



Neoliberalism and the Changing Role of Universities in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Research and Development

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Abstract

With some specific examples from Kenyan universities, this article reviews the role of the post-independence African university in research and development, and the effect of neo-liberalism and funding on these activities. It was established that since their inception in the colonial era, the academic purpose of universities in Africa was essentially similar to that of universities the world over; to teach and advance knowledge by disinterested research and to maintain standards of teaching at a level which could be clearly related to those established in other countries. Following the achievement of independence, universities were designated as ‘development universities’, which meant, they were expected to undertake research and participate in the development of their respective countries. Most African universities tried in a variety of ways to further the idea of the development university, but due to inherent internal structures as well as the prevailing political climate, it failed to emerge as a ‘development university.’ However, such challenges to the development university did not diminish the central role of the African universities in research and development. African universities, as others the world over, are required to respond to a variety of needs and fulfil many aims, and this is not a matter of external demands, but of the multifaceted commitment rooted in the traditions of the universities themselves and of the academic profession. This article demonstrates that the neo-liberal ideology which required a significant withdrawal of the state in social provision through drastic reductions in social expenditure, which includes education, contributed to drastic reduction in

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public expenditure in higher education. This reduction in funding has had a far-reaching effect on the quantity and quality of research in most African universities. The virtual lack of research has serious implications on the role of the university which is characterised by disciplinary specialisation and basic research; which means public universities in Africa are increasingly losing out on their role as producers and disseminators of researched knowledge for the development of their countries.

Résumé

Avec quelques exemples précis tirés d'universités kenyanes, cet article passe en revue le rôle de l'université africaine post indépendance dans la recherche et le développement et l'effet du néo-libéralisme et le financement de ces activités. Il a été établi que depuis leur création pendant l'ère coloniale, la mission académique des universités en Afrique était essentiellement celle des universités partout dans le monde ; enseigner et faire avancer la connaissance par une recherche désintéressée et maintenir des normes d'enseignement à un niveau qui pourrait clairement être mis en relation avec ceux établis dans d'autres pays. Suite à la réalisation des indépendances, les universités furent désignées sous le vocable « universités de développement », ce qui voulait dire, qu'il était attendu d'elles d'entreprendre la recherche et de participer au développement de leur pays respectif. La plupart des universités essayèrent de diverses manières d'amener plus loin l'idée de l'université de développement, mais du fait de structures internes inhérentes, ainsi que du climat politique prévalent, celle-ci manqua d'émerger en tant qu' « université de développement ». Cependant, de tels défis à l'université de développement ne réduisirent pas le rôle central des universités africaines dans la recherche et le développement. Il est demandé aux universités africaines, comme aux autres partout dans le monde, de répondre à une variété de besoins et de remplir beaucoup d'objectifs ; et ceci n'est une question de demande externe, mais l'engagement multidimensionnel enraciné dans les traditions des universités elles-mêmes et de la profession académique. Il est démontré que l'idéologie néolibérale qui exigeait un retrait significatif de l'Etat de l'offre social à travers des réductions drastiques des dépenses publiques dans l'enseignement supérieur. Cette réduction dans le financement a eu des effets profonds sur la quantité et la qualité de la recherche dans la plupart des universités africaines. Le manque de recherche virtuel a une sérieuse implication sur le rôle de l'université qui est caractérisé par la spécialisation disciplinaire et la recherche de base, ce qui veut dire que les universités en Afrique perdent de plus en plus sur leur rôle de producteurs et disséminateurs de connaissances de recherche pour le développement de leurs pays.

Introduction

The early African universities in both the Anglophone and Francophone Africa were designed to train the elite for leadership and to provide breadth and depth, rather than narrow professional training. However, the purpose of these universities was, essentially, that of universities the world over; to teach and advance knowledge by disinterested research and to maintain high standards of teaching at a level which could be clearly related to those universities established in other countries. Many of the universities were therefore established as small elite institutions for training high-class personnel. With independence, universities in Africa were perceived to have responsibilities which were in many ways different from those of the universities in Europe and North America on which they had been modelled, and an interpretation of these roles and related issues were expected to be characteristically different. Such universities and others which were established later were designated as 'development universities,' which meant, they were expected to undertake research and participate in the development of their respective countries. These expectations stressed the key responsibility of the university as one of serving its society in direct, immediate and practical ways that could lead to the improved well-being of the national populace (Burns 1965).

