
Global Trends in Higher Education Reform: What Lessons for Nigeria?

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Abstract

The crisis that engulfed the higher education sector in many developing countries from the mid-1970s in many ways epitomised a much wider socio-economic and political crisis. In much of Africa the balance of payment crisis compounded an uneasy relationship between the rulers and academia. However, addressing the crisis in the 1980s was defined by the emergent neo-liberal mindset. It was also an ideological posture that saw the academy as a domain of a ‘leftist leisure class’ that needed market discipline. Education as a public good was replaced by a commodity logic. The impact of the neo-liberal orthodoxy on the higher education sector, however, varied widely across counties. In countries whose education policy came under the direct control of the Bretton Woods institutions, the orthodoxy drove policy as close to its ideological posturing as possible. In many developing countries commodification of access has impacted harshly on research activities in the higher education sector, reversing earlier achievements at endogeneity. In some countries, including Nigeria, the persistent anti-intellectualism of those in power has intensified the broader crisis. In this paper, I argue that this contrasts sharply with the domestic experience of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in their higher education sectors and the public commitment to research and development. What lessons are there for higher education reform in Nigeria? Firstly, in spite of the neo-liberal claims, successful countries show strong commitment to education as a public good and tend to invest heavily in their higher education sector, especially in endogenous research and development. The second point is that experiments with the commodity approach in both its provisioning of skilled human resources and internal relations have proved to be counter-productive. Thirdly, in situations of prolonged decline and decay, what needs rebuilding is more than just the infrastructure but also the ethos and ethics of academia.

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Résumé

La crise qui a mis à terre le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur dans un grand nombre de pays en développement dès le milieu des années 70, était le symbole d'une crise socio-économique et politique profonde. Dans la plupart des pays d'Afrique, la crise de la balance des paiements est venue aggraver les relations déjà houleuses entre les dirigeants et le corps académique. Toujours est-il que les solutions apportées à la crise des années 80 ont été définies par l'esprit néo-libéral émergent. Il s'agissait là d'une certaine position idéologique qui considérait le corps académique comme une « classe de gauche adepte du loisir », ayant besoin de s'imprégner de la discipline du marché (libre). L'éducation en tant que bien public céda ainsi la place à une logique marchande. Cependant, l'impact de l'orthodoxie néolibérale sur le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur variait selon les pays. Dans les pays où la politique d'éducation était passée sous le contrôle direct des institutions de Bretton Woods, l'orthodoxie de ces institutions a rapproché au maximum ces politiques d'éducation de l'idéologie libérale. Dans un grand nombre de pays en développement, la marchandisation de l'accès à l'enseignement a eu un sévère impact sur les activités de recherche du secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, bouleversant ainsi les réalisations antérieures tendant vers l'endogénéité. Dans certains pays tels que le Nigeria, l'anti-intellectualisme persistant des dirigeants a contribué à intensifier la crise en cours. J'avance que cela est en net contraste avec l'expérience interne des pays de l'OCDE en matière d'enseignement supérieur, mais également avec leur engagement public envers la recherche et le développement. Quelles leçons peut-on en tirer en ce qui concerne la réforme de l'enseignement supérieur au Nigeria ? Cet article expose trois points principaux. Le premier est que malgré les revendications néolibérales, les pays développés ont engagé une politique considérant l'éducation comme un bien public, et ont tendance à investir lourdement dans le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, particulièrement dans le secteur de la recherche endogène et du développement. Deuxièmement, l'approche de la marchandisation de l'enseignement s'est révélée contre-productive, aussi bien à travers son mode de recrutement de ressources humaines qu'à travers son système de relations internes. Troisièmement, dans une telle situation de déclin prolongé, il convient de reconstruire non pas uniquement les infrastructures, mais également l'ethos et l'éthique même du monde académique.

Introduction

The crisis in the higher education sector in many developing countries that began in the mid-1970s reflects a much wider socio-economic and political crisis. The crisis of unreformed, inherited political economy became painfully clear from the mid-1970s onwards, when modes of integration of the African economies into the global economy compounded internal domestic policy problems to produce severe balance of payment crises for many of these countries. While the relationship between the higher education sector and the political

elite had been frosty in many countries, even countries in which the relationship was warm did not escape the severe contraction in the sector that was to follow the fiscal crisis. If these elements defined the initial crisis, the mode of addressing the higher education sector was to set the stage for a new and ongoing crisis. It was the neo-liberal conservative ideology and mindset that shaped the debate and policy framework for the 'reform' of the higher education sector. Much of the neo-liberal approach was shaped by an ideological posture that saw academia as a domain of a 'leftist leisure class' that needed market discipline. The idea of education as a public good was replaced by a commodity logic that insisted on applying the market as a resource-allocative mechanism to the sector. This was not only with regard to access but also with regard to the curriculum and relations between the students and faculty as well as between faculty and the managerial layers of the universities.

The impact of the neo-liberal orthodoxy on the higher education sector varied widely across countries. In countries whose education policy came under the direct control of the Bretton Woods institutions, the orthodoxy drove policy as close to its ideological posturing as possible. Countries that were less directly subject to the Bretton Woods orthodoxy have been more able to retain a wider perspective on the education sector broadly, and specifically on the higher education sector and its multiplier effects on the economy and society. In some countries, such as South Africa, eight years of experimenting with market-transactional understanding of higher education sector is now giving way to a rethink of the lessons of the period, as the market-driven logic of the sector, especially in the restructuring of the curriculum, has proved more counter-productive than anything else. It was the capacity of the policy-making structures in these countries to 'learn' and rethink policies that defined the ability to reverse the damaging impacts of the commodity logic of the neo-liberal agenda.

