
Formulating Higher Education Policies in Africa: The Pressure from External Forces and the Neoliberal Agenda¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes the higher educational policies made for Sub-Saharan Africa by the World Bank and portrays its hostile attitude towards higher education development on the sub continent. Though an organization such as UNESCO holds up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states “higher education shall be accessible to all, on the basis of merit,” the Bank insists on what it calls diversification of funding and “cost sharing”. The ramifications of these policies both at individual and institutional level are discussed. Some recent documents from the Bank now recognize the importance of the sector in Africa without, however, any apologies for decades of neglect. Despite increased emphasis on the sector, the basic tenets, such as more cost sharing and more privatisation largely remain. Furthermore, the article discusses language issues in African universities and calls for the need to nurture local knowledge development. The article underscores the great need for an education that is of Africa and for Africa.

1 The analysis and discussion that follow will be limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa has since the dismantling of the apartheid regime become a regional presence with a massive transformation agenda of its own. The historically white universities here have traditionally modelled themselves after universities in Europe and US and have more in common with these universities than universities in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. My own experiences from working with staff development at the historically black universities in South Africa (1996–1998) have been dealt with in one of the last chapters in my book (Brock-Utne, 2000) and will not be dealt with here. The South African government has recently issued a white paper on Higher Education in South Africa where plans are launched to merge the historically black universities (with the exception of the University of Western Cape which used to be a colored institution) with the white institutions (Howell, 2002). According to information conveyed to me by staff at the historically black universities (especially from the University of Venda) these plans have been met with considerable protest from these universities who feel that they are being closed down.

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Résumé

Cet article analyse les politiques d'enseignement supérieur conçues **pour** l'Afrique subsaharienne et édictées par la Banque mondiale. Il décrit l'attitude hostile de la Banque face au développement de l'enseignement supérieur à travers cette partie du continent. Bien qu'une organisation comme l'Unesco s'évertue à maintenir son soutien à la Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme qui statue que « l'enseignement supérieur doit être accessible à tous, sur la base du mérite », la Banque elle, insiste sur ce qu'elle désigne par diversification des sources de financement et partage des charges. Le texte analyse les ramifications de ces politiques aux niveaux individuel et institutionnel à la fois. De récentes publications de la Banque reconnaissent l'importance du secteur en Afrique. Cependant, ces documents ne présentent aucune excuse concernant l'attitude défavorable de la Banque tout au long de ces dernières décennies d'incitation à la négligence. Malgré ce regain d'intérêt pour le secteur, les doctrines de base relatives au partage accru des charges et à une privatisation plus soutenue, ces options de la banque persistent encore. Plus loin dans le texte, l'article pose la problématique des langues locales dans les universités africaines et en appelle à la valorisation des connaissances au niveau continental. L'article met en évidence l'énorme besoin de promouvoir un enseignement par l'Afrique et pour l'Afrique.

Introduction

When lost, it is better to return to a familiar point before rushing on.
(African proverb)

A university's contribution to development turns on the quality of the knowledge it generates and disseminates.

Sawyers, 2002, p. 34

When the historian Ki-Zerbo from Burkina Faso discussed contemporary education in Africa in 1990, he started by quoting the above African proverb. He was concerned about the decline in quality, knowledge generated, and independent research at the African universities at that time. Akilagpa Sawyers (2002), the Secretary General of the Association of African Universities and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, voiced a similar concern in a more recent publication. He noted that the underfunding of African universities, along with market-driven globalization and the neo-liberal agenda of the last 15–20 years, have seriously affected the independent and critical research

Secretary General of the Association of African Universities and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana for sending me, still in draft form, his very interesting manuscript *Challenges Facing African Universities-Selected Issues*, which had been presented in November 2002 at the annual ASA (African Studies Association) conference in the US.

capabilities of African universities. The principal contribution of a university to society, according to Sawyerr, can be measured by the quality of the knowledge a university generates and imparts, the habits of critical thought it institutionalizes and inculcates in its graduates, and the values of openness and democratic governance it promotes and demonstrates (Sawyerr, 2002). The quality of performance of African universities can, according to Sawyerr, be assessed through the use of indirect indicators such as:

- the caliber and commitment of the teaching and research staff,
- the range and quality of the curriculum and pedagogy, and
- the quality and extent of educational facilities, including the means of accessing traditional as well as world-wide knowledge.

Sawyerr, 2002

In his book “Educate or Perish” Ki-Zerbo (1990) presented an urgent call to educators in Africa to set immediately to the task of designing an education that is **of** Africa and **for** Africa. He acknowledged the importance of Africa’s returning to her roots, to restore the culture and true independence of Africa. He tells how the break-up of the African educational system was completed by colonial domination. The colonialists replaced the African educational system with an absolutely different system, one designed to serve the overall aim of the subjugation of the continent and its people to European needs. For African societies, education lost its functional role. By this, Ki-Zerbo does not mean that Africa should return to the system of merely informal education that was pervasive prior to colonization. Instead, he believes that the education provided must be built on African culture, on the wisdom and traditional knowledge of Africans, and on their everyday experiences.

In this article, I shall look at the formulation of higher education policies in Africa, and, more specifically, who formulates them. It is not possible to discuss higher education policies in Africa without discussing the important role of the donors and international agencies, the first and foremost being the World Bank. The World Bank’s influence—setting conditionalities and promoting the neo-liberal agenda—will be discussed below. I will also examine the effects of the renewed emphasis on basic education for the higher education sector in Africa. Two rather recent documents from the World Bank show that the Bank has been rethinking its stance on higher education in Africa and is now actually giving some emphasis to the higher education sector across the continent (World Bank, 2000; World Bank, 2002). It does not, however, acknowledge or apologize for the mistakes made during the years since it shifted its own resources

from higher to primary education and encouraged bilateral donors and African governments to do the same.

Other matters worthy of consideration are whether the terms of the Bank's recent engagement (the knowledge competitiveness argument) make sense for Africa and if and how universities in Africa can cope with the current crises. I will devote space both to the neo-liberal agenda and the link phenomenon, as well.

Towards the end of the article, I shall also look into the language policies in higher education in Africa as well as the curriculum development policies. I shall explore the link between the ordinary people of Africa and academia, examining the extent to which national or institutional policies within higher education are taking into consideration the needs, cultures, and experiences of ordinary Africans. Finally, I will look for any signs that African universities have started with what Ki-Zerbo 13 years ago saw as the immediate task of designing an education that is of Africa and for Africa.

Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa

In the beginning of 1988, I was asked by the Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD) to make a critical review of *Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa – EPSSA* (1988), a World Bank publication. At that time I was a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. I had, however, started in my position just six months earlier and felt that I did not know African education well enough to be able to make this analysis on my own. Instead, I should have to rely heavily on African expertise, first and foremost that of my colleagues. I also determined it would also be necessary to elicit the views of educators in other African countries on this document. So, on Thursday, 21 January 1988, I paid a visit to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Malawi in Zomba.