Although the development universities appeared to be the popular expectation of universities in Africa, leading African scholars highly questioned the capacity of universities to undertake the development role, especially since, structurally, virtually all of them were based on one or more Western models, the use of foreign languages as primary media of instruction as well as instructional materials, among others. In addition, while there had been some changes in curricula, they were still largely based on assumptions about knowledge from the North (Mazrui 1992). Despite such challenges, many of the universities in Africa tried in a variety of ways to further the idea of the development university. In varying degrees of imagination and conviction, they embarked on efforts to enhance the social relevance of what they were doing in many areas of study. However, research is showing that the neo-liberalisation ideology which favours free market economics and advocates for privatisation, marketisation and performance as well as the shift of the cost of higher education from the state to the individual is having a major effect on the traditional roles of universities and their management practices (Byaruhanga 2002). With some specific examples from Kenyan universities, this paper reviews the role of the post-independence African university in research and development and the effect of neo-liberalism and the funding on these activities.

Role of African Universities in Research and Development

As pointed out above, since their inception in the colonial era, the academic purpose of universities in Africa was essentially one of teaching and advancing knowledge by disinterested research and to maintain standards related to those established in other countries. It is in that context that the early university colleges in the Anglophone countries, except for Fourah Bay College, which was already associated with the University of Durham, the level to be reached in degree examinations had to be explicitly related to international standards through the special relationship established with the University of London. Nairobi, for example, was established in 1956 as the Royal Technical College in conjunction with that university. This arrangement which was based on collaboration between university colleges in Africa and foreign universities in syllabuses and examinations was expected to ensure that examinations and standards set at the degree level were those set in the foreign universities and led to the award of degrees of those universities (Watson and Furley 1978).

With the achievement of independence in the 1960s, it however, became increasingly evident that African universities had social purposes deriving from the influences to which they owed their own existence. This was reflected in the universities' attitude towards education as a public service and their readiness to undertake extra-mural responsibilities in subjects of study or those special aspects which seemed peculiarly relevant to an African context or even in the levels at which courses could be offered such as lectures in African studies which were attended by all undergraduate students in some universities. Furthermore, a majority of the universities in Africa were essentially public institutions, created and maintained by national governments and planned to serve the needs of the nation rather than those of particular groups in the society. Unlike Western and American universities, African universities were expected to be instruments for change of the existing order, and not to preserve it. In some countries where they had been closely associated with the nation-building mission of the governments, universities were regarded with considerable affection as well as esteem (Coleman and Court 1993).

Among the early influences on the emergence of post-independence African universities' role was the Tananarive (Madagascar) Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa of September 1962, under the auspices of UNESCO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa which played a complementary role to the Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1961 and had placed priority on the expansion of higher education. The Tananarive Conference, in particular, addressed the role of higher education in the development of African countries in the context of cultural, social and

economic fields, noting that apart from teaching and research functions, higher education institutions had to assist in the building up of African nations as well as the unification of the continent. The Report stressed that in order to accomplish these tasks, African institutions of higher learning should not become 'ivory towers' detached from the society in which they are situated, but must contribute to national unity within the states they serve (UNESCO 1962)

Another important influence on the development of higher education in Africa, especially towards the achievement of independence was the Report of the Ashby Commission on post-secondary education, which emphasised that higher education was a national investment, and established links between high education and economic development. The report recommended substantial expansion of higher education systems and the specific introduction of manpower planning as the rationale behind African educational planning. This was in tandem with the national aspirations of newly independent nations, and the process of expansion was taken up on a large scale (Ashby 1965).

The exhortation that universities in developing countries in general and Africa in particular were to be demonstrably relevant for and totally committed to national development became so incessant and all-engulfing that it saturated all speeches, studies, debates, and discussion about these institutions. One of the most eloquent exhorters of the role of the African university was the former President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. In one of his speeches, he said:

The University in a developing society must put the emphasis of its work on subjects of immediate environment to the nation in which it exists, and must be committed to the people of that nation and their humanistic goals... We in poor societies can only justify expenditure on a University- of any type- if it promotes real development of our people... The role of a University in a developing nation is to contribute; to give ideas, manpower, and service for the furthering of human equality, human dignity and human development (Nyerere 1966).

These perceptions in part gave rise to the notion of the 'Development University', in which universities were expected to undertake research and participate in development projects in the rural areas. The development university was widely held by a set of expectations concerning the distinctive and practical role in the task of national development. These expectations stressed the singular responsibility of the university for serving its society in direct, immediate and practical ways that could lead to the improved well-being of the national populace. Although universities were to continue improving the relevance of teaching and research and contribute to human resource development, their

role should however, go beyond these traditional functions to incorporate an expanded sense of social responsibility and policy relevance and to adopt new forms and purposes for their realisation. Universities were to take responsibility for such things as increasing food production, addressing poverty of rural populations, advising governments on house construction, as well as social engineering to improve ethnic balance and national integration. The new touchstones of university quality were its vocational and service contribution and its social commitment. To demonstrate the intricate relationship between the state and universities and the implications for national development, several governments attached the name of the nation-state to their universities, for example; the University of Malawi, University of Zambia, University of Sierra Leone and others (Puplampu 2005).