However, in countries whose education policy came under more direct control of donor/Bretton Woods institutions, the commodification of access has tended to impact negatively on research activities in the higher education sector. This contrasts sharply with the domestic experience of the OECD countries in their higher education sector and in their public commitment to research and development. Later in this paper I will show the extent of the commitment to fundamental research in these countries. These are also countries in which the intellectuals are much valued by the state and society – something that contrasts sharply with the persistent anti-intellectualism of the state in countries like Nigeria, even with the advent of 'democracy'.

From all of this experience there emerge three key lessons for higher education reform in Nigeria. First, in spite of the neo-liberal claims, successful

countries show strong commitment to education as a public good and tend to invest heavily in their higher education sectors, especially in endogenous research and development. Second, experiments with the commodity approach in both its provisioning of skilled human resources and internal relations have proved to be counter-productive. The 'Macdonaldisation' of the education sector and the attempt to impose a commodity logic produce universities (especially private universities) with scant understanding and commitment to research and scholarship. Research and scholarship are not luxuries for a developing country like Nigeria, and a 'fast-food' approach to the higher education sector will produce 'Mickey-Mouse' qualifications and graduates (if you will forgive the mixed metaphor). Both the first and the second points require a renewed emphasis on endogeneity. The lessons of successful higher education sector transformation, many of which can be learnt from the Nigerian higher education sector in the immediate post-colonial period, suggest a third lesson, and one that is urgent. Reform or transformation in the context of prolonged crisis requires much more than just the rebuilding of physical infrastructure in universities; it also requires the reconstitution of the ethos and ethics of academia in order to revive scholarship and promote an internal commitment to academic values.

The Higher Education Crisis and Reform: The Importance of Memory

Much of the debate around the higher education crisis in Africa is often caught up in the crisis of historicity, in putting the crisis in context, and in the loss of analytical nerve in going beyond the dominant conventional (and largely neoliberal) 'explanations'. The selective amnesia regarding the role played by the international financial institutions and donor community in explaining the current crisis is pervasive. This amnesia ranges from offering 'new perspectives' that is palpably silent about role of institutions such as the World Bank (Ramphela 2004), to the "experts" who make their careers analysing Africa (Bloom, Canning and Chan 2005), and the Bank itself which can make a 180 degree turn in analysis without any apparent awareness of earlier problematic analyses. For the latter one could compare the World Bank's *Financing Education in Developing Countries* (1986) and the *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1988) on the one hand, and its *Higher Education in Developing Countries: peril or promise* (2000) and the *Constructing Knowledge Societies* (2002), on the other hand; all within a space of sixteen years. In one set (1986, 1988), Africa was better off devoting its meagre resources to other level so of schooling and farming out its tertiary education needs to the rest of the world; in

another set (2000, 2002) the Bank ‘discovered’ 2002 what African nationalist leaders knew in the 1950s: that higher education investment is important for economic growth, social cohesion, social development, and the capacity for autonomous knowledge production (cf. Adesina 2007; Udegbe 2007). Ramphele’s *Preface* to the *Constructing Knowledge Societies* tells (as a new discovery of the World Bank) what African intellectuals, popular forces and governments spent the 1980s telling the Bank. The resemblance with the Bank’s ‘discovery,’ in the 1990s, that ‘the poor have voice’ is uncanny; perhaps something emblematic of deep-seated institutional amnesia.

Having spent the 1980s telling African governments that the social return on higher education was negative, the Bank purports to rehash what is common knowledge: that the returns on public social expenditure, including higher education, has returns that are far more than individualistically economic. It is not about private economic return; it is about social and public returns. But there is a common thread in the seeming analytical U-turn. What ties the four reports together – apart from UNESCO’s involvement in the 2000 and 2002 documents – is an ontological narrative that is steeped in neoliberal and latterly post-modern sensibilities (Kotecha 2004: 116). The rationale for higher education is fundamentally economic and transactional. The very narrow developmental idea of higher education was further articulated by Ramphele (2004). The idea that universities ‘can contribute to development by internal efficiencies and also by providing leadership to national policy reform, especially in the education sector’ (Ramphele 2004: 21), suggests a poverty in understanding difficult to square with the more expansive and transformative idea of education, broadly, and higher education, specifically (Adesina 2007; Assié-Lumumba 2006, 2005), or the more contemporary idea of higher education not only as a ‘public good’ (Singh 2001) but as a ‘social good’ (Jonathan 2001).

Transcending the crisis of historicity and selective amnesia is important for our current analysis. The starting point in addressing the crisis of historicity concerns the question asked elsewhere (Adesina 2006a), and this section draws heavily on this earlier publication. The central question remains: ‘How did major universities on the African continent that were once major centres of research excellence in the post-colonial period become so desolate in the 1990? How did the ‘turn-around’ in many of them such as Makerere and Dar-es-Salaam, which Court (2001) and others celebrate, hollow out their fundamental role as centres of *knowledge production* rather than simply knowledge transmission of a second-hand version?’