On arriving at the University of Malawi, I was rather startled to discover that the Vice Chancellor was a white British man. He noticed my surprise and told me that Life President Kamuzu Banda had himself decided that the Vice Chancellors of the University of Malawi should be white British men. In Banda's opinion, these were the only leading educationalists he could trust to serve in these important positions. Still, this particular Vice Chancellor identified himself strongly with the University of Malawi and, especially, with the students and the staff.

On this particular day, he was disturbed because he had just been told that the World Bank had insisted that all book allowances to students be cut, as well as all funding for student vacation visits home. In addition, the World Bank had made it clear that students should soon have to pay for their accommodations and food. They had also been told that tuition fees might be introduced.

These were among the conditionalities that the World Bank had established in order for Malawi to get a World Bank loan for its primary school sector. The University had not asked for a loan from the Bank and had been quite proud that they had been able to run their economic affairs to the satisfaction of the students.

“How can we formulate policies for the higher education sector here in Africa when conditionalities are forced on our institutions of higher learning for loans we have not even asked for?” he asked. He was very upset and felt so sorry for the students. Strikes had, at that time, been forbidden by Lifetime President Banda, but the Vice Chancellor knew that such bad news must result in frustration and indignation among the students, since he knew that many of them could neither afford to buy books nor to go home for vacations. When it came to the policy document of the World Bank, he was extremely skeptical as he saw in it an attempt to reduce the role of higher education in Africa and give priority to primary education. “Are we not going back to colonial times?” he asked.

Together with some of my colleagues at the University of Dar es Salaam, I arranged a student–staff seminar on 28 January 1988, to discuss the *EPSSA* World Bank report. Several of them had received the report in its full text, and I had seen to it that everyone had a summary of the report, as well. The discussion was very lively. Most of my colleagues voiced strong criticism of the report. They were annoyed at the audacity of the World Bank to write education policies *for* Sub-Saharan Africa, asking me if the World Bank would write education policies *for* Norway. Certainly not. The question was well-placed.

They were annoyed at the suggestions from the World Bank that they cut back on higher education, on educational theory within teacher training, and on the already low salaries they were paying teachers. (My colleagues could not live at that time on the salaries they had at the University.) They knew that, at earlier meetings about World Bank policies for the educational sector, African policy-makers had strongly opposed the suggestion of a stagnation in enrolments in higher education. They saw, however, that this suggestion was advanced repeatedly in the *EPSSA* paper.⁴

The *EPSSA* paper suggests that students pay for their upkeep at the university. Furthermore, the paper also suggests cut-backs in university funding for fields like the arts and humanities, threatening exactly those fields, which, ac-

4 Africa’s university leadership and their apex organisation, the Association of African Universities (AAU) had consistently argued against a policy of neglect of higher education in Africa. This can be seen from the declarations at the AAU Harare Meetings of the late 1980s as well as the various statements emanating from the Association advocating much greater attention to Africa’s universities (Sawyer, 2002).

According to my colleagues, must be strengthened if an aim of higher education is to restore the African heritage. I listened well to their critiques and built my report to NORAD entirely on what my colleagues had said. A group of them read my report critically before it was sent. I remember one of them saying: "It is a wonderful analysis and critique of that World Bank report, Birgit. You have actually captured everything we said but none of us would have dared to have written that report." The others nodded. They were dependent on donor consultancies to supplement their meager salaries; the World Bank paid the best. I, on the other hand, had my salary from home and was not dependent on consultancies.

In my book *Whose Education for All?* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I ask whether there is a future for higher education in Africa after the Jomtien conference in 1990 and the formulation of the "Education for All" strategy. It has been almost thirty years since the World Bank began the process of emphasizing the importance of primary and basic (including, at first, non-formal) education in its 1974 *Education Sector Working Paper*. The Bank urged that the proportion of education lending to this sector be increased (from 11% to 27%), thus reducing the proportion going to higher education (from 40% to 30%). Although non-formal and adult education soon dropped from Bank priorities, it did prove possible over the next twenty years to raise dramatically the proportion of lending for primary education and reducing the proportion to higher education, as planned, to approximately 30% (King, 1995). The subsequent *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1980) was remarkable in that there was almost no more than a page or two of discussion on higher education in some 100 pages of text.

The thinking of the World Bank was instrumental in shaping the 1990 Jomtien conference "Education for All." At the conference, the countries in the South feared that the donor emphasis on basic education would mean a further starvation of higher education. At the Jomtien conference, a whole series of countries, therefore, were lobbying for more explicit safeguards for higher education, research, and access to high technology. The thrust of this concern was from Latin America, with other signatories coming from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe. *NORRAG News* (1990, p. 6) claims that the pressure from the developing countries led to the article quoted below, Article 8, point 2 in the World Declaration on Education for All:

Societies should also insure a strong intellectual and scientific environment for basic education. This implies improving higher education and developing scientific research. Close contact with contemporary tech-

nological and scientific knowledge should be possible at every level of education.

WCEFA, 1990, p. 8

In an evaluation of the outcomes of the EFA conference from an African perspective, Aimé Damiba, the program specialist in education and planning in UNESCO's regional office in Dakar, Senegal, concludes: "We must avoid the danger of limiting ourselves to basic education and neglecting high-level manpower training and research. It is not possible to solve the problems of Education for All without a national pool of expertise and without an indigenous capacity for research" (Damiba, 1991, p. 11). Yet many officials of Third World countries interpreted the outcomes of the Jomtien conference as a wish from the donor community to limit their own renewed efforts within the education sector to primary education and to tell developing countries to do the same. In hindsight we can see that their interpretation, unfortunately, was correct.⁵

It is worth mentioning that at a meeting with African vice-chancellors in Harare in 1986, the World Bank argued that higher education in Africa was a luxury. Most African countries were, according to the World Bank, better off closing universities at home and training graduates overseas. Recognizing that its call for a closure of universities was politically untenable, the Bank subsequently modified its agenda, calling for universities in Africa to be trimmed and restructured to produce only those skills that the "market" demands. Such was its agenda for university restructuring in Nigeria in the late 1980s, for instance (Mamdani, 1993). Isahaku Sadique (1995), through his analysis of the World Bank's involvement in the university sector in Nigeria, concludes that the World Bank still sees university education for Africans as a luxury. He also shows how the Bank forced the National University Commission (NUC) of Nigeria "to reallocate resources in order to shift emphasis from arts and humanities to science, engineering, and accountancy" (Sadique, 1995, p. 130). He further reports that the World Bank insisted on choosing the contractors who were to supply the needed materials (books, journals, laboratory consumables) and that all of these contractors were foreign companies.

