientists, supporting individuals' reproductive health rights, and developing open educational resources. Hewlett's Joint grantmaking made up 35 per cent, the highest of the seven partner foundations. 89 per cent of Hewlett's funding went to grantees in multiple countries. African universities made up Hewlett's second highest type of grantee, with the investment totaling \$5.9 million to seven institutions. This was made up primarily of support to the African Virtual University (\$2.1million) and the University of the Witwatersrand. Countries benefiting from the remaining 11 per cent included South Africa, Ghana and Egypt. In their report, the foundations identified four major PHEA accomplishments over their decade-long partnership with African universities: (a) enduring improvements in African higher education, (b) increased resources for African universities, (c) collectively adding value beyond what individual foundations could do, and (d) enhanced individual foundation efforts.

Under their first major achievement "enduring improvements in African higher education", which seems to suggest that results are sustainable, they listed ten accomplishments: 1) The Bandwidth Consortium; 2) Universities developed the capacity to manage their IT networks; 3) Seven universities implementing action plans to use educational technology to improve teaching and learning; 4) Improved gender equity in enrollment and graduation rates; 5) Strategies to increase university access for marginalized groups are in place; 6) Policy research and advocacy for African higher education expanded and strengthened university physical infrastructure; 7) University physical infrastructure was strengthened; 8) Universities established new and more efficient systems; 9) African institutions were strengthened to respond to development needs and create high level talent; and, 10) Stakeholders are

beginning to address the crisis of the Next Generation of African Academics.

Before getting into details about each foundation's program activities and contributions in PHEA, the report proposes future directions and "where they hope others will go":

As this phase of PHEA ends, we encourage others to join the ongoing efforts of the seven foundations to support the strengthening of African higher education systems, particularly through direct assistance to African universities identifying and designing solutions to their own challenges and opportunities. Top among these challenges is the recruitment, development, and retention of the Next Generation of African Academics. Solving the "Next Gen" problem requires highly trained academics working within functional universities and collaboration through networks and other kinds of academic communities (p.8).

The focus of the foundations' joint report is entirely on their accomplishments. Less emphasis is put on challenges that PHEA faced in the project's conceptualization, planning and execution process.

In *"Lessons From a Ten-Year Funder Collaborative: A Case Study of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa,"* Parker (2010) goes a step further and outlines some of the challenges the foundations were faced with, based on former participants' experiences such as

- Lack of clarity about the mission of the partnership;
- Cumbersome decision-making and initial lack of strong coordinating body and expertise on specific issues such as the bandwidth;
- Large time commitment from program officers;
- Lack of joint grant-making and "big-picture" grant-making;
- Different cultures among foundations;
- Lack of communication among foundations and to external audiences;
- Lessening interest and changes in leadership from president;
- Limited outside partners including African governments, African leaders, multilaterals, and local non-governmental organizations;
- Lack of data to show collective impact of work; and

- Lack of exit plan when partnership ended.

Evidently, all these challenges as identified by the participants seem to suggest that their assessment is clearly one-dimensional, as they focused exclusively on the foundations and how they ran the process of the partnership and not on their "partners" on the other side, namely African universities. What were the challenges African universities were confronted with? What were the lessons to be learned on their end from a partnership that lasted a decade? If education aid today is actually seen more as partnerships aligned with the recipient countries' policies and programs than as donor-owned and donor-driven activities, how come the role of African universities and their involvement throughout the various stages of the PHEA is given very minimal attention?

What Role for African Universities?

The "Partnership"

As discussed earlier, until the mid-1990s, the role of higher education in Africa's development was seen as an anomaly, with most education development projects focused on basic and secondary education. We have therefore come a long way from a context in which higher education in Africa was considered a "luxury ancillary" to one in which it is seen not just as necessary, but also a sufficient condition for development. There is also no denying that we have come a long way from a time when discussions about Africa's higher education in the donor-aid literature shifted from terms such as "international aid" to ones such as "partnership". The PHEA, it is true, increased the spotlight on the importance of higher education in Africa, as evidenced by the increase in the number of additional funders after the original four foundations and the considerable amount of leveraging they received from major donors such as the World Bank, the European Union, The Swedish International Development, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). For instance, the initial \$13.6 million that established the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) was leveraged for an additional \$1 million by NORAD. PHEA provided a lot of publicity around higher education in Africa and brought up key issues for

further debate. However, as Samoff and Carrol put it, citing discussions at the 1998 Academic Partnership at Michigan State University:

There are partnerships and there are partnerships. We understand partnership to go beyond technical assistance and external support. To be something other than foreign aid, partnership must involve a collaboration that can reasonably be expected to have mutual (though not necessarily identical) benefits, that will contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities at both institutions, that respects the sovereignty and autonomy of both institutions goals, and that it is itself empowering, in that it enables both partners to be better able to specify goals, chart directions, create appropriate governance strategies, employ effective administrative routines, and focus human, material, and financial resources on high priority objectives (p. 67).

Partnerships are never formed in a vacuum, and reasons for establishing partnerships are often based on the interests and agenda of key actors, whether these are explicit or implicit. PHEA provided very little explanation as to how the foundations worked with African institutions to establish a higher education agenda. For example, if surveys were relied upon to gauge areas where support was needed, then sample survey inquiries and responses should be included in the PHEA reports. However, it is clear that for most overseas universities and foundations, partnerships with African universities are driven by their strong interest in internationalization, which has now become a core activity in American universities, and may not always necessarily contribute to the improvement of teaching, research and public engagement. Partnership presumes interaction.

The paucity of substantial information from African universities on their academic partnerships with US foundations is equally frustrating. It is also quite obvious that, from the African perspective, highest priority is placed on building infrastructural facilities than on areas that can be innovative and bring about lasting change. For instance, African universities often get involved in partnerships that do not address critical priorities such as relevant curriculum

development, pedagogical, research and/or institutional innovations, which if sustained beyond the partnerships, are able to bring about lasting and positive changes to higher education in Africa. The reality is that what usually drive partnerships are the interests of key actors from both sides. "Individual scholars may be interested in partnerships to further their individual research projects, private companies may be interested in increasing the market penetration of their products, whereas higher education institutions may be interested in furthering their international reach" (Samoff and Carrol, p. 44).

A clear understanding of the foundations' incentives for providing support to African institutions would presumably improve understanding of project expectations. African institutions and their partners need to define ways to measure the success of their projects. The PHEA report could be much more enlightening by providing additional in-depth data on the status of higher education programs before and after funds were allocated. For example, the report notes that one of PHEA's priorities centered on gender equity in enrollment in higher education. Citing the creation of scholarships for women at Makerere University and the University of Dar es Salaam would have been more effective had the report stated how the universities went about creating the scholarship programs to address female students in particular, and the more explicit strategies they used throughout the stages of female access, retention and completion in order to sustain their participation in higher education.

Despite the inequality in access to resources, partnerships within the academia should be based on mutual learning and mutual benefit, but the reality is that they are also defined and set up as assistance from the poor to the more affluent. Although the assumption is that these academic partnerships will help narrow the gap between them, there is no evidence of funding agencies and their collaborating institutions from the donor side reducing their advantage. Samoff and Carrol argue that "while particular aid projects may well provide important and useful assistance to higher education in Africa, overall foreign aid generally functions to strengthen and entrench patterns of dependence and to foster the internalization, within Africa, of

understandings and institutional arrangements that reinforce and simultaneously obscure those patterns of influence" (p. 35).

As mentioned earlier, there has been some progress in how support to higher education in Africa is labeled. Nonetheless, whether such support is labeled "aid" or "partnership", the patterns of dependence will continue as long as the benefits of aid are always limited to university facilities upgrading, better trained teachers, or more textbooks. This is not to suggest that such improvements are not factors of progress in education, but innovative higher education systems that seek to be relevant to their environment and contribute to development in a meaningful and sustainable way should not be based on short-term projects and only seek immediate responses to immediate problems.

To be more specific, let us turn to research, which plays an important role in the expansion of knowledge and in making the benefits of such an expansion available to society. It also represents a key ingredient for the establishment of new and innovative higher education systems if sustained research programs exist. However, in a foreign aid context, the complexities and vagaries of aid assistance affect both the process and the nature of research in many important ways. Academics from African universities often take minor roles in research projects funded through partnerships whereas donor agencies and their consultants have become research entrepreneurs whereby research in higher education institutions in Africa becomes increasingly consultancy research, which Samoff and Carrol warn us about in these terms:

Foreign funding and technical assistance agencies have become research entrepreneurs. Initially to inform and guide, but often in practice to justify and legitimize their support programs, they commission studies on education in Africa. Formally, those studies are expected to reflect the unique circumstances of the research sites. Collectively, however, their observations about diverse settings and their accompanying recommendations are strikingly similar. That should not surprise us. That research reflects the basic understandings and expectations of those who commission it (p. 35).