The crisis that African higher education institutions faced could be divided into two: political and fiscal. In the period between 1960 and 1980, the challenge was often political and involved contentions around the role of the intellectual community vis-à-vis the ruling political elements. It was largely around the issues of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The exiling of the social sciences from the University of Kinshasa campus in the state capital to the university in the more remote Lumumbashi in Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire and the exclusion of Sociology (Assié-Lumumba 2005, 2006) represents one dimension of this crisis. At the extreme end was Idi Amin's siege on the University of Makerere and the murder of its vice chancellor. In most cases, however, this conflict was sporadic, often defined by the clash between the student bodies and the governments than a pervasive or persistent assault on academia. Conflicts with academics were often related to heavy-handed response of the state to industrial actions by academics. In a case like Kamuzu Banda's Malawi, state repression against perceived enemies of the regime was combined with diligent efforts to nurture the universities and maintain 'quality' of an English type; a combination which was not unique where repression was palpable.

Even so, in Dar-es-Salaam for instance, the academic's right of dissent was repeatedly emphasized by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (Shivji 2005). In the case of Ibadan, the most productive years, from 1960 to the mid-1970s, were periods of virtually no interference by the state in who taught what, and what was taught. During the period, for instance, University of Ibadan received its block grant from the national treasury, covering its research, emolument, equipment and maintenance needs, etc. As Adesogan (2005) noted, it was adequate to allow researchers to work without distraction. The higher education sector in most of post-colonial Africa was seen as serving several objectives, simultaneously: meeting the human resource needs of the countries development agenda, nation-building and national prestige. In almost all cases, bursaries and scholarships were provided to support bright students from poor backgrounds (Adesina 2006a, 2007).

Across most of the African countries the idea of local relevance and embeddedness of the universities was a priority issue for the new political leadership and in most cases for the academics themselves. The establishment of the University of Zambia (Ajayi *et al.* 1996) was not simply a status symbol; it was within the broader national development agenda. The National University of Côte d'Ivoire, in spite of the dependence on the French university system, was charged by President Houphouët-Boigny to engage with 'national reality' and a curriculum that reflects its local context and needs (Assié-Lumumba 2005: 11).

Contrary to the assumption in Ramphele's claim that 'the colonial model of the university as an ivory tower *is no longer* sustainable' (2004:17, emphasis mine), the challenge of the colonial model was integral to the nationalist struggle. No one ever thought that the 'ivory tower colonial model was sustainable. For instance, the 'Oxbridge model' on which the University College, Ibadan was run – a miniscule student population (1 000 for a country of 45 million), students waited upon by stewards, and a curriculum shaped by the needs of the British Empire – was subjected to vigorous criticism by nationalist representatives on its Council (Ajayi & Tamuno 1972), the small contingent of local staff, and several of its students (Soyinka 1994). The critique shaped the number and model of university education after independence; it also shaped the efforts to infuse a local content to what was taught and researched. From Dakar to Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam, the academic community reflected the energetic drive to find local relevance and contents to their scholarship. In the case of Ibadan, about which I am more familiar, it was fervour that evident: from History to Chemistry (Adesogan 1999), from Physics (Awe 1974) to Politics.¹ The more famous outcome is in the field of History, with the emergence of the Ibadan School of History, the Dar-es-Salaam School, and the Dakar School, the latter under the directorship of Cheikh Anta Diop. The quest for embeddedness of the university was even more so in the case of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), where efforts at scholarship that valorised Yoruba culture and language was pursued with vigour. In addition to cultural studies of Wande Abimbola and the Sociology of Akinsola Akiwowo, the university's Institute of Education initiated the Ife Six Year Primary Project on the premise that mother-tongue as medium of instruction is more beneficial to a child's education (Oyetade 2000: 33-34). Detailed accounts of the project and its pedagogic success are contained in Afolayan (1976) and Fafunwa, *et al.* (1989), the main personalities in the project. The learners taught in mother-tongue Yoruba language (except in English Language as a subject) for the duration of their primary education performed better than the control group that received the first three years in Yoruba and the last three years in English. Even in learning English Language as a subject, the experimental group performed no worse than those taught in English (Oyetade 2000: 33). The important thing here is that while the higher education institutions in the francophone African context might have been 'sites for the reproduction of European cultural domination' (Assié-Lumumba 2005: 11, 2006) this is not necessarily true everywhere on the continent.²

While I do not wish to give the impression that Ibadan, Ife or Dar-es-Salaam were representative of the trend in Africa's higher education institutions before the 1980s, it is important to highlight them given the current narratives

of a relentless crisis of an unreformed colonial enterprise. As Ajayi *et al.* (1996) and Assié-Lumumba (2006) show, the first wave of the reform of higher education sector in modern Africa was in the deliberate and focused efforts to convert colonial outposts into national institutions. The important thing to note is that this project was not imposed on African scholars or a project executed in opposition to an unreformed political 'elite.' The fitness of higher education institutions for national purpose was driven by a shared commitment of post-colonial intellectuals and politicians. Adebowale (2004) showed that in terms of scholarship and publications, it was also the period when the Nigerian intellectual community, as an example, had considerable international presence.

There is no single narrative of the problem that the higher education sector faced from the late-1970s, although there are common threads. In most African countries, the funding crisis was a direct result of the budgetary and balance of payments crises of the late-1970s and the early 1980s. In Ghana and Zambia, the crisis started much earlier, in 1966 and 1973, respectively (Adesina 2006a).