5 Sawyerr (2002) mentions that the neo-liberal ideology of the World Bank was reinforced by the argument that the rates of return to basic education were so much higher than returns to university education that efficiency required that the former should attract the bulk of public resources. "This 'rate of return' argument was strongly pressed both as policy advice to African governments and as conditionalities for funding. In addition, it influenced external donors into turning away from the support of higher education in favour of basic education. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a turning away of the state and most external donors from support for the universities, resulting in the under-resourcing and general deterioration of the university sector in Africa" (Sawyerr, 2002, p. 42).

When funds to build up higher education in Africa are cut back, the dependency of Africa on studies overseas increases. African institutions of higher learning are again staffed with expatriates and people who have been trained mainly overseas and given mostly Western or, at least, non-African concepts, ideas, outlooks, and research methodologies. The brain drain from Africa will continue, and the need for expatriates will increase, when institutions of higher learning are financially starved. Sub-Saharan Africa lost 30% of its highly skilled manpower between 1960 and 1990, largely to the European Union countries. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that since the 1960s more than 50% of Africans who pursued tertiary studies in chemistry and physics in the United States never returned to Africa. On the other hand, more than 100,000 expatriates from industrialized countries in the North are employed in Africa (Bekele, 1997).

The World Bank on Higher Education, Lessons of their Experience

In *Whose Education for All* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I show that the emphasis on education for all has, in reality, meant that donors willingly, and African governments unwillingly, have given a priority to investing in primary education, resulting in often drastic reductions in higher education funding. Four years after the Jomtien conference, the World Bank published the policy paper *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience* (1994). It is worth noting that, of the 152 bibliographic references mentioned in this 1994 World Bank paper, only 32 (21%) are not World Bank publications or publications of Bank staff. This fact leads one to question whose experience is meant by the subtitle "The Lessons of Experience"? The World Bank is writing about *their* experience or rather *their policies* for higher education in developing countries. Fernando Reimers (1995) is struck by the fact that even UNESCO's 1993 policy paper *Strategies for Change and Development in Higher Education* is not mentioned as a publication from which to draw lessons of experience, nor are any of the many important publications from the Eastern and Southern Africa University Research Project (ESAURP), written by African university people.

The 1994 World Bank paper on higher education is *not* a paper in defense of the higher education sector. On the contrary, it follows up the strong signals given in *the Educational Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa (EPSSA)* report of 1988. The proposed stagnation of higher education, which can be found in the *EPSSA* paper, is also a prominent feature of the higher education paper of 1994. The safeguards that people from the South thought they had managed to get into the Jomtien declaration do not seem to have had much effect on the World Bank's position in 1994. In the *EPSSA* study, the focus on higher education was principally on the public university sector, whereas in 1994 one of the

main themes was that there should be diversification of higher education, with attention given to the whole range of private sector and non-university institutions. The neo-liberal agenda is even stronger in the 1994 paper than in the 1988 paper.

Lene Buchert (1995) asserts that any expectations that the World Bank higher education paper would defend the higher education sector against other priorities, and argue its relevance among and in relation to other sub-sectors of education, is not fulfilled. For these expectations to have been fulfilled, the document would have had to focus on the importance of both the traditional and modern goals of education. The paper would in that case have focused on higher education as a knowledge producer, a values and culture transmitter, and a capacity builder for industry and business. Instead, the lens through which higher education is seen in the Bank's document is primarily an economic one. The Bank wants to reduce government expenditures to higher education in Africa.

The British economist Christopher Colclough (1995a), however, points to the need for increased support rather than reduction in the expenditures for higher education in many developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank's paper on higher education recommended solutions that sought simultaneously to reduce costs and increase access, specifically to those areas of education that support the utilitarian purposes of the university. The following are the main policy prescriptions around which the higher education paper (World Bank, 1994) is centered:

- *A Redefined Role for the State in Higher Education.* A predominant role is given to the market in relation to the state. This ignores the fact that in most African contexts there is no local industrial dominance and no powerful private sector with which the state can share the responsibility for higher education. Moreover, as Keith Watson (1995) demonstrates in an article on redefining the role of government in higher education, in many of the key country cases (e.g., OECD countries and NICs) the state has maintained an interventionist role in the higher education sector.
- *Institutional Differentiation.* The World Bank gives a predominant role to the private sector among higher education institutions.
- *Diversification of Funding.* The Bank introduces cost-sharing measures, including user fees, university partnerships with business, privatization, and diversification of the higher education system. The assumption made by most advocates of user charges at the tertiary level is that net private returns would remain high enough, even after the imposition of fees for

higher education, to make studies a rational personal investment. Yet, as argued by Colclough (1995b), most of the evidence upon which this assumption is based uses earnings data from the 1960s and 1970s and does not accommodate the strong reductions in real earnings and earnings differentials between university graduates and other workers. This reduction in the real earnings outcomes of academic studies has been a characteristic of the 1980s in many developing countries and, especially, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- *Policy Attention to Quality, Responsiveness, and Equity.* African countries have to prove themselves worthy of Bank support for higher education, and this “worthiness” is measured by results in terms of enrolment and decreased dropout rates at the primary and secondary levels. In his criticism of the 1994 World Bank paper on higher education, Kenneth King (1995) finds that the paper presents a new conditionality: *higher education only after adequate provision of primary and secondary education.* The World Bank paper ignores the importance of a well-functioning higher education system in efforts to achieve quality at other sub-sectoral levels.

A Life after Jomtien for Higher Education in Africa?

Studies after the 1990 Jomtien conference have shown that the focus of aid for education among many multilateral and bilateral donor agencies in the decade following Jomtien was increasingly shifted toward basic education. Lene Buchert (1995b, c) shows that even agencies that had previously allocated the larger proportion of their bilateral education assistance to the higher education sub-sector adopted policies in favor of basic education after the “Education for All” agenda adopted in Jomtien. This included, for example, the Italian Development Co-operation, the Dutch development agency DGIS (Diretoraat-General Internationale Samenwerking), the UK-based Overseas Development Administration (ODA—now DFID—Department for International Development), and the French Ministry of Development Cooperation.

The increase in resource allocation toward basic education is often clearly indicated by the donor agencies as being undertaken at the expense of higher education. For instance Wolfgang Kuper of the German development agency (GTZ) notes:

Since the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the promotion of higher education institutions in developing countries by Ministries of Development Co-operation has no longer been popular—at least in Germany but also in some other industrialised countries.

The promotion of basic education has been getting more emphasis—in our country initially at the expense of the promotion of higher education.

Kuper, 1998, p. 23

These policies that African governments have felt forced to adopt, partly because of donor pressure, partly because of increased enrolments in higher education coupled with limited resources, have had two direct consequences for universities in Africa:

- An increase in user fees at universities (as well as the elimination of book allowances, food allowances, and free tuition) have made the universities in Africa places of learning only for students from better-off families.
- African university people feel compelled to seek donor support for their departments, faculty, and research institutes, by building links with more affluent universities in the industrialised world. They depend on these universities for money for research, publishing their findings, keeping journals going, and training their junior staff.