When research is so narrowly confined within the donor agency realm, the funders' approaches, frameworks and methodologies shape its guiding questions, identify the data to be gathered and where it should be gathered, and influences its analysis and findings. In addition, the same cycle continues as they are replicated in other settings and other funded projects, for their recommendations become the foundation and prime reference for future research.

Some scholars have long pointed to the negative impact of aid programs and have even gone as far as proclaiming the "death of aid" and advocating a "world without aid." The reality is painful, in that for that to happen, Africa's long-standing development impasse would require a totally new level of consciousness and a much greater degree of innovation both from within Africa and from external actors. Development programs in all domains including higher education should not be implemented on non-African expertise, nor should they be approached as "hit or miss" initiatives. What really counts is not the amount of funds funneled to African universities. There should be more systematic ways to improve higher education delivery and better ways to engage with African universities and academics. When African universities are increasingly less able to support research programs and depend more and more on external support, a key question then becomes how do we ensure ways in which they can contribute to the building of a systematic, programmatic knowledge and research base in a foreign

The PHEA initiative, as noted earlier, focused on partnerships with a select list of nine countries, namely Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. According to the PHEA press release announcing the partnership, the initiative was committed to supporting efforts that were already underway in select African universities to expand and improve the education of the next generation of African leaders in fields which they hoped would contribute to "strengthening higher education in Africa". The project focused on key areas and outlined key dimensions on which they anticipated progress could be made by its completion: aid environment that would hopefully be replaced with a "partnership" environment in the real sense of the term?

Sustainability of the PHEA Initiative

- Effective use of information and communication technologies;
- A diverse student body;
- Creation of high-level professional talent and new ideas;
- Transfer of skills essential for national development; and
- Strengthened university management and global engagement.

During the first five years, PHEA focused on six sub-Saharan countries, namely, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. These partner-countries were selected based on improved economic conditions, the extent to which they were committed to public policy reform, and whether foundation activity was already underway. Partner universities were chosen depending on whether they were already taking initiatives to reform and strengthen themselves. In other words, to maximize aid effectiveness, PHEA, like most donor initiatives, focused on countries and universities "on the move." Indeed, these countries and the three that joined the partnership later, namely, Egypt, Kenya and Madagascar are neither the least developed countries in Africa nor are they countries with the least developed higher education systems. Top-quality universities in developed countries receiving foundation funds often engage in projects with institutions of comparable quality in Africa.

On the one hand, such criteria for selection make perfect sense, as there needs to be in countries and universities structures and initiatives already in place to sustain partnership accomplishments. On the other hand, a key question that deserves some attention is whether these criteria should be the only ones for determining who should or should not receive academic partnerships. For, when it comes to the issue of sustainability in the African context, a strong government support is not always given.

Most African countries share common core problems including the deterioration of infrastructural conditions, faster increase in enrollments (than the capacity to plan and accommodate them), poor teaching-learning conditions, increasing irrelevance of universities to national needs, and deplorable research facilities. These are challenges that cannot be

solved with international cooperation and partnerships alone, especially in the case of African universities that were established as, and continue to be, public institutions under direct government control. Governments in Africa have authority over how universities function and have control over the curriculum, courses, examination and certification, among other things. In this case, the paramount factor when assessing the sustainability of a project is to ensure, from the planning phase, that the recipient university government is likely to sustain it. In most cases, as soon as the partnership ends, the project ends too, because the government never gave it priority in the first place. Missing from the PHEA joint report and its commissioned evaluations is any solid evidence of an exit plan, as well as collaboration with relevant government ministries or officials in partner African countries. Besides, the sustainability of projects becomes even more at risk when there is a change in government. Because funds from partnerships are formally part of foreign aid, academic partnerships are therefore linked to state-to-state relations between the US and African countries. As such, the sustainability of academic partnerships with African institutions is problematic and rests on shaky grounds too given the many shifts in US foreign policy. For instance, the current US government's growing emphasis on defense and intelligence will drastically change the landscape of US academic partnerships, as what are deemed key priorities in strengthening African universities may not be at all on the agenda of donor agencies in the next decade or so. Sustainability is surely the real and ultimate test of development efforts. Assuming that the PHEA initiative was a success for the various foundations and the African universities involved in it, with respect to objectives set during the ten years of the partnership's life, the benefits it has been able to generate beyond the life of the initiative constitute the real benchmarks for measuring its success.