What is unique in the 'reform' of the 1980s, which triggered a more deep-seated crisis (Adesina 2006a; Magagula 2005; Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004a) is that it hollowed out the public/social good essence of higher education. In responding to short-run fiscal crisis, the neo-liberal agenda, articulated in the World Bank's now infamous 1986 policy document (*Financing Education in Developing Countries: An exploration of policy issues*), the institution that had the policy leverage altered the terms of engagement between state and society, between economy and education. Zeleza and Olukoshi (2004a: 2) noted that:

Rather than establish, maintain and invest in the university, Africa, it was argued, would be better served by investing in primary education and vocational education, while exploring more cost-effective foreign options for university-level training... Continuing investment in the university system... was seen as unsustainable and African governments were called upon to re-consider their policies through pro-active remedial action.

It was an important turn; a fundamental recasting of the post-colonial understanding of the ethical basis of social spending that Ramphele's historiography (2000, 2004) misses in how the Bank (as part of a wider neoliberal cortège) fundamentally laid the basis for converting crisis of higher education funding into endemic crisis of knowledge production and fitness of universities for purpose. The Bank's argument (1986, Ch.2) was that investment in higher education was not Pareto-optimal or sustainable given the resources available to

developing countries and that it was generating social inequality and diverting resources away from the poor. These were staples of the neoliberal orthodoxy of the time. It was all the more difficult to understand given an earlier study in the Bank (Eicher 1984) that had expressed scepticism about the quality of the data used to arrive at some of these claims and the methodological bases of the pronouncements (Adesina 2006).

Whatever might be the opinions of the African Vice Chancellors at whose meeting in Harare in 1986 the Bank presented its ‘findings’, the critical thing is that on the basis of intellectually and ethically questionable misuse of data, the Bank and its sister institution, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), were in a position to convert these claims into policy conditionalities. The result was a significant divestment of public funds from a range of social provisioning, including not only higher education but the education sector generally. The ability of national policymakers to mediate the impact varied significantly (Adesina 2007). In situations where the political rulers of a country were less disposed to social investment, the impact was dramatic. In Nigeria’s case, public expenditure on education, generally, declined from 6 per cent in 1980 to 0.65 per cent in 1995 – a change in actual resource available declining from US\$3,719 million in 1980 to US\$181 million in 1995, in current US dollars (Adesina 2007: 17). The massive decline in funding took two forms: direct cuts or stagnation in an environment of declining purchasing power, often the result of the devaluation of national currencies.

As previously noted,

‘[p]reviously vibrant science laboratories that produced world-class doctoral theses became empty. Ground-breaking research in the Humanities and Social Sciences ground to a halt. The loss of earning power was so enormous that university teachers and researchers faced the options of emigrating, moonlighting in the non-formal sector, and doing tenuous consultancy work with little or no returns on fundamental contribution to knowledge. The hollowing out of the universities flew in the face of the optimism about the efficacy of the market (Adesina 2006a: 137).

If the World Bank did not cause the problem, the policy that it, the IMF and the ‘international donor community’ imposed turn fiscal crisis into an endemic crisis of knowledge production. To invent a narrative of current deficiencies in Africa’s higher education landscape and skip these critical moments – a period of what was earlier referred to as social vivisection (Adesina 1994) – is to render opaque the fundamental aspect of the current crisis and challenges, and

how fundamentally wrong-headed are the central assumptions of the neoliberal reform agenda.

Unlike the neoliberal narratives that see contradiction where the Nationalists saw complementarity, the funding of primary and secondary education is both fundamental in itself and to an equally important funding for the higher education sector. The agenda for shifting attention from secondary and higher education to primary education was vigorously articulated in the Bank's 1994 'report,' *Higher Education: The lessons of experience*; again something missing in Ramphele's (2002, 2004) narrative of the role of the World Bank. Any (growing) demand for higher education, as Tilak (2004: 3) noted, would be 'met by distance education programmes or by private sector, in neither of which governments have to invest any substantial resource'. Whether one can assume that this deflection of policy attention from the higher education was merely a matter of coincidence with the vigorous push for 'cross-border' and 'transnational' education as tradable goods under the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) is a matter of conjecture (cf. Zeleza 2005; Magagula 2005). In 1999, the United States earned US\$8.5 billion from cross-border provision of education in service (Magagula 2005; Hayward 2002).

The *African Virtual University* (AVU) emerged as an in-house venture of the World Bank in response to the crisis triggered by the policy that it, other international financial institutions (IFIs) and the 'donor community' championed, as well as an ideological agenda of restraining public provisioning. As noted, the AVU, much celebrated in Ramphele's narratives (2004) is essentially about outsourcing higher education provisioning to a number of second-rate US universities, and the course 'offerings of the AVU, demonstrate the futility of assuming that the pedagogic process, inherent to a university environment can be outsourced over the Internet' (Adesina 2006a: 139).

Further, the 'equity of access' argument so fundamental to the neoliberal demand for reform of the higher education landscape – its diminution or privatization – have largely fallen off the radar at the turn of the millennium. In the highly celebrated case of Makerere, privately-funded students have literally crowded out state-dependent students; with the percentage of the private-fee paying students rising from 32 per cent in 1993 to 86 per cent in 1999 (Obong 2004). While more financially viable, this has been at the expense of the university as a centre for knowledge production; research has been firmly supplanted (cf. Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004a, 2004b).