As for the first point, even World Bank figures are unequivocal in showing that the majority of students in Africa—an average of about 60%—used to come from the ranks of the peasantry, workers, and small traders. These people are not likely to have the means to meet the increasing cost of university education. The natural outcome will be a decrease in enrolments and an increase in dropout rates among students from poorer family backgrounds.

In Kenya's Moi and Egerton universities, for example, with a combined population of about 6,000 students, over 2,000 students were deregistered in early May 1996 over non-payment of fees and tuition (Mazrui, 1997). These tuition "defaulters" are more likely to have come from lower- than upper-class families. According to Alamin Mazrui: "The net effect of the World Bank's structural adjustment programmes in education, therefore, is increasingly to transform the African university into a "white collar" institution in terms of the parental background of its student population" (Mazrui, 1997, p. 40). The Declaration and Action Plan for Higher Education in Africa that was adopted in Dakar in April 1997 at the African regional consultation preparatory to the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO in Paris in 1998 starts by stating that:

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 which affirms that: "Everyone has the right to education..." and that "higher education shall be accessible to all, on the basis of merit," and further recalling the Convention Against Discrimination in the field of Educa-

tion adopted by UNESCO in 1960, which calls on Member States to “make higher education accessible to all, based on individual abilities.”

Point 1, UNESCO, 1998, p. 599

The Declaration goes on to “strongly advise that the economic conditions of families be taken into consideration, and that the only criteria for access or non-access should be merit” (Point 40, UNESCO, 1998, p. 610). This, unfortunately, has proven to be no more than wishful thinking.

In an article analyzing the way policy formulations in developing countries took place in the decade from Jomtien (1990) to Dakar (2000), Rosa Maria Torres writes:

Education for All 1990–2000 was essentially a top-down movement planned, conducted and evaluated by international and national political and technocratic elites, with scant information or encouragement to participate given to citizens, even to teachers and education researchers and specialists.

Torres, 2001, p. 14

She tells how the education policy plans in this decade were drawn up by international agencies and discussed behind closed doors by a few national and international functionaries. In the decade from 1990 to 2000, the world changed fundamentally but this is, according to Torres, not reflected in the Dakar document.

In the immediate post-independence years, the small numbers enrolled in Africa’s universities tended to be drawn from different social classes and all parts of the country. Sawyerr (2002) notes that while it was never a case of equitable representation from all parts and segments, the source of the student supply was sufficiently broad for secondary schools and universities to play a role in establishing the beginnings of a truly *national* elite, an elite with some representation from the different segments of society.⁶ He refers to recent studies which suggest that, despite explicit policy and much rhetoric on equitable access to education at all levels, the sources of recruitment into university have become even narrower during the last decade.⁷

6 Obvious exceptions would be situations like apartheid South Africa, where access to education was deliberately discriminatory, or others where subtle cultural or religious conditions created gender, ethnic and other barriers.

7 Sawyerr (2002) notes that while indications of this can be found in virtually all recent studies of higher education access in Africa, some of the most dramatic evidence is provided by recent reports on enrolment in Ghana, Mozambique and Uganda. Using the educational level of parents as an indicator of socio-economic origin of students and relying on survey data, Mario et al. (2001, taken from Sawyerr, 2002) found that 70% of the fathers of students at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane

As for the second consequence of the new policies mentioned above, African universities have become increasingly more dependent on support from over-seas donors. The support to the universities in Africa from the North could, in theory, come as a grant that the universities themselves could use as they wanted. This is, however, seldom the case. In a paper on North and South partnership models in the university sector, Endashaw Bekele (1997) of Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia asserts that the support his university gets from SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) is superior to other donor support. This is so because SAREC is supplying a recurrent budget of foreign currency. This is a much better form of support than the provision of equipment (which often breaks down and for which there is no budget for repairs) or research money for certain projects of limited duration.

In Search of the Missing Link

In order to cope with the present situation, African institutions of higher learning have to go into link arrangements with more affluent universities in the North or seek direct support from western donors. "Experts" from the North coming to teach and distribute the Western curricula are normally part of the link phenomenon. So are books written in the West, computers from the West, and scholarships for master's and Ph.D. students to go to the West to study the curricula offered there. Rarely are provisions made for students from the North to study in the South or for professors in the South to be visiting professors teaching in the North. No wonder, then, that many academics in the South develop a Westernized outlook.

The editorial of an issue of the newsletter of the Academic Staff Assembly at the University of Dar es Salaam especially devoted to the link phenomenon discusses the dilemma surrounding university links with institutions outside the region:

The situation at the University of Dar es Salaam is a microcosm of that in the nation as a whole. Here, in the midst of filthy toilets and classrooms with broken windows and furniture, thrives the LINK phenomenon. Virtu-

(UEM) had secondary education or higher, compared to fewer than 3% in the general population. The figures for mothers of students were 50% as against less than 1% in the general population. Using parental tongue as an indicator revealed that Portuguese, the language of privilege in Mozambique, was the parental tongue of almost 70% of UEM students, and the means of family communication for over 60%. This compares to a figure of 9% in the general population. More specifically, the survey showed that students from more privileged backgrounds were disproportionately represented in courses of higher prestige and potential wealth (law, medicine, etc.).

ally every department, under the threat of material and intellectual starvation, has been forced to establish links with one or more institutions, mostly from the West. We depend on the links for the training of our junior staff, for teaching material and equipment, and a host of other things. The link agreements are, almost without exception, as unequal as would be expected. This is despite some efforts to include clauses suggesting reciprocity... What is primarily at stake is that as we lose confidence in our own ability to sustain our education system we shall also have to abandon the pretence of determining our educational future.

UDASA, 1990, p. 1

In the same newsletter, Sheriff (1990, p. 2) writes about the way the once proud academic community of the University of Dar es Salaam “has been brought to its knees, begging from donors and the ubiquitous ‘Links’ merely to keep on breathing.”

In 1990, the Tanzanian university teacher Karim F. Hirji came back to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Dar es Salaam after eight years of studying and working abroad. This is how he describes his experience with the link phenomenon:

As one goes around the Faculty of Medicine, one wonders whether, after a hundred years after Karl Peters landed here, a second partition of Africa is in progress or not. The Dental School seems to be run by the Finnish, the AIDS research program by the Swedes, community health programs by the Germans, with the British, Italian, Danish all having their own corners.

Hirji (1990, p. 23)

Hirji further writes that he is definitely in favor of international exchange, and that such exchange should be cultivated in any university. “However when such exchanges are solely conducted in the framework of a donor-recipient relation, what is there to guarantee that they are conducted on the basis of academic equality and mutual respect?” he asks (1990, p. 23). I shall return to this point later in this article.

