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# The Role of Universities in Attaining Kenya Vision 2030

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## ABSTRACT

The Kenya Vision 2030 is the economic blueprint towards the achievement of development and the transformation of Kenya into a “newly industrializing, middle income country providing high quality life for all its citizens by the year 2030” (Vision 2030, pg. vii.) To achieve this long term development goals, there is need for the country to invest in training of qualified manpower to drive the wheels of development. Educational institutions and particularly Universities in Kenya have continued to play a significant role in the training of manpower to meet the demands of industry. Universities play an innovative role in tackling the problems of underdevelopment (Mosha, 1986). This paper deliberates the role of Kenyan Universities in the country’s economic development and their contribution towards the achievement of Vision 2030. The discussion will revolve around three themes which form the pillars of Vision 2030 - the Economic Pillar, Social Pillar and Political Pillar, and the role of the University in fortifying these pillars. It is imperative for Kenya to invest in the training of manpower to work on infrastructure because this is critical for accelerated rates of economic development (Bloom et al (2006). The cohesiveness of the Kenyan society is an essential factor in national development too. Higher education fosters national unity by changing people’s attitudes and developing positive mind sets towards each other and various ethnic diversities. This is focal in developing a cohesive society that is free from ethnic prejudices and other social ills buffeting Kenya today. The political pillar of vision 2030 is ‘a democratic political system that is issue-based, people –centered, result-oriented and accountable to the public.’ (Vision 2030, pg. 16). Universities contribute substantially in buttressing this pillar by providing the intellectual citadel where political discourse occurs and ideologies pertinent to policy formulation are generated. It is necessary that dysfunctional systems of the past are replaced with new value systems that will repair the emaciated social fabric. Universities can assist in this by developing individuals committed to democratic values and human rights (Botman, 2011).

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## Introduction

Higher Education is understood as being necessary to the success of national efforts to boost productivity, competitiveness and economic growth (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2000). This is contrary to previously held conceptions that tertiary education has little role in promoting poverty alleviation. In the previous years, the contention was that primary and secondary education contributed more to economic development because of the high rate of return on investment. Consequently multi-lateral development partners invested a lot of funds in the primary and secondary school levels of education at the expense of Universities which continued to struggle under the burden of reduced funding and increasing expenditure occasioned by increased enrolment. However, this perception has changed after the realization that University education contributes significantly to social and economic development. Universities in Africa and indeed all over the world have continued to play a pivotal role in the nations’ socio-economic development. Due to this realization, higher education in Africa has significantly expanded over the past years. Despite this, less than 2% of Africa’s population is able to access higher education.

### State of higher education in Africa

African Universities are still marking time in putting in place needed arrangements to open up the labour market. The Gross Enrolment rate in Higher Education is the lowest in Sub-

saharan Africa (Varghese, 2004). There is an urgent concern to expand University enrolment in all African countries. Despite the expansion of public Universities in many African countries, the growth of private Universities is a welcome alternative. Universities are expected to conduct research and train highly qualified personnel to meet the needs of the labour market and the society in general. In order to address itself to the changing global economy, the African University has gone through a restructuring process in order to remain relevant in the global arena. Many Universities have entered into twinning arrangements to offer their programs across the world (Varghese, 2004). There is an emergent need for structural reforms in educational institutions in order to create harmony between the disciplines and the production sector in order to respond to socio-economic and cultural needs of the society.

Universities in Africa are accused of training personnel that are not prepared to meet the challenges of the global economy. The accusation of producing half-baked graduates is not an uncommon sentiment emerging from industry players. In many African countries, universities are unable to conduct meaningful research hence depriving the knowledge-based economy of the meaningful asset. Education and training programs must be periodically reviewed to check for pertinence and effectiveness. In order to expand access to higher education, many African countries have encouraged the growth of private Universities.

Kenya initially led in the establishment of private Universities but has since been joined by other countries like Benin, Ghana, Senegal, and Tanzania (Varghese, 2004). Virtual Universities and for-profit Universities have improved access to privatized services to an increasing number of people.