However, as Mazrui pointed out, the expectation that African universities should serve as major instruments of development in their societies by producing high-level human resource, relevant research and training appropriate skills and become potential innovators seemed to ignore some fundamental ethos and values underlying their foundation. For example, there were some elements of academic dependency on the northern institutions which were unmistakably clear. He pointed out that structurally, virtually all African universities in Sub-Saharan Africa were based on Western models and use Western languages as media of instruction. Relevant curricula, to a large extent, were still based on assumptions about knowledge copied from the North. While aspects of international subject matter could be embraced, specifically indigenous subject matter could only have very little place. In terms of materials, many universities relied overwhelmingly on books and materials published in the West, while student admission and staff recruitment continued to put a high premium on prior assimilation into Western culture (Mazrui 1992; Brown 1992).

Despite the heavily embedded Western foundation, African universities embarked on some efforts to fulfil their new role as 'development universities.' In East Africa, for example, following the establishment of the University College, Dar es Salaam, in 1962, the Federal University of East Africa was established in 1963, consisting of Makerere College in Uganda and the Royal Technical College, Nairobi. The expansion of the federal university was driven by the human resource development, with the rallying point being rapid growth in higher education, especially university education.

Like many other African universities, the University of Nairobi, the oldest in the country, tried in a variety of ways to further the idea of the development university. In varying degrees of imagination and conviction, it embarked on efforts to enhance the social relevance of what it was doing in areas such as an expanded role in extension work and community service, a considerable

contribution to national policy, an effective fulfilment to human resource and development, especially with regard to scientific and vocational careers, and enhancing of national integration. The independent government of Kenya, in particular, placed great emphasis on the expansion of higher education and geared it towards the manpower needs of the modern sector of economic life. Although, this particular task was expected of all tertiary institutions, the University of Nairobi, being at the apex of the education system at the time, had to play a major role in the development of the required human resource. It took the lead in the provision of qualified persons to man the burgeoning economic and administrative institutions as the oldest and largest university in the country.

Among the University of Nairobi's expected role was the development of outreach and extension activities or programmes. On the whole, such activities were not widespread although it embarked on increasing access to university education. Its College of Education and External Studies at Kikuyu launched a wide range of adult and further education programmes through its regional Extra-Mural Centres in the provincial towns of Mombasa, Kisumu, Kakamega, Nyeri, Embu and Nakuru and, lately, they have become colleges and campuses of the university.

Furthermore, to increase relevance and address among the main concern that university students graduate from the university, knowing practically nothing about the intricate political and social structures of their own communities, it established the Institute of African Studies to offer courses and programmes in culture and development. The promotion of African culture and related activities were not confined to the student body within the university, but included their responsibility for helping to promote a cultural awakening among the people or communities, a purpose which is served best by considerable expansion of the normal range of extension or outreach activities. Although this was a function which falls outside the university's customary responsibilities, a number of the university schools, faculties and departments/institutes have embarked on extension or outreach programmes with adult groups as a way of promoting a cultural awakening with communities and enhancing nation building as well as furthering their education through classes and study groups. In many cases, the target groups have included an effort directed towards the vast majority who live and work on the land as well as the slum dwellers in the urban areas (Sifuna and Sawamura 2010).

Despite such efforts, the University of Nairobi did not fully live up to the expectations and ideals of the development university, partly due to a number of factors. First, was the lack of training among the bulk of teaching force to teach development studies, followed by the inherent conservatism regard-

ing structural change and the functional overload because most of the new developmental functions had to be performed by the same academic staff as the traditional functions of teaching and research. Second, for a long time, there was a strong mistrust between the university and the national political leadership emanating from the notions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy which were hardly appreciated by the latter. The Kenyan regime's overriding concern for stability and its own survival at the time, heightened its inherent suspicion that the university was the main or potential source of hostile criticism and serious opposition. Such suspicion seemed to be increasingly confirmed by events of the time. There were widespread student and academic staff challenges to the regime during the late 1960s and 1970s which only strengthened its mistrust of the university as a base of opposition and discontent. This contributed to a greater questioning of the fundamental purpose of the university, and deeper penetration by the regimes into the vital areas of decision making previously within the realm of university autonomy. The prevailing climate of caution and fear coupled with the general belief that the regime had informants in most classes, prevented the emergence of a critical function of the University of Nairobi as 'development university' (Coleman and Court 1993).