The so-called “experts” and university people from the North go to Africa to teach, to “transfer” knowledge. In reality, those of us from Europe and North America may have more to learn from Africans than they have from us. The fact that we are “experts” in our own countries, for instance, in competitive sports of a Western kind, women’s law in Norway, research methods in a literate society, AIDS prevention in the North, or commercial forestry or fishery in the North Sea, for example, does not make us experts on the use of the body in Africa, women’s law in Africa, research methods among an illiterate population, the spreading of AIDS in Africa, sexual norms among various African

groups, African agro-forestry, or tropical multi-species fishery in shallow waters. Whenever there is a review of a department at an African university receiving donor support, one should ask questions like: How much has the support been given as a help to self-help, as a possibility for Africans to do research on their own culture, and how much has it been another “transfer of knowledge” project? How much do we from the North come to learn: language, culture, traditional law, and traditional medicine? How much do we listen and learn to appreciate the indigenous knowledge?

To establish a North-South co-operation in the university sector which is truly symmetrical is an accomplishment that must be regarded as utopian, given the unequal distribution of resources in this world. The mere fact that one party is giving the money and is a “donor,” while the other party receives the money and is a “recipient,” signifies a disempowering and asymmetrical relationship. I have, in other publications, examined some examples of university link arrangements between African universities and universities overseas (Brock-Utne, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2000a). Several of the examples show that Norwegian academics have been too domineering, too eager to teach or transfer knowledge and showed too little concern for a symmetrical relationship, for development of knowledge built on African roots and on contemporary African society. These are examples I happen to know. And, while they involve Norwegian academics and universities, one would have no problem finding other examples involving academics from other European or North American universities; examples which must certainly exist.

Increased Support to the University Sector in Africa from a Non-Apologetic Bank

Within the last few years, the specific problems of African higher education have begun to attract serious attention, both within Africa and within the donor community. The external agencies have done some re-thinking and now acknowledge the importance of higher education within the educational sector as a whole. They now recognize that the rate-of-return analysis that was partly responsible for the emphasis on primary education was inappropriately used and acknowledge the importance of paying attention to the “public good” contribution of higher education.

The World Bank remains the World Bank, and it rarely apologizes or acknowledges a mistake,⁸ but two recent Bank documents dramatize this change

8 The furthest it will go in apologizing is the following sentence taken from the executive summary of the *Constructing Knowledge Societies* report: “There is a perception that the Bank has not been fully responsive to the growing demand by clients for tertiary education” (World Bank, 2002, xviii). A *perception* indeed! It is much more. It is a well-documented fact, as shown above.

of emphasis. Both are major publications. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, a body of experts from 13 countries convened by the World Bank and UNESCO to explore the future of higher education in the developing world, authored the first publication, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (World Bank, 2000). The second, more recent publication is called *Constructing Knowledge Societies—Challenges for Tertiary Education* (World Bank, 2002). After over a decade of pressuring developing countries, as well as the donor community, to cut down on higher education and give priority to basic education, the World Bank appears in these two publications to realize that higher education is essential for the survival of a nation. In the words of Henry Rosovsky, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University, and Co-Chair of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society:

Higher education is the modern world's "basic education," but developing countries are falling further and further behind. It's time to drive home a new message: higher education is no longer a luxury, it is essential to survival.

The new millennium has thus started with new World Bank loans to African nations for higher education development. Apart from these new loans, agencies have also been encouraged once again to give aid to tertiary education in Africa. Sawyerr (2002) mentions the agreement in April 2000 of the presidents of four American Foundations (the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation) to constitute a "Partnership to Strengthen African Universities." This Partnership proposes to provide up to US\$100 million in support of selected African universities or higher education systems over a five-year period. While some support has been committed and useful case studies commissioned, it is not wholly clear exactly how the project will work.

While the World Bank has come to realize that the African universities are essential for the development of Africa, it has not, however, changed its neo-liberal agenda or its belief that, ultimately, growth will reduce poverty. The argument is now that "strengthening the capacity of tertiary education institutions to respond flexibly to the new demands of knowledge societies will increase their contribution to poverty reduction through the long-term economic effects and the associated welfare benefits that come from sustained growth" (World Bank, 2002, p. xxxi). Today, tertiary education is given the job of reducing or alleviating poverty. At the 2000 Education for All Conference in Dakar, primary education was given that job. I agree with Rosa Maria Torres, who wrote after the Dakar conference:

The “poverty alleviation” discourse continues to be repeated over and over again, while in this very decade we reached a point where we need to ask ourselves whether the problem is to improve education in order to alleviate poverty or to rather to alleviate poverty in order to improve education and, moreover, to make education and learning possible. Trust is still placed in economic growth as the solution to social equity, while what was reaffirmed in this decade is that growth is not enough, . . . wealth is becoming ever more concentrated in a few hands.

Torres, 2001, p. 10

Rather than economic growth, we need a redistribution of resources. Rather than a reliance on the market, we need to formulate and agree on national aims and plan the economy and change to fit these aims. The so-called “Makerere miracle” in Uganda shows what can happen to a university in a poor country when it becomes governed by the market, rather than pursuing its own national plans for development.

The Costs of the Makerere Miracle

Because of deteriorating terms of trade and high costs of debt servicing, the Government of Uganda did not have the funds to cover the demand for higher education by the 1980s. It bought into the solution which comes with the neo-liberal agenda: make education a commodity, sell what can be sold, privatize what can be privatized. The analysis of what happened at Makerere is interesting for two reasons:

- The restoration of the university from one that had almost fallen to pieces to a functioning institution and the way this was achieved is looked at as a miracle and a success story by the Task Force authors
- Sawyerr (2002, drawing extensively on Musisi, 2001) is much more skeptical to this miracle and asks at what costs it has been achieved.⁹

In 1992, the Government of Uganda allowed Makerere University to charge fees for evening courses and special programmes. Taking advantage of this, the Faculties of Law and of Commerce started evening classes exclusively for paying students. In 1995, the University Council allowed Faculties to admit fee-paying students to fill quotas not taken up by government-sponsored students. The result was that from a 1993/94 enrolment of 3,361—made up of 2,299 government-sponsored and 1,062 private students—the situation metamorphosed to a total enrolment of 14,239—made up of 1,923 government-

9 The following account is built on Sawyerr (2002).

sponsored and 12,316 private students—in 1999/00, with no significant increases in the resources available to the university from the government.

Through income from student fees and the small profits from commercialized units, as well as considerable donor support (estimated at around US\$5 million per annum during the period), Makerere University succeeded in reducing its dependence on government subvention. Average staff incomes rose above a “living wage,” facilitating staff retention and, indeed, the return of some who had left the university during the difficult days. The curriculum was expanded and diversified, mainly in response to demands arising from the economic and social environment. Still, both the housing and learning environments for students and the research environment for the academic staff suffered considerably under “the miracle.” The Musisi et al. (2001) study referenced by Sawyerr finds it “remarkable how little attention has been paid to student welfare compared to that given to their capacity to pay and provide the university with income.” The study tells of “unbearable pressure on space, facilities and staff, as there had been little increase in physical infrastructure.” Nor had there been any “significant” increase in building space or the numbers of lecturers, despite the tripling of the student population. Not surprisingly, a report issued by the Makerere University Academic Staff Association found that

...more than half the registered students in some courses did not attend lectures because of a lack of seats and poor audibility in the lecture halls. Such insufficient facilities and high student-lecturer ratios compromise academic quality.