Besides the necessity of strong government support post-foundation period to ensure continuity in project activities, another key factor from the sustainability point of view is to adequately train relevant trainers and thus have skilled personnel in African universities to take over specific projects. In the case of information and communication technologies (ICTs), for instance, training-of-trainers at

host African universities, either within their own countries or at US grantee institutions, is always given a lot of attention in most call for applications. However, most training-of-trainers efforts are often considered 'appropriate' by foundations and grantee institutions if they involve just a few quick workshops throughout the partnership. Such workshops cannot provide the sustained interaction needed to learn new skills necessary to keep a project going. In addition, even if the necessary skilled personnel is in place, when it comes to ICTs, the actual e-learning environment in African universities and the nature and quality of the Information Technology (IT) infrastructure also have a major role to play in the sustainability of ICT-related projects. All of this also boils down to the need for strong institutional support at African universities post-partnership period. If a particular African University finds hiring of faculty or keeping up-to-date with their salaries more pressing than innovating computer laboratories, this would obviously either slow down or put an end to an ICT-related project, despite the investments already made with respect to finances and faculty time commitment.

A Forward-looking Approach to Partnerships with African Universities

Stronger linkages need to be made between African universities themselves, as well as between African universities and research networks based in the continent, especially given the fact that most research networks were established as a response to the serious crises in African universities. It is actually quite impressive that despite the series of crises in African higher education, the continent has gained renewed momentum in the growth and strengthening of continent-wide regional research networks. We will come back to linkages between African universities and research networks and its implications for research. The point here is that just as pan-African and regional integration initiatives are pushed forward to encourage economic integration within Africa as the best way to counter the challenges of economic globalization, African institutions of higher education in the broader sense can also meet new challenges by strengthening their links and the already established pan-African networks. External partnerships via such pan-African networks would be far more

beneficial, far more efficient, and far more sustainable.

Academic partnerships between African universities and American universities and other universities in the North through major foundation initiatives, while often taken as great opportunities by the latter to increase their international reach, on the African side, these partnerships are often looked at as a symbol of prestige and for the realization of short-term projects and opportunities for specific units and a select group of administrators and faculty. There is very little an entire institution can gain from several short-term individual faculty visits at grantee universities and from few consultancies. Instead, these individual privileges have, to some extent, helped reinforce inequalities between universities and between units within the same universities.

Within Africa, the patterns of academic partnerships and exchanges are quite uneven given the varying levels of economic and educational progress. Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa represent the most popular destinations for student and faculty exchanges from other African countries and remained so for several decades, and as early as the 1970s for the most part.

Although very limited and its progress quite slow, online and distance education also have the potential to effectively revolutionize various curricular offerings in various disciplines and across universities, as well as promote innovation in curricular content and quality. However, there are multiple challenges associated with online learning which even countries with the most advanced educational systems have to grapple with. African universities have a lot more problems to deal with concerning online learning, including issues around access. The argument here is that if ICTs and some aspects of online learning are increasingly becoming priority areas on the agenda of many funding agencies, more efficiency and more sustainability could be achieved if they were to tap into institutions that are already in place and currently trying to reach out to other African countries. A few traditional universities and colleges and recently new open universities, such as the Open University of Tanzania and the Zimbabwe Open University, are currently slowly attempting to provide instruction outside of their national boundaries. The most well established online education institu-

tion is the African Virtual University, a World Bank-sponsored project that has, from 1997 – when it was established – to 2001, created thirty one learning centers in seventeen African countries and has trained 23,000 people in various professional fields. In addition, various e-libraries and e-books are now available, and have great potential to support research.

African institutions of higher learning face multiple challenges, one of the biggest being the need to establish a solid and innovative research base in Africa. Despite the important role of donor funding in the survival of African higher education, it is crucial that research on and in Africa expands far beyond the realm of consultancy-driven projects. For that to happen, more collaboration needs to be built between universities and research organizations and institutes.