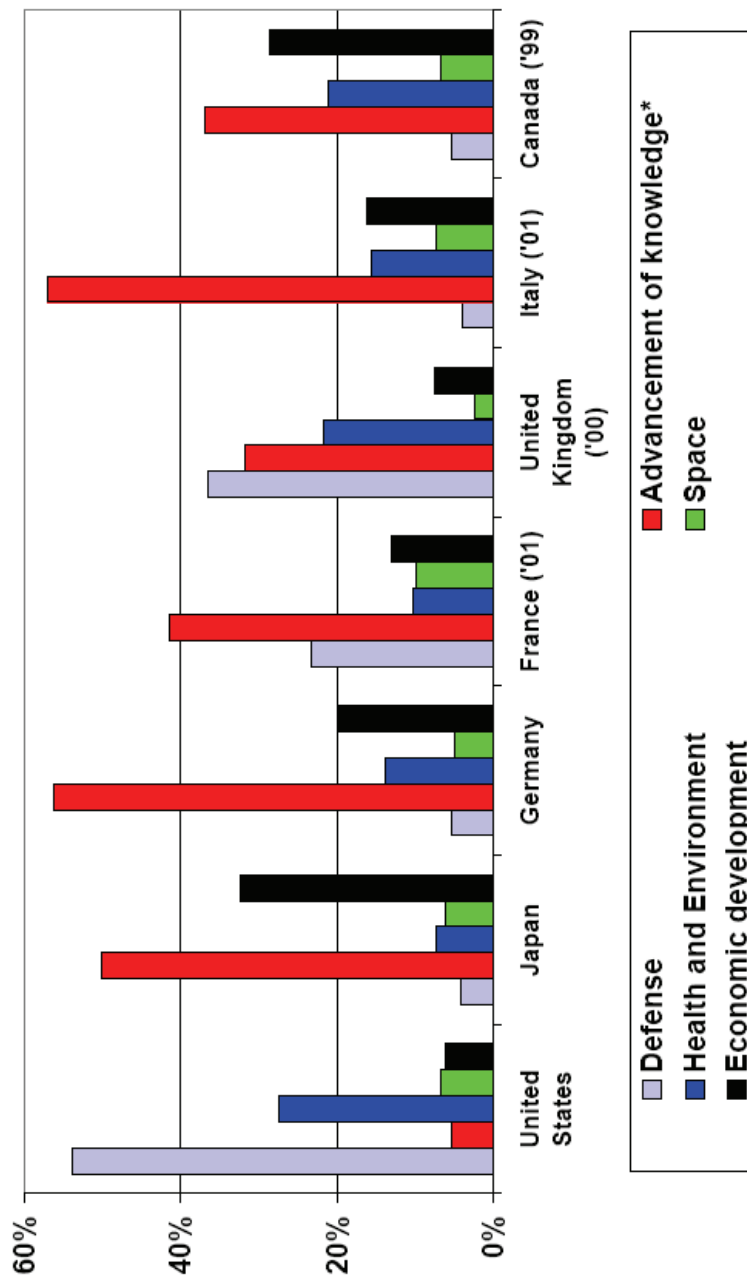
Overall, between 1965 and 1997, per capita spending on students at the higher education institutions in Africa declined by a factor of 14: from 1,490.8 per cent of the per capita gross national income (GNI) in 1965 to 107.2 per cent in 1997. The more dramatic decline was between 1980 and 1997: from

820.8 per cent in 1980. Contrary to the rhetoric of a shift in spending towards primary education, there is no evidence of a significant increase in per capita spending on learners at the primary school level (as a percentage of the per capita gross national income). Between 1965 and 1997, per capital public spending (as percentage of GNI per capita) increased by 1.8 per cent: from 18.4 per cent to 20.2 per cent, although a gain of 3.8 per cent on 1980. For secondary education the decline was from 130.8 per cent in 1965 to 74.3 per cent in 1985, and 35.2 per cent in 1997.³

The attempt to use ICT to serve as the platform for alternative provisioning of higher education, as in the case of AVU or other cross-border e-education platforms, distracts from a fundamental lesson in sustainable higher education: the imperative of endogeneity in education generally, and research, specifically, through sustained public and endogenous resource provisions. If the tertiary education sector ‘is more than the capstone of the traditional education pyramid’ (Ramphele 2002: ix) and it is to be valued for its contributions to national development, competitiveness; if it is to produce the ‘trained individuals who develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies’ (Ramphele 2002: xi); if it were to perform even the narrowest of the functions allocated to it under the neoliberal policy regime, the lesson from the countries of the OECD is fundamental public spending in the research capacity of *national* higher education sector (cf. Adesina 2006a). Figure 1 shows the 2002 breakdown of some OECD countries for research and development.

The lesson to be learnt ‘is that sustainable development in this field rests on sustained support for higher education and research and development, and that much of the long-term support for research comes from public funding. Further, in several developed countries, commitment to “advancement of knowledge” qua knowledge is important for innovation and development’ (Adesina 2006a: 140). I have argued that the import of this is not that African countries should replicate this funding pattern, much less put so much into defence. The lesson to learn is that ‘national competitiveness’ (even if that were to be the primary or only criterion of valuing higher education) requires sustained, public commitment. The deployment of economic policy advice by ‘development experts’ whose countries pursue the value of higher education and research and development for the long haul must surely come across as questionable.