Sawyerr, 2002, p. 56

The study itself concludes

If the problem [of insufficient facilities and staff] is not addressed, the large number of students and the resulting decline in standards pose a real danger to the quantitative achievements and innovations in admissions and programming made by Makerere over the last seven years.

Sawyerr, 2002, p. 56

Income generated in the new ways goes to benefit the faculties/units that generated it and their staff. According to Sawyerr (2002), “laboratory-based and facility-intensive faculties such as science and medicine do not generate as much income as the humanities because there are absolute limits on the number of students that they can accommodate,” so those “underachieving” faculties in such areas have gained little from the improved financial situation of the university. Sawyerr continues his lament by stating that:

Not only does this result in severe imbalances in the distribution of “earned” revenue, it also means that the allocation of the new revenues among university activities no longer corresponds to university or national priorities, but follows the logic of the market! Is this relative under-funding of science and technology what Makerere wishes, or Uganda needs?

Sawyerr, 2002, p. 56

An Education that is of Africa and for Africa

Julius Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, was one of the most prominent thinkers on education in Africa. His educational philosophy is best outlined in the 1968 publication *Education for Self-Reliance*. In it he stressed that education in Africa at any level must inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community and help the students to “accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those of our colonial past” (Nyerere, 1968, p. 52). He explained what he meant by this: “This means that the educational system of Tanzania must emphasize co-operative endeavor, not individual advancement” (Nyerere, 1968, p. 52). These values are very different from the ones now in vogue and actively promoted by Western donors, institutions, and consultants who aid them.

In its 2002 publication *Constructing Knowledge Societies*, the World Bank applauds the decision by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to offer all its courses free of charge on the web. This may be more worthy of praise if there was some reciprocity in it. What Africa needs is to develop its own courses, research, and publications, more directly suited to situations in Africa. The World Bank also applauds the agreement among six leading publishers of medical journals in the industrialised countries to give free access to their journals to more than 600 institutions in the 60 poorest countries. Laudable as this may be, it does not attack the problem of publishing in Africa, or the lack of medical journals tackling Africa specific problems, or other problems or interests most specifically aimed at Africa and African needs.

A book by Kenneth King and Simon McGrath (2002) on education, training, and development in Africa examines this issue further and came out of work on the “Learning to Compete” project commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Department For International Development (DFID). The project developed a partnership amongst researchers in the following three African countries: Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, as well as with researchers in Scotland. Strategies for the Africans to survive in the current world, must, according to King and McGrath, become strategies to compete better in markets increasingly impacted by globalization. The authors hold the position that glo-

balization leads to a competitiveness that will be based on the knowledge and skills possessed and utilized by individuals, enterprises, and nations. The core theme of the book is what the authors call “learning-led competitiveness.” The authors are of the opinion that “at the core of the globalization message is the argument that pockets of activity isolated from the global market are rapidly diminishing. It is essential, therefore, that policy interventions and projects that seek to help the poor survive better are closely intertwined with policies for competitiveness” (King and McGrath, 2002, p. 11).

When the authors write about skills, they are primarily writing about what they call “high level skills” or “core learning skills” which are requirements for knowledge workers. These are the skills that, according to the authors, knowledge workers in Africa need to acquire in order to compete in the current process of knowledge-driven globalization. Rote learning, they claim, is irrelevant in the information age. They find that there is a need to do away with rote learning and embrace the core learning skills forms a major part of the debate surrounding the South African introduction of Curriculum 2005, as well as what they term outcomes-based education, which can also be seen to a lesser extent in both Kenya and Ghana.

The authors do not seem to criticize the value of competition or ask how it, if at all, can be reconciled with the cooperative endeavors that still are important values in Africa. They do not ask the questions: Whose knowledge are we talking about? Knowledge developed by whom to profit whom? King and McGrath (2002) do not use their work to attempt to explain why rote learning is going on in most African classrooms and even universities, but this is a concern that deserves further consideration.

For some of us who have visited many classrooms and lecture halls in countries across Africa, the rote learning situation of students is a familiar phenomenon. In lecture halls, I have seen how students take down every word the teacher says and copy notes, which they then try to memorize. The situation is partly caused by the fact that there is a scarcity of textbooks. Often the only textbook that exists is the one the teacher or professor reads from and uses when s/he writes notes on the blackboard. My daughter, who studied for one year at the University of Dar es Salaam, experienced a situation where none of the books mentioned on the reading list was available in the bookstore. Normally, just one copy of the books were available in the library. That copy was put on special reserve, and one could check it out for one hour. In one instance, after having waited a very long time to take out the book from the reserve desk, she eventually got hold of the book only to find that the chapter which was required reading had been torn out of the book.

The Language Issue at African Universities

Another very important reason that underpins why rote learning exists and flourishes in African education has to do with the fact that teachers are forced to teach, and learners to learn, in a language they do not command well. This situation begs serious and important questions about issues surrounding language in higher education. How can you develop skills of abstraction and system thinking if you are required to do this in an unfamiliar language? How can you develop the ability to communicate if you are forced to communicate in a language you do not command (Brock-Utne, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2001 (Ed.); Brock-Utne et al., (Eds.), 2003; Prah, 2003)?

In the 1990 UNESCO-UNICEF publication *African Thoughts on the Prospects of Education for All*, the African educationist Babs Fafunwa wrote:

We impart knowledge and skills almost exclusively in foreign languages, while the majority of our people, farmers, and craftsmen perform their daily tasks in Yoruba, Hausa, Wolof, Ga, Igbo, Bambara, Kiswahili, etc.... The question is: Why not help them to improve their social, economic, and political activities via their mother tongue? Why insist on their learning English or French first before modern technology could be introduced to them?

Fafunwa, 1990, p. 103

The use of a foreign language as language of instruction is also a grave problem at the university. Even in an African country like Tanzania, where all the students and lecturers communicate in Kiswahili outside of the classroom, the language of instruction and exam writing is English.

In 1997, the Tanzanian researcher Grace Puja interviewed 34 second-year female students as well as 22 university teachers in connection with her Ph.D. research. She explains in a forthcoming article that her interest in the role of Kiswahili in Tanzanian higher education was prompted by some of the findings of this study (Puja, 2002). She had written her interview guide in English, since she was taking her Ph.D. in Canada and had expected to conduct the research in English. Her interview subjects had, after all, had English as the language of instruction for eight years. She found, however, that most of the Tanzanian female undergraduates that she interviewed asked if they could have the interview in Kiswahili. As a result, she then let them choose the language in which they would like to be interviewed, and only 8 of the 34 subjects chose to be interviewed in English, with the rest preferring Kiswahili. Among the eight who chose English were several of Asian descent. Most of the university teachers Puja interviewed stated that most of their students were not competent in either

spoken or written English. This is an observation Puja made during her field-work:

During class observations and during my visits at the three University campuses, I noted that most students (male and female) do not speak in class [where the medium of instruction is English] but as soon as the class is over, both teachers and students switch to Kiswahili and communicate freely.