However, such challenges to the concept of development university did not diminish the central role of the African universities in research and development. Much is expected of universities of the twenty-first century in all countries. African universities, like others the world over, are required to respond to a variety of needs and fulfil many at times incompatible aims, and this is not a matter of external demands, but of the multifaceted commitment rooted in the traditions of the universities themselves and of the academic profession (Smith 2007). An excellent example of how universities, especially in developing countries, find themselves pulling in all different directions came from a speech given by Thabo Mbeki, the then president of South Africa to the Association of Commonwealth Universities. The theme of his speech was the need for the revival of the African University to underpin the regeneration of Africa. It was noted that, 'Our entire continent remains at risk until the African university, in the context of a continental reawakening regains its soul. The new Africa can only be a product of the creative interface between the public, private and civil sector domains. At the centre of this interface is education' Smith (2007:31). It is further noted that the system of education is to furnish society with a steady stream of citizens of vision and commitment; it is not expected to be an enclave or an ivory tower whose curriculum has little relevance to the society in which it operates.

As an Indian Minister of Resource Development once noted, education, or more specifically, higher education, is the pathway to the empowerment of people and the development of nations. Knowledge generation has replaced ownership of capital assets and labour productivity as the source of growth and prosperity. Innovation is the mantra for development. This realisation is so pervasive that nations are scrambling to create institutions and organisations that would facilitate the process of knowledge creation. Knowledge creation requires a network of scholars actively engaged in its pursuit because the search for the unknown is a product of engaged minds, constantly challenging the known in an enabling environment. The modern university is the ideal space for the ecosystem of scholars to search for new ideas in a spirit of free inquiry (Sibal 2007). The positive contribution of tertiary education is increasingly recognised as not being limited to middle income and advanced countries, because it applies equally to low-income countries as it could help them become more globally competitive by developing a skilled, productive and flexible labour force and by creating, applying and spreading new ideas and technologies (Altbach and Salmi 2011).

A World Bank study on how to accelerate economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa spelt out the crucial contribution of tertiary education in supporting development. It observed that the key for success in a globalised world increasingly lies in how effectively a country can assimilate available knowledge and build comparative advantages in areas with higher growth prospects and how it can use technology to address the most pressing environmental challenges. Higher level institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa that are equipped to provide quality education and conduct relevant applied research can play a key role in producing workers with skills to assimilate technology and make effective decisions that help industry to diversify into a broader range of products. Good quality and relevant tertiary education is also key to stimulating innovations to produce new varieties and new materials and to develop sources of energy which can facilitate progress towards reducing poverty, achieving food security and improving health (World Bank 2008). Another World Bank study further noted that within the tertiary education system, research plays a critical role in training professionals, high-level specialists, scientists needed by the economy and generating new knowledge in support of the national innovation system (World Bank 2002).

Neo-liberalism and State Funding of Higher Education in Kenya

With regard to funding, during the era of 'the development university,' in Kenya as in other parts of Africa, the university was viewed as the key engine which powered African development, and hence, the levying of fees was perceived

as an unnecessary obstruction to that process. For many African governments, economic transformation of the continent was to follow from university education. As a result, after the achievement of independence in 1963, public higher education in Kenya has been free with public expenditure covering tuition and students' living allowances, development costs, instruction and research needs. The rationale for such state subsidies of higher education, especially tuition, was based on, among other things, on the country's desire to create highly trained personnel which could replace colonial administrators as well as ensure equity of access. It was reasoned that unless the state subsidised the high cost of higher education, many students would not be able to benefit from it, and therefore, the creation of highly qualified human resource would be seriously compromised. In this regard, from independence in 1963 to 1974 was the era of free higher education and its financing as part of public expenditure. In addition, the government met tuition fees and provided other allowances for students.

However, as from the mid-seventies, the Kenya government went ahead to introduce its first attempt at infusing cost into its public higher education through a student loan scheme which was rolled out in the 1974-75 academic year as part of the 1974-78 *Development Plan* (Republic of Kenya 1973). The loan scheme was introduced within the context of a free higher education, which was, however, coupled with increasing student numbers that rose from 571 in 1964 to 3,563 in 1973, and the economic difficulties the country has been experiencing since the early 1970s, caused partly by the rising oil prices in 1973. It was noted that the economy declined from a GDP growth rate of more than 8 per cent annually between 1963 and 1972 to 4 per cent annually in the following year. The student loan scheme was the first government's attempt to transfer the cost of higher education to students and their parents, although the loans were meant to only cover personal expenses such as accommodation, meals, textbooks and stationery, travelling and other effects; while the government continued to fully fund tuition and capitation. However, while higher education generally remained tuition free, the loan scheme heralded the advent of cost-sharing, not only in higher education, but in other sectors of education as well. The loan scheme was generously administered, as obtaining it was automatic. The socio-economic background of the applicant did not seem to matter much (Wangenge-Ouma and Nafukho 2011).