Figure 1: Government R&D Expenditure by Country and Objective (2002) (Percentage of government R&D)



Note: * - includes general university funds.

Source: American Association for the Advancement of Science (NSF Data) (April 2002), <http://www.aaas.org/spp/rd/intl300.pdf>

Reforming Higher Education: Commodity Logic and Students as Clients and Customers

There is little doubt that the upsurge in higher education reforms of the 1980s – from the UK to Australia – was driven by the political agenda of politicians who considered the university as the haven of a leisure class tainted by left-wing tendencies. In much of the popular discussion at the time you got the impression that university teachers worked for two to three hours in a week and spent the rest idling away while nurturing a counter-culture project. As is well known the reforms were part of a reining-in of the leisure class, an attempt to subject it to the same logic of the market that other sectors of society have to bear. What is less well known is that much of the reform programme was driven by failed or would-be intellectuals who charged that universities were producing students with little or no useful skills for industry and demanded that teachers should be more accountable for their teaching. Thus part of the reforms consisted of the increased use of student evaluations of teaching (SETs), driven by the idea of students as clients or customers in a ‘supermarket’ of learning. It followed that teachers should be subject to the same service evaluation that you find in a hotel or other service business. In the populist language that has come to define neo-liberalism, it was all about ‘empowering’ students.

Clearly no institution can afford to keep bad teachers on its payroll, and more efficient approaches to university governance need to be found. The problem is that, as with most things neo-liberal, the prognosis has been tall on promises but short on delivery, and has had the effect of undermining what it claimed it wanted to rebuild. Regarding SETs, for example, nowhere are they more widely used – forming the basis for tenure and promotion decisions – than in the United States. However a study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has shown that ‘grades were significantly correlated with students’ ratings of faculty performance... Courses with higher grades received higher evaluations ... [and] faculty members who were “easy graders” received better evaluations’ (Rosovsky and Hartley 2002: 9). Delucchi and Pelowski (2000) asked the question: ‘are we being rated as effective teachers because we promote student learning, or because we have become more “likeable”?’ Research reported by Delucchi and Pelowski (2000) and Rosovsky and Hartley (2002) shows that content has suffered (become watered down) and the concern, especially at lower echelons of the academic ladder, is increasingly more with being liked, yet ‘effective teaching... must be defined as promotion of student learning’ (Delucchi and Pelowski 2000). Excessive dependence on SETs as a measure of teaching effectiveness is therefore not only suspect in terms of

content validity, it promotes student 'consumerism' in higher education (Delucchi and Pelowski 2000).

My assessment of the experience in South Africa is that a combination of a more consumerist orientation to education by students, along with grade-chasing, competition for a small pool of students and SETs are impacting negatively on teacher effectiveness in maintaining discipline in the class, as well as on the wider issue of promoting true 'student-centred' learning. As the policing role of SET-based evaluation of teacher effectiveness is increased, it is pertinent to ask the question how many new and younger lecturers feel pressured to water down the curriculum, be more likeable and inflate grades? Do universities become better places for learning when they have people who teach because of their passion for their subject or because they want to get good student evaluations? Universities are in danger of promoting a very instrumental approach to what should be second nature in the way teachers practice their vocation.

At the heart of any assessment of the value of opinion surveys are two fundamental issues: reliability and validity. In designing a research instrument (a questionnaire in the case of SETs) care must be taken to ensure that the variables (the questions asked) are a valid measure of what we want to study or what we want to reach a conclusion about. Are the responses reliable? In other words are the responses a true reflection of what the individual is actually thinking? There are ways of dealing with issues of reliability, but by and large they are up to the respondents. However, issues of validity are squarely in the researcher's court.

When students rate me as a 'brilliant teacher', are they measuring my effectiveness to educate or are they simply fazed by my erudition? If I overwhelmed them with my 'intellect', does that make me an effective teacher? The reverse can be the case. If I receive negative comments from students, is this because I demand a lot of work from them? Is it because a person failed regularly in my speed tests? Is it because I do not allow people to chat in my classes? Or is it because I am actually in need of a rethink about what I need to do to improve my effectiveness as a teacher? When a student gives a very negative answer, is that a measure of the teacher's effectiveness or simply of the student's personal feelings about the teacher. When teachers are not likeable, are they necessarily ineffective as teachers? How do we untangle the two issues?

But there are other more worrying aspects of this dimension. Methodologically we know that gender matters a great deal in research (Kane and Macaulay 1993; Cavendish 1982; Roberts 1981). We know that race matters even more, as do class and other social parameters (Egharevba 2001; Hendrix 2002; Adesina 1992). The implications are quite profound, especially when we make

an implicit assumption that survey findings are necessarily valid. When a black female teacher receives a comment that she is an 'affirmative action' teacher from a student, is her gender and race the issue here or her effectiveness? Is there sufficient appreciation of the trauma that a female black teacher experiences when confronted by a team of assessors who arrive in her class because of complaints from a student? When a senior South African (black) law professor is faced with complaints from first-year students that they cannot understand his accent, are we dealing with teacher effectiveness or the racial prejudice of the students? Can we truly address the question of content validity without unpacking these problems? Conversely can we argue that every instance of negative comments across gender or racial lines is *ipso facto* suspect? I doubt it. But when is a response a valid measure of the thing we set out to measure?