Puja, 2002, p. 1

Today, no university in Sub-Saharan Africa has an indigenous African language as the language of instruction. The languages of instruction at the universities in Sub-Saharan Africa are European languages: English, French, Portuguese, Dutch¹⁰ (in South Africa), and Italian (when the university in Somalia was still functioning).¹¹ Ali Mazrui (1996) argues that the choice of European languages as the media of instruction in African universities has had profound cultural consequences for the societies served by those universities. He gives as an example professional Japanese scientists who can organize a conference and discuss professional matters entirely in Japanese. (He could have also mentioned Korean, German, Norwegian, or Finnish scientists who do the same.) Mazrui states: “But a conference of African scientists, devoted to scientific matters, conducted primarily in an African language, is for the time being sociologically impossible” (Mazrui, 1996, p. 4).

Generally, Mazrui is correct when he maintains that almost all black African intellectuals conduct their most sophisticated conversations in European languages. “It is because of this that intellectual and scientific dependency in Africa is inseparable from linguistic dependency” (Mazrui, 1996, p. 4). Mazrui quotes Jomo Kenyatta in the old colonial Kenya, who said: “When the white man came to Africa he had the Bible and we had the land. And now? We have the Bible and he has the land” (ibid., p. 5). Culture, including language, was offered in exchange for material goods. The West exported its ideas and languages and imported Africa’s riches.

In its publication on higher education, the World Bank (1994) does not even mention the language question. For the further growth and development

10 Afrikaans, the language of the Boers and also the Coloured of South Africa is, according to Dutch people I have talked with in South Africa, 95% Dutch.

11 In Somalia the language of instruction in all the faculties except the Faculty of Education was Italian (even though the language of instruction in primary school was Somali and in secondary school English) because the University got development aid from Italy. The Faculty of Education was, however, sponsored by the Americans and therefore English was the language of instruction there (Personal communication from Hassan Keynan from Somalia, who attended my “Education in Africa” seminar while in Norway, see also Warsame, 2001).

of a language, its use as language of instruction at higher levels is of fundamental importance. The West African educational researcher Adama Ouane from Mali, now the Director of the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg, Germany has accurately observed:

Unless these languages (the indigenous African languages) can step beyond the door of primary schooling, and face the challenges of secondary and higher education, with increased number of subjects to deal with, their modernization will be achieved only half-way.

Ouane, 1991, p. 10

At the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, however, there is one department and one institute that use an African language as the language of instruction: the Department of Kiswahili and the Institute of Kiswahili Research. Referring to the history of the Department of Kiswahili, Zaline Makini Roy-Campbell (1992a, 1992b) counters the frequently heard argument that African languages do not have a vocabulary that is developed enough to be languages of scholarship and instruction at higher levels in the educational system. She holds that this department gives a good practical example of the coinage of technical words which was undertaken in the process of changing from English to Kiswahili as the medium of instruction.

Prior to 1970, the courses in this department were also taught in English. There were no Kiswahili terms for guttural sounds and phonemes, nor terms even for linguistics and vocabulary. Once the decision was made to teach the courses in the Department of Kiswahili in Kiswahili, however, words were developed in the process of teaching and were later standardized. Some words were used side by side as synonyms. English terminologies were used until Kiswahili terms were developed. Some English terms became Kiswahili-ized and some terms were found in some of the other languages of Tanzania. The process of creating new words was done with the assistance of all teachers in the Department of Kiswahili and the Institute for Kiswahili Research. This example illustrates the fact that a language develops and grows through use.

The Link that Is Really Missing

At the installation of the University of Zambia on 12 July 1966, President Kenneth Kaunda gave an address in which he stressed that the people of Zambia had every reason to be very proud of their university. "The University of Zambia is our own university in a very real sense," he said. He told how the ordinary people of Zambia helped to build the university:

Humble folk in every corner of our nation—illiterate villagers, bare-footed school-children, prison inmates and even lepers—gave freely and willingly everything they could, often in the form of fish or maize or chickens. The reason for this extraordinary response was that our people see in the university the hope of a better and fuller life for their children and grand-children.

Kaunda, 1966, taken from Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996, p. 1

In their book *The African Experience with Higher Education*, Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) state that the address by Kaunda at the inauguration of the University of Zambia captured the communal pride and identity, which everywhere initially greeted the coming of the University to Africa. But they wonder about “the real sense” in which the African people can now claim the African universities to be “their very own.”

Again and again the people dance to welcome the University and bring their fishes and best wishes on the day of inauguration but, if they ventured to show up at the gates on the day after inauguration, they find that no-one there knows their name or understands their language.

Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996, p. 1

Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) present the debate about what constitutes the African university and how to make the University the “very own University of African peoples” as central to the African experience with higher education. Xabier Gorostiaga, former rector of the University of Central America (UCA) in Managua, Nicaragua, is concerned with the same question when it comes to the situation of Latin American universities:

What, then does it mean to train “successful” professionals in this sea of poverty? Does an institution that does not confront the injustice surrounding it, that does not question the crisis of a civilization that is ever less universalizable to the great majorities of the world, merit the name “university”? Would not such an institution be simply one more element that reproduces this unequal system?

Gorostiaga, 1993, p. 29

What is really missing in most of the universities in the South is the link between academia and the ordinary people.

Values and knowledge creation, particularly through independent and basic research, is critically important in order to develop the African continent as a creator of science and technology and not simply a consumer of imported versions. This knowledge creation has to be produced together with the local people. Examples of the missing link between local and university know-how can be

found in most departments in all of the universities in Africa. University know-how has come about through studying texts that are relevant in the North but not necessarily in the South.

Xabier Gorostiaga (1993) writes about professors of business administration in the South who cannot research businesses of twenty workers because such businesses do not use the sophisticated accounting systems that they studied in the texts from the North and which are used by only a small minority of factories in the South. In countries where the immense majority of farms belong to small and medium-sized growers, some professors of agricultural administration are only comfortable with the business and state administration schemes that they know from the Harvard manuals.

The missing link is between the universities and the masses of people in Africa, between the macro (policies adopted, though often unwillingly, by national governments) and the micro (local experiences). There is a lack of what Gorostiaga calls “people-bridges” capable of creating communication links among different local experiences, of promoting experimentation among them, or of pushing viable national programs based on their successes. Aklilu Habte, the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Addis Ababa stated that:

The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but one growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil.

quoted in Karani, 1998, p. 117

Attention to Local Knowledge

Even the Jomtien declaration mentions the need to base curricula in the South on local knowledge. The preamble to the World Declaration on Education for All (WCEFA, 1990) states that “traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development.” In light of the “Education for All” emphasis, Professor Komba of the University of Dar es Salaam stresses the need to “analyze the possibilities to revive and use dying traditional learning systems in various tribes” in an assessment of the Tanzanian “education for self-reliance” policy (Komba, 1996, p. 6). In the book *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education* (Teasdale and Ma Rhea, eds., 2000) I have probed further into the issue of transforming African universities by using indigenous perspectives and local experience (Brock-Utne, 2000b, see also Brock-Utne, 2002).