The Kenya government's shift in the funding policy in higher education seemed to coincide with extensive research findings on the contribution of education to economic growth, its costs and economic benefits (by level of education as a proxy for direct benefits), and rates of return. On the basis of such research as Woodhall points out that, 'the highest rates of return are

usually for primary education, followed by secondary education, with higher education apparently being the least profitable investment in terms of social return' (Woodhall 2003). Such a conclusion had far-reaching effects on some key international funding institutions. The World Bank, for example in its paper, 'Financing Education in Developing Countries', made some key recommendations, which included: recover the costs of higher education through user fees and reallocate these resources to the primary level; develop a credit market in higher education; and decentralise the management of schools and encourage private and community schools in order to increase competition and generate a demand-side push for better quality and efficiency.' The paper was emphatic that the funding arrangements at the time, contributed to a misallocation of resources devoted to education because higher education was the relatively less socially efficient (World Bank 1986). This position greatly contributed to the shift in donor priorities away from higher education to primary education, leading to more extensive cost-sharing in higher education, especially through the introduction of increases in tuitions and the use of student loans as opposed to grants and scholarships.

It was further reasoned that the argument that individual students or graduates should finance a greater share of the costs of higher education and that the share of the state should be reduced did not solely depend on the rate of return analysis. It is shown that many studies had concluded that high dependency on state funding were simply unsustainable considering the competing demands and the often declining budgetary expenditure in many African countries. In addition, there were also powerful equity arguments in favour of changing the balance between public and private finance, as participation in higher education was far much greater for children who came from upper income families, especially from urban areas who have access to high quality secondary education, than children from the poor, disadvantaged rural areas. It was noted that continued state financing was exacerbating inequalities (World Bank 1986).

In the World Bank's policy on education in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular made a number of recommendations which were supposed to improve both the internal and external efficiency of higher education in Africa. They included increasing student and staff ratios, expanding access for part-time fee-paying students, and assigning to non-public sources the full cost of housing, food and other welfare services provided to staff and students as well as expanding opportunities and improving quality by privatising institutions and functions. However, a more far-reaching recommendation was the one on cost-sharing or cost recovery. In particular, African governments were called upon to relieve the burden of public sources of financing higher education by increasing the participation of beneficiaries and their families (World Bank 1988). This paper

was key in setting a stage for major adjustments in public university education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Higher Education paper seemed to be a reinforcement of the previous paper, as it was noted that the extent of government involvement in higher education had far exceeded what was economically efficient as it had become a burden to the public finance. In this regard, countries were called upon to adopt policy reforms that could lower public costs to higher education which included cost-sharing and government withdrawal from meeting capital and recurrent expenditures (World Bank 1994).

In this regard, the Kenya government's shift in the financing of higher education since the early 1970s reflected the broad international thinking. It was in tandem with neo-liberal economic ideology which de-emphasised government intervention in the economy and a belief in progress through markets or deregulation rather than state control, liberalisation of trade and capital movement and privatisation of public enterprises and others. This was made quite explicit in the following statement:

...the central thrust of the new policies is to rely on market forces to mobilize resources for growth and development with the role of the central government increasingly confined to providing an effective regulatory framework and essential public infrastructure and social services. The government will limit direct participation in many sectors and instead promote private sector activities (Kiamba 2004).

In emphasising privatisation and marketisation, the neo-liberal ideology requires a significant withdrawal of the state in social provision through drastic reductions in social expenditure.

At the same time, the World Bank pushed through the cost sharing policies in higher education, by which parents and students had to assume a portion of the costs of higher education in the early 1990s, following the granting of an emergency loan of US\$ 55 million to finance public universities in Kenya (Nafukho 2004). With the usual characteristic of World Bank loans to poor countries, some conditionalities were attached to the loan, which included, the institution of new financing strategies for higher education. It actually made specific reference to cost-sharing. In this regard, the World Bank effectively prescribed reduced funding by government to the higher education sector and the introduction of cost-sharing. Which meant that due to the World Bank loan conditionalities as well as other related factors such as the poorly performing economy, and implementation of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), the Kenya government was literally forced to shift its education financing by reducing its expenditure to higher education. The government had therefore to

depart from its own previous form of cost-sharing initiated in 1974/75 which did not include the payment of university fees and introduced a direct form of university fee payment as part of the cost-sharing strategy beginning in the 1991/92 academic year. The new cost policy required parents and students to cover both tuition and student upkeep. This cost-sharing policy also witnessed the abolition of all personal allowances which students had been enjoying (Wangenge Ouma 2008).

