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UTILIZATION OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Research is one of the hallmarks of University activities. As a result, numerous research findings and discoveries abound in a number of Universities in West Africa. Some of these findings are ground breaking while some are not necessarily so. The impact of a University must be felt within and outside its community. Apart from the production of man-power and the involvement of universities in community services, university findings in West Africa, like their counter-part in the developed world, ought to be utilized for national development. This is against the backdrop of existing practices where most university research findings and discoveries only end up in the University libraries. In the developed world, research findings play vital role in the socio-economic and political development of such nations. But same cannot be said of some African countries where research product and findings tend to be largely seen as only "academic exercise". But the developed world has gone a step further by utilizing academic resources from tertiary institutions in enhancing every aspect of their national life. The paper advocates a University-Stakeholders summits to address the issue of numerous research findings and discoveries, many of which are presently largely under utilized. Since a number of findings and discoveries are known to exist in most of these universities, they should be harnessed, processed, sieved and turned around for developmental activities in Africa and beyond.

Introduction

Research is generally seen as the systematic investigation for the establishment of novel facts through scientific method. According to Wikipedia (2010:1),

the primary purpose for applied research is discovering, interpreting, and the development of methods and systems for

the advancement of human knowledge on a wide variety of scientific matters of our world and universe.

Research is one of the hallmarks of university activities. As a result, numerous research findings and discoveries abound in number of universities in a Africa. Some of these findings are ground breaking while others are not necessarily so. But the impact of a university must be felt within and outside its community. In this vein, Kellogg forum on Higher Education (2010) submitted that American public universities have a long tradition of contributing to social economic development in the United States. Kellong forum on higher education goes further to say that since World War I, Universities have become the major instrument for any country to achieve its goals in national development in terms of "human capital, economy, social improvement, democracy building, national defence and other areas".

The roles of universities in national development seem undermined in Africa. For instance, apart from the production of man-power and the involvement of universities in community services, research findings in Africa, like their counter-part in developed and developing countries ought to be utilized for national development. This is against the backdrop of existing practices where most university research findings and discoveries in Nigeria and most African countries end up in the university libraries. Chachage (2006:6) affirms that the social responsibility of intellectual is embedded in the rehabilitation of academic practices which are sensitive to human predicament and championing social reforms capable of fulfilling human needs.

In the developed world, research findings play vital role in the socio-economic and political development of the nations. Many of the most important discoveries which advanced the course of mankind on planet earth were achieved through the effort of researchers in universities. According to Compass Newspapers (2010:15). such discoveries include:

1. Understanding the scientific method-by Francis Bacon
2. The law of motion - by **Sir Isaac Newton**
3. The discovery of the electron - by **J.J. Thomas**
4. The splitting of the atom - by **Ernest Ruther ford**
5. The splitting of the nucleus - by **Sir John Cockcroft and Earnest Walton**

6. The unification of electromagnetism - by **James Clerk Maxwell**
7. The discovery of hydrogen - by **Henry Cavendish**
8. Theory of evolution by natural selection - by **Charles Darwin**
9. The Turing Machine - a basic model for computation - by **Alan Turing**
10. The structure of the DNA - by **Francis Crick and James D. Watson**
11. The pioneering quantum Mechanics-by **Paul Dirac**

The above scenario seems a far dream from most universities in Africa where research products and findings tend to be largely seen as mere "academic exercise". In what seems like a reaction to this phenomenon, (Sutz 2010:1) declares that universities in developing countries need to transform themselves into "developmental universities" in order to contribute to the society through the production and distribution of knowledge. To achieve this, says Sutz, industry and government need to show readiness to take new responsibilities of dialoging within and outside the universities, because:

central to social economic development is the role played by universities as they adjust to and find their place in the changing national innovation system

Hwang (2006:2) also subscribes to the fact that there should be collaboration among government, non governmental agencies, research organizations, the universities and funding agencies to achieve community growth. In the same vein, Troen (1992) highlighted the Israeli situation where universities are used as important resource for the cultural rebirth of the Jewish nation and the physical development of the country. In addition, Mamphela (2006:16) had warned that University's effectiveness in development is predicated largely on its readiness in adapting to the fast changing global society that shall dominate the 21st century.