Peer assessors can be used, but where SETs are widely used, they are usually considered the primary measure of teaching competence. After all the students are the 'customers' who experience the 'service' week in and week out. Peer assessors, on the other hand, come only at designated, limited times. The inherent methodological bias is enormous. Where there is conflict between SET results and peer-assessors' reports, who do you believe? In an age of 'consumerism' in education, where the customer is king, the preference is obvious.

A corollary of the 'empowerment' of students is the trend to equate the reform of higher education with the provision of skills for the employment market. This again often comes across with the neo-liberal populist claims about the lack of fit between the skills that graduates possess and what employers need. In the 1980s this took the form of the demand for the reconstitution of universities away from traditional discipline-based education toward 'programme-based education'. Philosophy, Sociology or History were declared as unsuitable for the demands of a globalising world. These and other subjects were to be replaced by more vocationally oriented training in Media, Tourism, Human Resource Management, etc. It was argued that universities would only prosper in the competitive global environment if they focused on training graduates that have business skills that employers need. In many cases the rise of online universities was presented as a grave threat to the traditional brick-and-mortar universities, which therefore needed to quickly reconfigure themselves to become more competitive. In some cases universities were completely reconfigured in a frenzy to become relevant to the demands of the new global economy, often with very little evidence other than the commodification logic of the neo-liberal ideologues. Traditional departments,

especially in the Liberal Arts – the traditional home of the so-called left-learning leisure class – were replaced with a range of corporate-sounding structures. Courses were redesigned to make them more ‘sexy’ to a generation assumed to be attracted more by the wrappings of university education than the content. The running of universities took a decidedly more managerialist turn, and a clear demarcation was drawn between senior management or the ‘Executive Team’ and the academic staff, often reflected in huge pay differentials.

However the experience in several universities is that, rather than boosting student numbers, ‘Macdonaldisation’ has done the reverse. Managerialism has fundamentally undermined collegiality, and intense bureaucratisation and surveillance have weakened the very institutional integrity they claimed to want to maintain. In the South African experience the universities that somehow circumvented programme-based education are the ones experiencing quality growth; indeed it is those universities that have tried to maintain the traditional ideals of academia as opposed to the ‘fast-food’ approach that have come through quite well.

The problem with the commodity approach is that it misunderstands the essence of education generally and university education specifically. While the teaching of marketable skills has its place in university education, universities do much more than that. Universities are primarily centres for the production and dissemination of knowledge, with emphasis on *production* of knowledge. They differ from purely research institutions because they disseminate knowledge in two substantive ways – the training of succeeding generations for the human resource needs of the wider economy and the reproduction of the *academy* for the wider propagation of outcomes of knowledge production. It is in the interconnectedness of this dual function that university education finds its distinct locus and *raison d’être*. In this sense university education is distinct from and should not try to replicate the functions of technikons (polytechnics).

What university education offers are not vocational skills but critical, conceptual skills, a restless spirit of enquiry that pushes against the frontiers of knowledge. Teaching in the university sense, therefore, is a matter of instilling in students the knowledge that beyond every ridge of conventional wisdom there is a whole new frontier of knowledge. Thus the comparative advantage of university education is equipping people to *think*. The essence of university education is to train people to answer in twenty years’ time questions that we can not even formulate or ask today!

For the university teacher, therefore, the link between research and teaching becomes particularly relevant. If university education is about the production

and dissemination of knowledge, teaching is *not* about regurgitating written and received formulae; it is about placing students at the cutting edge of the debate in the different subject areas; it is about challenging conventional wisdom and pushing back the frontiers of knowledge. The classroom interaction can and does become a critical arena of contributing to this perpetual search for the new and getting students to see anew what they have previously taken for granted.

Reforming Higher Education: Lessons for Nigeria

I will end this paper by drawing three core lessons for *effective* higher education reform in Nigeria:

1. Sustained commitment to education generally and higher education specifically as a public good rather than a commodity.
2. A fundamental commitment to the ethos and ethics of academia and scholarship at two levels, external and internal.
3. Sustained commitment to the higher education sector generally, and specifically to research and development activities. Both require sustained commitment of resources and political will. However the quality of spending rather than the absolute fiscal allocation or proportion of spending is vital to successful reinvention of the higher education sector. Furthermore endogeneity remains at the heart of successful research and development efforts.

It is perhaps better appreciated today than twenty-years ago when the neo-liberal orthodoxy was in full flight that education is primarily a public good (Singh 2001). Efforts at imposing a market logic on higher education curricula, provision and access have neither served the interests of society or of equity. In several OECD countries, such as France and the UK, access to higher education is considerably more open and public-resourced than the neo-liberal orthodoxy have suggested. Even in the United States, state resources support a huge proportion of intakes into higher education. While the effective and efficient management of resources is of absolute importance in the allocation of public resources, attempts to turn universities into clones of profit-maximising corporations undermine the very reasons for existence of universities. Successful change requires that the *raison d'être* of the institution must determine the appropriateness of the model of change. Efforts at commoditising the education environment are often counter-productive from the point of view of what is immanent in the higher education landscape. The ethos of academia requires that professors see themselves and are seen, first, as shepherds, with