#### **Higher education in Kenya**

Since independence, University education in Kenya has steadily witnessed explosive progression that has not been matched in the East and African region, besides Republic of South Africa (Oanda, Chege & Wesonga, 2008). In 1991, the World Bank “prevailed upon the government to restrict the growth of enrolment of public Universities to no more than three percent per annum up to the year 2017” (Varghese, 2004, p. 12). This led to rapid emergence of private Universities in order to meet the social demand for education. The Commission for University Education (CUE) reports in its website that there are 22 public Universities, 9 constituent Colleges and 3 Public University Campuses. There are 17 Chartered Private Universities and 5 Private University Colleges. 12 Universities are operating with Letters of Interim Authority

According to the Human Development Report (2013), Kenya’s Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2012 is 0.519. This represents an increase of 22% from 0.424 in 1980. The HDI is measured in terms of life expectancy, access to knowledge and the standard of living. An educated and well trained labour force is essential for the country’s socio economic development and the achievement of Vision 2030. However, the Kenya Vision 2030 reports a serious shortage of capacity, both in public and private institutions. Despite the increase in enrollment in public universities, the high cost continues to limit access to a large number of qualified students. In anticipation of increased enrolment precipitated by free primary education and free day secondary education, the government has worked out programs to elevate middle level colleges/institutions into universities and equip them with skills consistent with emerging technologies. Training at these institutions is also linked with training at universities.

#### **University Education and Development**

According to Jones, McCarney & Skolnik, (2005), Universities have two primary functions in a knowledge based economy. Universities have a role in conducting meaningful research and training highly qualified personnel. The Universities are active promoters of the innovation culture at the regional and international level (Muresan & Gogu, 2010). Higher education can enhance economic development through technological catch-up, by helping economies gain ground on more technologically advanced societies. Investing in tertiary education in Africa may accelerate technological diffusion, which would decrease knowledge gaps and help reduce poverty in the region (Bloom et al, 2006). The development of infrastructure is a vital component in steering the country’s development agenda. Universities have a primary in empower Africans with expert knowledge to work on infrastructure in their own countries.

The Kenya Vision 2030 emphasizes that, “successful transition to Vision 2030 calls for a considerable shift in the manner in which Kenya deploys her resources to acquire the necessary capacity and access to infrastructure services by firms and citizens in their wealth-creation efforts” (Vision 2030, pg. 10). Many African countries continue to spend colossal amounts of money in hiring experts and equipment for infrastructural development, yet this can be reduced by equipping Universities with adequate capacity to train more engineers. One of the reasons for the lack of support for investment in tertiary

education is the “brain drain” phenomenon. A huge percentage of highly skilled Africans continue to move to the developed world in search of better working conditions. This phenomenon discourages governments of African states from investing in training of high level manpower who eventually migrate to other countries thus denying their motherlands of their highly needed expertise.

#### **University Education And Vision 2030**

In the recent past, Universities have come under continued pressure to conduct applied research that is meaningful for the country’s economic development. This has pushed Universities to develop partnerships with industry players (Jones, et 2005). Universities are expected to play active roles in promoting technological innovation to reinvigorate regional economies (Sa, 2010). Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of Universities to produce knowledge that is relevant to the industry, disseminate knowledge and provide technical support to industry. The generation and dissemination of relevant knowledge is essential for the needs of the economy and society. Under its social pillar – investing in the people of Kenya, the Vision 2030 recognizes the importance of education and training of Kenyans with “understanding and knowledge that will enable them make informed choices” (pg. 78). In pursuant to this, the Vision 2030 identifies the following challenges facing the sector in Kenya’s transformation to Vision 2030:

- (i) To meet the human resource requirements for a rapidly changing and more diverse economy.
- (ii) To ensure that the education provided meets high quality standards and provide content that is relevant to the needs of the economy and society.
- (iii) To increase enrollment in regions that lag behind and bring them at par with other regions.
- (iv) To develop a cohesive society imbued with the culture of hard work and efficiency

Muresan & Gogu (2010) aptly contend that the primary challenge the academic environment faces in the emerging knowledge economies is to bridge the gap between political decision, governance and the labour market. A knowledge based economy is a product of dynamic interaction of several forces – life-long learning, research and innovation and technological infrastructure. Universities contribute towards fostering life-long learning by engaging adults in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills that are relevant to the society. The Vision 2030 attaches importance to the need to produce a citizenry that is committed to life-long learning. Research and innovation is central for economic growth and development (Glen et al. 2005). Private enterprises should position themselves to benefit from knowledge generated from applied research by universities. This requires developing a sophisticated framework that strengthens the institutional and interpersonal linkages between universities and firms.