The African continent has gained renewed impetus in the establishment of continent-wide and regional research networks. Organizations such as the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and the South African Development Community (SADC) have tremendously helped in broadening the scope of research and strengthen linkages between universities, African scholars, as well as create a real sense of an African intellectual community. Besides, in the context of declining government expenditure on education and the constant shifts in priorities among outside actors, tertiary-level institutions in Africa will experience increasing pressure to ensure institutional capacity building and undertake promising research. In their analysis of the benefits of transnational initiatives in the field of higher education, Koehn and Demment (2010) note:

Regional partnering can serve as an important stepping stone to additional resources. The World Bank reports that regional and sub-regional networks often provide an avenue for "national tertiary systems and institutions to 'bridge' into the sphere of experiences, best practices, and innovation that exist at the international level, and to use scarce resources more efficiently" (Yusuf, et. al. 2009: 99; Johanson and Saint, 2007:11) (p. 7).

Most transnational African higher education institutions serve as strong platforms, networks, and advocacy groups for the promotion of research, dissemination, capacity building in African higher education, as well as in international cooperation (ADEA 2008). A perfect example here revolves around the creation of *The Journal of Higher Education in Africa* (JHEA), which covers issues concerning higher education in Africa in general, the only other journal being the *South African Journal of Higher Education*, which focuses specifically on South Africa. Interestingly enough, JHEA was one of the two first joint projects of the PHEA funded by the four initial foundations. Following lack of coordination between the PHEA and the two co-grantees, namely Boston College and CODESRIA, which resulted in irregularity in JHEA publication, CODESRIA took over the journal in 2006 and has been publishing two to three issues every year.

Conclusion

Following the mid-1970s and '80s economic crises which resulted in structural adjustment programs, higher education in Africa was hit hard. As a response to the crises of higher education, African institutions and intellectuals went through a process of self-criticism and reorganization. At this juncture, there is a need to return to that process, to avoid what Mkandawire (2002) warned us against:

If an earlier generation of African scholars was stifled by the obsession with the nationalist project, or by the revolutionary oppositional stance that refused to propose anything before everything else had been challenged, the new generation of African intellectuals runs the risk of operating under the paralyzing auspices of 'post-colonial' pessimism, which suggests that, everything being contingent, there are no more grounds for action (p. 39-40).

This article has addressed key issues related to a major US partnership initiative with African universities that lasted a decade, from 2000 to 2010, thus offering us a great opportunity to rethink the impact of such initiative in the field of higher education in Africa and raise important questions related to foreign aid and education in general. Such an initiative was one among many geared towards improving the quality of higher education in several African countries following a general recognition that African universities can contribute in a

meaningful way to Africa's development project. This initiative was also already underway when the current global economic crisis hit. Thus, in our attempts to propose a forward-looking approach to partnerships with African universities, we do so bearing in mind the likelihood of reduced external budgetary allocations to education assistance in general, and aid towards higher education in particular, although most donor agencies claim they are committed to their aid policies. As far as US foundations are concerned, it is probably true that there may not be cuts in budgetary allocations towards education. What we may see is a major shift in priority areas for that aid as evidenced by current moves by the present administration to put more emphasis on security issues and major military projects such as the US-Africa Command (AFRICOM). Many worry that the current emphasis on security issues will take attention away from international cooperation, democracy, human rights, and sustainable economic development.

It appears that we have now come full circle in debates surrounding the importance of higher education in Africa. As discussed earlier, there was recognition of its importance in Africa's development, then a general attitude towards higher education as being a luxury to be relegated to a secondary position after basic education, to again a renewed interest in investing in it as a necessary condition for development. In the current context, higher education in Africa cannot be left at the mercy of the many whims of international financial institutions and multilateral agencies. The internationalization of African institutions of higher learning is very promising and there is an increasing need for it, as these institutions strive to compete in this new phase of globalization where, more and more, disparities in the distribution of knowledge become a source of inequality between nations. Academic partnerships play an important part in the process of greater internationalization, and as such, this article does not, by any means, suggest that they should be avoided. Rather, it calls for healthy partnerships whereby donor agencies can meet their expectations and contribute in a meaningful and sustainable way to "strengthening African higher education", without adding to the burdens and constraints African universities are already carrying.

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