It is important to also mention that before the World Bank demands to introduce a new cost-sharing policy, the Kenya government had been contemplating making changes in the financing of higher education, especially the discontinuation of tuition-free higher education. This was first signalled by the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on economic management which pointed out the need to put some tight limit on ministry expenditures which was expected to grow by less than 2 per cent a year of inflation through 1988-89. The paper particularly identified the ministries of education and health as targets for reduced recurrent expenditures (Republic of Kenya 1986). However, the government's Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988, formally abolished tuition-free higher education several years ahead of new form of cost-sharing put in place in 1992 (Republic of Kenya, 1988). It also needs to be pointed out that the change from free higher education to cost-sharing did not actually signal major financial responsibilities to parents and students. The cost-sharing seemed to go hand in hand with a heavy subsidisation of the system and low-level cost recovery. Heavy subsidies applied to all students admitted through the then Joint Admissions Board (JAB), which covered, among other things tuition and accommodation, irrespective of their ability to pay. Such subsidised students paid around US \$229 as tuition fees irrespective of their programme of study. At the same time, while public universities began levying fees for extra services such as food and accommodation, the charges were below the market prices, which meant that the government still continued to subsidise these services heavily.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that as changes were being effected in the state funding in higher education, the insatiable demand for it in the country continued to grow as most public universities enrolled more and more students well beyond their capacities. The government did not seem to respond to the situation with increased funding, but instead embarked on a policy of financial cutbacks. For example, as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), public funding of higher education averaged 0.94 per cent between 1996 and 2000 and declined to 0.74 per cent from 2001 to 2005. For the individual public universities, in particular, this meant that for the University of Nairobi, the decline from 1998 to 2005 was from 70 to 39 per cent

while Kenyatta University declined from 67 to 50 per cent (Wangenge-Ouma 2008). As a result of the state's insufficient allocations, many of the public universities were in a state of financial crisis from the 1990s through 2000s. The type of cost-sharing implemented by the Kenya government which ensured minimal financial contribution by students seemed to exacerbate the crisis. Consequently, most of the public universities could not meet their financial obligations and continued to pile pressure on the government to increase its expenditure on higher education.

In response to the universities' persistent pressure for more funding, the government began admonishing them to turn to other sources to meet their costs such as learning and research as well as capital development expenditure. Through policy papers, the government exhorted public universities to seek more funding from markets and related sources. For example, in the Master Plan, 1997 to 2010, public universities were called upon to develop non-public sources of their revenues, including income-generating activities such as returns from research and consultancies with industries and employers, services to the community, agro-based production, manufacturing for the market, including making equipment for use in schools, hiring out university facilities; grants and donations from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and well-wishers; and funding from alumni associations. Hence, the government pointedly discouraged public universities from solely relying on public sources and the nominal fees they charged government-subsidised students (Wangenge-Ouma 2008).

Research Activities and Output

As already discussed, among the key roles of African universities was the need to develop and promote knowledge through teaching and research. In this regard, it was an important function of universities to analyse, interpret, and explain the prerequisite conditions which would enable a society to rise to a higher quality of life for all its members (Yesufu 1973). African systems and institutions have the crucial role of knowledge generation, synthesis, adaptation and application to ensure the advancement of the national interest on all fronts be they economic, social, cultural as well as political. Central to such knowledge systems are the universities and their research and advanced training programmes. Africa's universities continue to provide the bulk of their research and the training of virtually all key echelons of personnel. Admittedly, alternative sites for the generation and adaptation of knowledge are emerging and assuming prominence in public research institutes, private research centres, firm-based research units, regional and sub-regional centres, non-governmental organisations and so on. However, the trend is only begin-

ning and has yet to pose a serious threat to the dominance of the universities as the core of knowledge generation, reproduction and dissemination system in Africa. In this regard, the strength of African universities and their research institutions is a key condition for the continent's development (Sawyer 2004). Hence, the formulation of appropriate policies and mobilisation of the necessary resources in the support of universities' research institutions has remained a key factor in development.