The non utilization of most research findings in universities in Africa has become a cause for concern to many academics. For example, West Africa has over 300 tertiary institutions where research activities continue unabated day and night. But many of these research findings and discoveries are not harnessed nor

processed and turned around for developmental activities in Africa and beyond. Even Ogunkola (1997:127) stated that:

The performance of Sub-Sahara Africa economies has not responded appreciably to policy prescription especially those associated with the economic reforms that were introduced since the early 1980s

Of what use is a research result that is locked up in the library and not used, disseminated and applied for societal development? For how long will African countries continue to wait for foreigners to develop Africa when the university's activities are neglected? Presently there are numerous factors militating against the application of research findings for socio-economic and political developments in most African nations. Prominent among them are:

1. Political instability
2. Non dissemination of research findings
3. Poor funding of universities
4. Politicization of university education
5. Law patronage of university research products

Political Instability

It is no secret that most countries in Africa are bedeviled by political instability. Until very recently, it was not unusual to wake up and behold a set of people suddenly taking over the instrument of governance from the legitimate one in power. This of course means, the abandonment of existing policies for new ones. Perhaps, this led Odusile (2001:98) to disclose that "instability in programmes organizations "even when implementation has finally taken place". Even where there are "stable democracies" in some African countries, some of the leaders perpetuate themselves in office that they think more of their survival in office than the socio-economic and political development of their country.

Non-dissemination of Research Findings

It is a common occurrence to read of so many research breakthrough in foreign journals, magazines, newspapers electronic media among others. But this cannot be said about research findings in most African countries where research products also exist but most times, kept in the "cooler". This practice does not

augur well for both the universities and the society which the universities are supposed to serve.

Low patronage of University Research

Perhaps, it is a question of a prophethess not having honor in their homes. Or how else can one explain the reasons why government and her agencies and non government organizations tend to have little or no regard for researches carried out in most universities in African. The impact of a university is supposed to be felt within and outside its community.

Politicization of University Education

Politicization of university education is a new development in Africa, especially in Nigeria, where some universities are established to satisfy the political yearnings of some tribes. It is now a common occurrence for a governor or an individual to suddenly declare that he has established a university in his area – in fact, some politicians employ the establishment of universities as political gimmick. It is good to establish universities, but such universities must be adequately funded and must function as conventional universities where researches that will benefit the community, the nation and the world at large is encouraged and utilized.

Poor funding of Universities

According to Onuka (2005), what universities receives in Nigeria is a far cry from what could meet their needs. Also Adesina (2006: 18-19) disclosed that, from Europe to North America and Southern Africa, national research findings from public and private sources are put in place for higher institutions. Although the funding situation in the federal universities in Nigeria have appreciated in recent years, it is still not comparable to what most universities in the developed world and some developing countries receive for developmental activities. If universities in some African countries were appropriately funded, perhaps, they could go a step further by either commercializing or actualizing their research products for national development without waiting for government or other agencies to initiate the patronage.

The way forward

Since a number of useful research findings are known to exist in universities in Africa, this paper is advocating that:

1. The universities affected by this predicament should set up **committees** within their universities to take critical look and identify those research findings and products that may be germane to socio-economic and political development of the Africa continent and the world at large.
2. A University-Stake holders summit should hold to address the issue of numerous research findings and discoveries, many of which are presently largely under utilized.
3. There is also a need to encourage university-industry collaboration in research product utilization.
4. Universities should look at the possibility of having experimental communities (outside the university) where research findings are actualized. The success obtained in such communities, in the long run, may become sign post of university developmental activities. This may attract national and international attention for further societal development.
5. It has become imperative for the international community to persuade government and non government organizations in African countries, especially West Africa, to allocate adequate fund to university education. Proper funding of university education will lead to pragmatic actions for developmental activities in African.
6. There is of course, the need for universities in Africa to reappraise their curriculum to meet with current societal demands. Such revision of the curriculum should be explicit on the practicability and applicability of research findings for national development. The case of China is a good example for all of us. The Chinese economy has been turned around through concerted efforts within the country and it presently ranked one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Africa can borrow a leaf from China.
7. There is also need for each university to set up a fact-finding team of academics to visit some top universities abroad. This team is to find out how universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and a host of other universities have been able to positively affect their societies and the world and their

research works. The universities in Africa can borrow a leaf from this world class universities and help the people to Africa in boosting the socio-economic and political development of the continent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, intellectuals in Africa cannot fold their hands when most African communities are seriously affected by abject poverty. Researchers must play a very significant role in taking Africa to the higher level of development. The universities cannot shy away from their social responsibilities. The universities must be seen to contributing in all ramifications to the development of the African continent. The existing research findings and products in these universities can go a long way in ameliorating some of the problems in Africa --- if they are harnessed and utilized for the well being of the people. The universities should not be islands separated from the societies which they are supposed to serve. The impact of universities must be felt within and outside their communities. Of what use are research findings that are kept in the 'cooler' while the African continent is crying for upliftment of the standard of life? Shall the continent continue to wait for foreigners to develop Africa? For how long shall the continent continue to wait to be delivered from hunger and starvation? The time has come for intellectuals in Africa to help turn the situation round in Africa for the better, through application of research findings, products or discoveries.

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