To me, the fundamental question is: How is it at all possible to reconstruct the curriculum of African schools, to root it in African culture, without a significant emphasis on indigenous research, preferably by African scholars who

are clearly African-based in their outlook? Ali Mazrui (1978, p. 352) notes that “the full maturity of African education will come only when Africa develops a capacity to innovate independently.” This independent innovation may incorporate elements from the West but must be based in African roots.

In his book on academic freedom in Africa, Ali Mazrui notes that any academic freedom in Africa is being devalued by intellectual dependency:

It was not the traditional African that resembled the ape; it was the more Westernized one, fascinated by the West’s cultural mirror. A disproportionate number of these cultural “apes” were and continue to be products of universities. Those African graduates who have become university teachers themselves have on the whole remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the West. African historians have begun to innovate methodologically as they have grappled with oral traditions, but most of the other disciplines are still condemned to paradigmatic dependency. This includes those African scholars who discovered Karl Marx just before Europe abandoned him.

Mazrui, 1994, p. 119

Staf Callewaert, who has done extensive research in Namibia, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, tries to explain why one seldom finds African researchers questioning Western schooling as such: “As a rule you cannot expect the educated African to use much energy to reconstruct and problematize the break, by which he or she became exactly what they are: educated in a modern Western sense of the word” (Callewaert, 1994, p. 108).

According to the Tanzanian biologists Adelaida Semesi and Felister Urassa (1991), many African women have accumulated knowledge about some of the causes and effects of crop failures and spoiled food and have devised ways to overcome such problems. Some solutions work very well. Moreover, village women are great science teachers in the fields of agriculture, medicine, and food technology, and they pass their knowledge on to their children, friends, and neighbors through practical training. A mother will show the children how to select and plant seeds, weed, and identify pests, and she will even explain about the different soils suitable for the different crops. She will also talk about food processing and food preservation, for instance, through drying or smoking meat.¹²

12 Since much of this knowledge is not documented, it is not easily developed or challenged. As a consequence the accumulated knowledge is seldom consulted to develop a better understanding of the environment. This can be illustrated by the Kongwa groundnut scheme, which failed because local people were not consulted to assess the suitability of the soils and reliability of the climate to cultivate groundnuts (Semesi and Urassa, 1991).

Lancy (1996) points to sensitive and open-minded research by ecological anthropologists in recent years which has shown that the kind of subsistence practices followed by slash-and-burn horticulturalists, such as the Kpelle people in Liberia, instead of being inefficient, are wonderfully adapted to the local ecology. He sees Western aid, whether in the area of agriculture or schooling, as something that destroys the original culture and sets the Kpelle society on to the *Kwii* way. (*Kwii* in the Kpelle language is a general term that refers to Westerners and Liberians who dress and talk like Westerners, live in towns, participate in the cash economy, and so on.) In order to avoid African societies going further on the *Kwii* way, according to Lancy, African universities need to pursue research based on local experience in collaboration with the people of Africa.¹³ What is most needed now is for African researchers to be able to develop academic fields from African roots.

Archie Mafeje (1992), writing on the indigenization of intellectual discourse in Africa, reminds African intellectuals of the guiding principle in Socratic thought: "Know thyself." Looking at African philosophical thought, he finds grounds for reconstruction and self-realization. He sees that unwritten accounts, transmitted in stories, legends, myths, and so on reflect African philosophical thought in various ways and are sources of high significance and authenticity. In an article on the teaching of philosophy in African universities, Kwasi Wiredu (1984) laments:

An African may learn philosophy in a Western institution of higher learning abroad or at home and become extremely adroit in philosophical disputation; he may even be able to make original contributions in some branch of philosophy. The fact remains that he would be engaged in Western, not African philosophy. Surprisingly, many Africans accept this; they have even seemed to take it as a matter of course.... The usual practice seems to reserve all references to African conceptions to classes on African philosophy. As far as the main branches of philosophy are concerned, African philosophical ideas might just as well be non-existent. This trend, I suggest, ought to be reversed.

Wiredu, 1984, pp. 31–32

Wiredu makes himself a spokesperson for the strategy of "counter-penetration." This strategy is meant to impress upon the world that it has something to learn from Africa, that in the global culture that is evolving, the West would do

13 In my book, *Whose Education for All?* (Brock-Utne, 2000a), I have shown that in the fields of African languages, culture, and dances; physical education; philosophy; law, and environmental studies Africa has a lot to offer.

well to listen to Africa.¹⁴ It is a strategy also mentioned by Ali Mazrui (1978, p. 350), who raises the question whether African universities that have been so permeated by Western culture in turn can affect Western thoughts and values. Mazrui thinks this is possible and outlines his strategies of domestication, diversification, and counterpenetration (Mazrui, 1978). The balance of cultural trade between the North and the South has to be restored. The strategy will not work, however, unless Africa builds on its own foundation and stops mimicking the West. Neither will it work before Africa is allowed to work out its own educational policies instead of being forced to adopt those worked out by the World Bank or by donors overseas.

Pai Obanya (1999), for many years the Director of the UNESCO regional office for West Africa, BREDA, located in Dakar, Senegal, writes that successful future prospects for higher education in Africa will require African countries to formulate their own national policies on higher education. These policies should, according to Obanya, follow certain systematic steps. They must first contain statements about what type of learning should be undertaken, “what types of activity are of the greatest worth, and how should these be reflected in higher education?” (Obanya, 1999, p. 548). After an agreement has been reached on such issues a statement of the qualities expected of academic and other staff must follow. According to Obanya (1999, p. 549): “Higher education in Africa in the years to come has to be guided by national policies, which are understood and accepted by the populations it is supposed to serve.” But, as we have seen above, the Makerere “miracle” has not been guided by national policies but by advice from the World Bank and the neo-liberal agenda it adheres to. This agenda makes it difficult for any country to govern according to national policies.

I agree with Obanya, Wiredu, and Mazrui that African researchers need to develop national policies of higher education and develop academic fields from African roots. The West can help by showing interest in the endeavor, giving economic support, and no longer sending so-called “experts” who come to teach and not to learn. These experts or consultants often have the audacity to impose Western culture on a defenseless continent that is now lost because of colonial and neo-colonial interventions, a continent that needs to return to a familiar point—its own roots—before rushing on.

14 There is much the West could learn from the black people of Africa about leading a good and harmonious life, taking care of each other and the beloved dead ones, respecting the wisdom of older people and being one with nature and the spiritual world.

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