On the whole, since independence in the early sixties, most African universities have given a lot of prominence to research as a key function. Taking the example of the University of Nairobi, from the outset, it placed itself as an important centre of research by establishing some institutions which focused mainly on research. For instance, the Faculty of Education at Kenyatta University College, then a constituent college the university had the responsibility of training all undergraduate and post-graduate students in the country. One of its key departments was the Bureau of Educational Research which had the explicit task of conducting and promoting educational research. In addition, the bulk of academic staff in the university obtained their first degrees in the University of East Africa, with its constituent colleges at Makerere, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, and followed with Masters and Doctoral work at a diverse array of schools and departments abroad as well as at Nairobi.

It was, however, noted that while the university at the beginning encouraged research as a means of effecting change and demonstrating its relevance in the development of the country, the measure of its support for research through financial resources was generally weak. Although the University of Nairobi provided a number of staff establishment positions for the research institutions like the Bureau of Educational Research and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), it provided very modest funds for research itself. For example, by the late seventies the funds in the research vote ostensibly earmarked for allocation by the Deans' Research Committee were absorbed into the general running of a financially stricken institution. In the face of expanding enrolments and soaring costs, university administrators inevitably gave priority to teaching rather than research needs (Court 1983). Of course, the problem of financial resourcing was not entirely that of the university, but of the government. While the importance of research was very much emphasised in official pronouncements and echoed in the official documents like the Development Plans, the practice was quite contrary to the official rhetoric. Hence, the university was not allocated adequate funds for its key activities. The position of the university progressively got worse both in material and goodwill terms from 1982 following the failed coup d'état of August of that year which students and many academics seemed to welcome (Nkinyangi 1981).

When faced with budgetary problems and the reordering of priorities, therefore, the university administrators made research grants the first casualties whether already allocated or not. From the early 1980s, the finance officer froze the Deans' Research Grants to members of staff. This action virtually halted research production by members of the academic staff. At the Institute of Development Studies, the university's main centre for the conduct of social science research and one of the leading institutions in this particular area in Africa, serious research production by individual scholars or by the centre came to a complete standstill, giving way instead to consultancies and short-term contract research (Nkinyangi 1983). The research situation at Nairobi was further exacerbated by continued budgetary cutbacks throughout the 1990s, during which research virtually ceased being an important component of the institutions, except for a few projects largely funded by donor agencies.

Hence, Kenya, like many other African countries, ceded the strategic area of research under pressure from the international financial institutions, donor community and its weak economic situation. The deteriorating economic conditions combined with international donor agencies policy bias against public financing of higher education, seriously contributed to the under-sourcing of research. The underfunding of these institutions has continued since 1990s. Public or private resources devoted to research and research capacity building have remained inadequate in Kenya, just like in many other African universities. For example, the Association of African Universities (AAU) study found that by 1993-1994, none of the responding universities spent up to 4 per cent of their recurrent budgets on research; research funding generally ranged between 0.33 and 3.78 per cent. Even then, much of the research was funded through donor grants (Sawyer 2004). Closely related to funding of research activities is the provision research infrastructure, such as laboratories, equipment, libraries, and an effective system of information storage retrieval and utilisation. These include, appropriate management systems and policies which facilitate and support research enterprise, including incentives that recognise and reward high calibre research.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the provision of more revenue through parallel programmes in some universities, especially in Kenya, has ignited an infrastructure construction boom in some of the public universities which had stalled since the 8-4-4 construction project in the 1980s due to public funding cutbacks, especially for capital development. Kenyatta University for example, has constructed a 5-storey post-modern library, a new administration block, a graduate school centre, among other facilities using internally generated resources, while Nairobi University is constructing a multi-storey plaza using similar resources as well as some external support in addition to

purchasing some properties for academic use in Nairobi. The two universities have also used additional revenues to undertake repairs and maintenance of physical facilities which generally were quite dilapidated as a result of underfunding by the exchequer. They also now look much neater and better maintained than a few years back, but little finding has been tailored towards research. However, they continue to face some serious challenges with regard to the provision of equipment and specialised teaching and learning resources due to very high student enrolments.

Among other key challenges of the research enterprise in African universities is the management of postgraduate programmes. On the whole, there are serious weaknesses in postgraduate programmes of most African universities which strongly limits institutional research capacity and development. While there is a general lack of relevant data which makes it difficult to confirm the actual numbers of postgraduate students in the various universities, the Association of African Universities mentioned above found out that, in the early 1990s, the proportion of graduate students out of the total enrolment at the responding institutions was between 7 and 1 per cent at a Francophone university with enrolment exceeding 40,000 students (Shabani 1996). At the University of Nairobi for example, postgraduate research also became a casualty of government financial cutbacks in higher education. In the early 1980s, both the government and university suspended funding postgraduate students. The government also followed by scrapping scholarships for graduate studies. The main effect of these decisions was to change the nature of the postgraduate programmes in the revenue earning faculties and schools. The withdrawal of state funding of postgraduate education left only two alternatives for faculties and schools which wanted to initiate them. They were either to turn to donor support to continue with research-based postgraduate programmes or launch course work-based postgraduate degrees which required no research and could be funded on the basis of tuition from fee-paying students. The general trend has been that only a few strategic departments and units can secure donor funding to continue with research-based postgraduate programmes. However, most faculties and schools opted for non-research postgraduate programmes. The non-research programmes are intended to meet the market demands.