the task of nurturing minds in the context of the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Successful higher education requires sustained commitment not only to the teaching aspects of tertiary institutions but also to research activities. Both require commitment, political will and the promotion of endogeneity. The imperative of endogeneity is perhaps even more compelling today than thirty years ago. With the emergence of a new global trading regime, covering issues of intellectual property rights means that the development tools and options available to the East Asian 'tigers', for instance, are no longer available. Even so, reverse engineering requires a strong foundational understanding of technology and how it works, which brings us back to research and training. I believe that the least that can be said at this stage is that Nigeria's performance on both counts, sustained support for higher education broadly, and for research and development specifically, has been appalling. In the period between 1980 and the late 1990s, Nigeria's government spending on education declined from 10 per cent of GDP to about 0.6 per cent and rose only slightly, to about one per cent in 2002. Udegbe (2005) notes that Nigeria's performance in relation to Ghana and even to the aggregate spending among African countries is poor.

The effort to shift the provision of higher education to the private sector does not address the critical issue of what universities are about: production of knowledge. Private universities across Africa and most developing countries are not known for any commitment to research. Some of a religious bent often impose theological restrictions on the boundaries of enquiries, even in the social sciences and the liberal arts. But research and development are not luxuries; neither is a sustained commitment to the higher education sector. As argued above, the emerging global trade regime makes endogenous research and development capacity fundamental if developing countries like Nigeria are to move away from being, in the words of the *Lagos Plan of Action*, 'consumers of what we do not produce, and producers of what we do not consume'. It is this unsustainable situation that triggered the balance of payments crisis of the mid-1970s and continues to chain countries to the state of underdevelopment.

The Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) recently started ranking Nigerian universities according to their research output. While this is an important effort and one that clearly needs to be sustained, its current format is flawed on two grounds. First it puts the cart before the horse. In the absence of a national research-promoting institution (or institutions) trying to create a research 'league table' becomes a dubious parody of overseas practices. From Europe to North America and South Africa national research-funding and

supporting institutions are in place (resourced with both public and private funding) to promote endogenous research activities. There is no evidence that the NUC, the Federal Ministry of Education, or the presidency is even thinking along these lines. For too long Nigerian higher education research efforts have been sustained by external donor funding, often with very little regard for specific national priorities. If learning from the United States looks daunting, the least that can be done is to look at South Africa for how an African government can produce and sustain an institutional framework for sustained research in areas of national priorities for endogenous gains.

The framework that the NUC used in determining journals considered worthy of recognition in arriving at the league table also represents a fundamental subversion of the intellectual integrity that the NUC purports to be promoting. In selecting as quality journals only journals that are based in North America, Europe, and Asia, the NUC inverts the process by which the countries that it seeks to mimic go about doing things. Not a single journal based or published in Africa was considered worthy of being added to the list of valued publication outlets. Unintended, I will assume, but the implication is self-deprecation of a profound nature. In many of these countries – including the Asian countries – the journals that the NUC considered international are considered local in their home countries! The right procedure is two-fold. First is the need for a concerted effort to revive several of the African journals that thirty years ago were considered highly reputable internationally, instead of engaging in the self-deprecating exercise of rubbishising all journals published in Africa. It undermines the very project of endogeneity that is central to the identity of an intellectual community, and that was the hallmark of Nigerian scholarship in the first two decades of independence. Second is to learn from the experience of countries like South Africa, which not only supports research through grant-making bodies and encourages research output through publication subsidies to universities but (more importantly) maintains a system for accrediting journals produced within the country itself.

Behind the issue of sustained commitment to the higher education sector is that of the relationship between those in political power and their intellectual community. The kind of spectacle that was witnessed two years ago when the president of Nigeria took an hour-long monthly radio and television programme to pour out tirades against his own country's academic community is unprecedented once you move outside the circle of the Mobutu Sese Sekos of this world. It is a spectacle that speaks volumes for the innate anti-intellectualism that drives public policy in relation to the higher education sector. Such behaviour undermines the integrity of the country, not just that of academics.

Finally, higher education reform in a context of extended crisis and decay requires more than just rebuilding the brick-and-mortar infrastructure of universities. It requires a reconstruction of the ethics and ethos that give the university system its defining character. Some of this has to do with the perspective in which external agencies hold the university, but it is also fundamentally about the internal integrity of the system and those who operate within it. Fundamental to the ethics of academia is the integrity of its operators and of its training, research, evaluation and accreditation processes. Without a concerted effort to maintain this integrity, without waiting for the outside world to provide all that it needs, a university community loses its very soul and essence. Avoiding this will require retraining and skills upgrading as we reinvest in the infrastructures for teaching and research. It will also require taking petty politicking out of university life, as well as removing those who use the university as a post office while they hobnob with politicians and run their private enterprises outside. Fundamentally it will require a new generation of vice-chancellors and other members of university governing structures who put the integrity of their institutions above political expediency.

Notes

1. Several parts of Ramphela's arguments demonstrated very little familiarity with these and other aspects of higher education in the African continent; at least outside of South Africa or before 1994.
2. Assié-Lumumba tended to substitute the francophone Africa experience for a generic African experience. The intellectual and cultural subservience of much of the francophone African intelligentsia to France and French culture may be dominant but it is not generic to all francophone scholars (cf. Joseph Ki-Zerbo or Cheikh Anta Diop).
3. All data are from Assié-Lumumba (2006: 61) extracted from the World Bank 2002 Africa Database.

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