In the process of knowledge generation and developing industry-university linkages, the involvement of the business experts in the tertiary teaching activities as well as the involvement of the professors and the students in the business activities is imperative. These collaborative activities are essential in the process of knowledge transfer from the universities to the consumers at the industry level. The university research activities represent an important bridge pillar between universities and socio-economic environment, contributing to improve the cooperation between academic and business actors (Glen et al. 2005).

### University Funding

The international development community has held the belief that primary and secondary schooling are more important than tertiary education in poverty alleviation (Bloom et, 2006). Consequently, higher education in Africa has suffered reductions in spending with many Universities continuing to struggle under the heavy burden of underfunding. Following the aftermath of reduced funding from the government and bilateral donor agencies, African Universities have been obligated to seek alternative means to finance their recurrent expenditures. Through developing strategic partnerships many Universities have been able to strengthen their resource bases. Universities make their own investments in the areas of research seeking to be at the forefront and to secure external support (Sa, 2010). In Senegal, INNODEV business incubator is an initiative for all public Universities and research institutions (Sall, n.d). A similar initiative has been implemented at Kenyatta University through the Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre. One of the objectives of the Centre is to blend academic research and training with entrepreneurship. The Centre intends to offer incubation for 100 students' ideas per year.

Strathmore University and Telkom Kenya have entered into a collaboration that will see the development and implementation of an internship program for the students, industry experience exchanges and student career mentoring. The University has also developed Strathmore Innovation and Technology Transfer (SITT). SITT is an initiative to establish a technology and business incubator within the Faculty of Information Technology at the University. The long-term objective of the program is to establish a self-sustaining technology and business incubator.

Other Universities with similar initiatives include Africa Nazarene University and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. These initiatives provide a forum where young people with business and technological innovations are accorded and opportunity to nurture and develop their ideas into maturity. They also strengthen the University-industry linkages. JKUAT has spearheaded a computer assembly project christened the Madaraka Computer initiative. This project is part of Vision 2030 flagship project funded by Ministry of Information and Communications and aimed at capacity building in ICT as well as assembling affordable computers that would be available to the public. It is hoped that this will provide a major boost to the government as it rolls out the free laptops project for Standard One pupils.

Government funding for higher Education has increased in the recent years. According to the Education Sector Report (GOK, 2012), the Government of Kenya has solely been funding Higher Education Sector since 2008. Government funding for Higher Education rose from KES. 22 M in 2008 to KES 22M in 2011. There was no financial support received from donors. This demonstrates the government's commitment to support higher education and the importance attached to this sub-sector. The Vision 2030 recognizes the "serious shortage" of capacity, both in private and public institutions. This calls for concerted efforts by all industry stakeholders to invest more resources in higher education. Universities have also to come up with innovative ways of generating more income to support their programmes. The recent proliferation of regional campuses and self-sponsored programmes in public Universities is an attestation to this phenomenon.

### Conclusion

The role of Universities in the achievement of Vision 2030 cannot be gainsaid. This paper has presented a brief summary of

the various ways in which the Universities have contributed and can contribute to this endeavor. There is still a lot that needs to be done. More resources must be invested in supporting the capacity of Universities to conduct meaningful research and support to the industry players. There is need to strengthen University – Industry linkages and ensure knowledge transfer. Following the enactment of the Universities Act and a revitalized Commission for University Education, it is envisaged that the issues of quality in local Universities will be dealt with and that the graduates from these institutions will be well equipped with knowledge and skills relevant to the social needs of the knowledge based economy. The problem of access can be addressed through the government funding private Universities to admit students who meet the minimum entry requirements for various degree programmes but are not unable to secure places in the public Universities. Public and private Universities in Kenya should enter into collaborations in order to jointly conduct research and tackle some of the social challenges facing this country. It is hoped that University academics will continue to conduct more relevant research as opposed to spending more time moonlighting and teaching.

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