In addition, the increasing number of postgraduate students poses a major challenge of supervision given the limited number of qualified staff. The poor state of postgraduate programmes is a reflection of their underfunding as well as poor research content. The graduate stipend was withdrawn in most institutions, and where it is still provided, it is not enough to support full-time study, while the job market, to a large extent, does not adequately reward advanced study. Apart from the failure to ensure the training of adequate teaching staff,

the inadequate numbers of graduate students at any one time in any institution implies not only the absence the natural foot soldiers of any research enterprise, but also a severe shortage of potential teaching assistants required to help the release of more of the time for senior faculty staff for undertaking research (Sawyer 2004).

However, while the University of Nairobi and other public universities in Kenya have put in place research policy documents which places considerable emphasis on the role of research for development and established units for coordination of research work as well as establishing the office of the deputy vice-chancellor in charge of research innovation and outreach, what seems unclear from such research policies is how resources will be mobilised to implement them as continued reliance on the government makes such lofty plans a pipe dream. Although these universities are commended for making efforts to generate funds for research locally, the funding has generally remained inadequate in comparison to their expenditure on infrastructure development. The University of Nairobi, for example, was recently reported to have raised around 8 billion Kenya Shillings for research in the last ten years and has undertaken a good number of research projects with the help of donor funding. Part of the key research challenges is not only the non-availability of resources, but also the lack of the research culture among the academic staff (*Daily Nation* 2015). A vice-chancellor is on record to have observed that despite the considerable amount of ongoing research at the University of Nairobi, most academic staff seem to view research largely as a vehicle for upward mobility on the academic ladder. Consequently, often after one has been promoted to the level of full professor, there appears to be reduced interest in research and publications due to lack of incentive for it (University of Nairobi 2012).

As Munene and Otieno have pointed out, Kenyan universities' shift towards low-cost high-demand teaching programmes puts at risk a fundamental role of universities in knowledge production through a culture of quality research. This is a serious threat to the reputation of these institutions. This is because as the demand for twining academic programmes to the labour market's immediate requirements increases and as government subsidies to public universities continue to dwindle, the temptation to expand this type of knowledge production will continue to be irresistible. The implication of this is that the country's public universities will be failing increasingly in fulfilling their role as producers and disseminators of research knowledge. This is because budgetary allocations for research both internally and externally have declined considerably and undertaking research is no longer considered to be a key function in the operations of public universities in the country (Munene and Otieno 2008).

Summary and Conclusion

With some specific examples from Kenyan universities, this paper has reviewed the role of the post-independence African university in research and development and the effect of neo-liberalism and the funding on these activities. It was established that since their inception in the colonial era, the academic purpose of universities in Africa has remained essentially the same with other universities the world over, namely, to teach and advance knowledge by disinterested research and to maintain standards of teaching at a level which could be clearly related to those established in other countries. Following the achievement of independence, universities were designated as ‘development universities,’ which meant, they were expected to undertake research and participate in the development of their respective countries. These expectations stressed the key responsibility of the university as an institution serving its society in direct, immediate and practical ways that could lead to the improved well-being of the people. Most African universities tried in a variety of ways to fulfil this notion of the development university. However, due to inherent internal structures as well as the prevailing political climate, they failed to emerge as ‘development universities.’

However, such challenges to the development university did not did not totally eradicate the central role of the African universities in research and development. Much is expected of universities of the twenty-first century in all countries. African universities, like others all over the world, are required to respond to a variety of needs and fulfil sometimes incompatible objectives; and this is not a matter of external demands, but of a multifaceted commitment, rooted in the traditions of the universities themselves and of the academic profession. The paper further demonstrates that the neo-liberal ideology was responsible for the significant withdrawal of the state in social provision through drastic reductions in social expenditure including the funding of education. This has contributed to a drastic reduction in public expenditure in higher education. The reduction in funding has had a far-reaching effect on the quantity and quality of research in most African universities. This virtual lack of research has a serious implication on the role of the university. It means that public universities in Africa are increasingly losing out on their role as producers and disseminators of researched knowledge for the development of their countries.

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