FOUNDATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

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Introduction

Tertiary education covers all categories of formal instruction following secondary schooling. At the lowest level, tertiary education is provided in higher colleges (such as the Yaba Higher College,), technical colleges, colleges of technology, colleges of education (such as the six colleges of education in Botswana, and the Federal and State Colleges of Education in Nigeria) and institutes of health sciences (as in Botswana, Nigeria, etc), leading to the award of certificates or diplomas in various disciplines. At a higher level, tertiary education is provided in universities, leading to the award of Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees. Our emphasis in this paper is on university education. The word, 'university', derives from the Latin word *universitas*, meaning a group of scholars or intellectuals, men and women from all parts of the world (universe) gathered for the pursuit of research, the sharing of the findings of such research and the dissemination of knowledge to others outside the citadel of learning (Sinclair 2000; Boyd 1966). Part of the educational development of the late medieval period was the rise of universities, the earliest ones being at Bologna (in Northern Italy, founded in 1088) and Paris, followed by Oxford and Cambridge in the 12th and 13th centuries respectively (Boyd, 1966).

The Early Universities

Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone

The earliest university in Africa was the University of Timbuktu where Mansa Musa and Ali- Maghili were known to have taught Islamic Law and Literature. However, historians of higher education in Africa tend to refer to Fourth Bay College, Sierra Leone, as the earliest institution of higher education in Africa, apparently because it was the first university of the Western type. It was opened in 1827, but it did not acquire a university status until May 1876, when it was affiliated to the University of Durham (Ajayi, Goma and Johnson, 1996, p. 23). On the institution's curriculum, Ajayi, Goma and Johnson had this to say:

> *The curriculum was drawn up in Durham. Durham teachers were to set the papers and mark the scripts. For both the B.A. (pass) degree and the Licentiate of Theology, the needs of candidates for the Ministry of the Church of England dictated the contents of the course- Biblical Studies, the Classics, English History up to the Conquest, and Mathematics. The only adaptation that was possible was to supplement it with a non-examining course in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Proposals for Law, Medicine, Science, Agriculture, Economics, Engineering and Architecture, not to mention African Studies, were washed off (p. 23).*

Fourah Bay remained the only university in West Africa until 1948 when the University College, Ibadan, was founded. It was a product of Christian missionaries and colonial Government efforts.

UNISA and Fort Hare

The opening of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Fort Hare University were also the results of Christian Missionary and colonial Government efforts. As a result of private initiatives, some of the high profile colleges in South Africa tried to push beyond secondary education. UNISA grew out of the University of Cape of Good Hope. It became the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 1916. Similarly, the Victoria College at Stellenboch became the University of Fort Hare in 1969. UNISA and Fort Hare provided the

stimuli for the establishment of other universities in South Africa, to serve the varying needs of the white, coloured and black populations in South Africa. Today, there are 23 universities in South Africa, some of these being the products of merging two or more tertiary institutions, as part of the transformation process and government's cost-saving initiatives (Ajayi *et al,* 1996).

Foundations of Tertiary Education in Africa

The success of Fourah Bay, UNISA and Fort Hare encouraged the Africans in West and Southern Africa to desire more institutions of higher learning. This prompted the colonial administrations in both regions to facilitate the opening of more universities. For West Africa, two commissions (Elliot and Asquith Commissions) were set up concurrently in 1943. The Elliot Commission was mandated to report on the number of higher educational institutions that could be established in West Africa, while the Asquith Commission would report on the type of relationship that should exist between the proposed colonial university colleges and the University of London. While the Elliot Commission recommended the establishment of a university college in West Africa, to be cited at Ibadan, the Asquith Commission recommended the implementation of a 'scheme of special relationship' with the University of London. The establishment of the University College, Ibadan, in 1948, was therefore the outcome of the Elliot Commission Report of 1945, while the scheme of special relationship with the University of London was the outcome of the Asquitht Commission Report of the same year (Taiwo, 1980; Ajayi *et al,* 1996; Nduka, 1964). The opening of the University College, Ibadan influenced the growth and development of similar institutions in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.

The Growth of the African University System

The experience gained during the colonial period propelled the various governments and peoples in Africa to aspire to have institutions of higher learning in their respective countries. In Nigeria, for example, the Ashby commission was set up in April 1959 to conduct investigations into Nigeria's need in the field of post school certificate and higher education over the next twenty

years (Nigeria, 1960). Following the government's acceptance of the Report in September 1960, on the eve of Nigerian independence, the Nigerian Government embarked on an aggressive drive for the provision of higher education in Nigeria from the time of independence on 1st October 1960 (Crowder, 1960). One of the first steps in this direction was the upgrading of the University College Ibadan, to the status of a full fledged university in September 1962. The first author of this chapter was one of the first graduates of the new institution in June 1965. This was the beginning of the birth of the so-called "Ashby Universities", more popularly known as the "first generation universities" in Nigeria. The example of Nigeria was followed by other countries in English speaking Africa where the wind of change was blowing political independence and education for self-employment, self-reliance and responsible citizenship. Between 1960 and the year 2006, therefore, every independent country in Africa had its own university or universities. Table 1 below shows the growth of the African higher education system.

Table 1
The Growth of the African University System, 1827-2006*

Countries	Periods				
	1827-1900	1901-1950	1951-2000	2001-2006	Total
Botswana	-	-	1+	-	1
Ghana	-	-	5	-	5
Kenya	-	2	7	-	9
Lesotho	-	-	1	-	1
Malawi	-	-	2	-	2
Mauritius	-	-	2	-	2
Namibia	-	-	1	-	1
Nigeria	-	1**	35	35	71
S-Leone	1	-	3		4
S-Africa	-	8	9	6	23++
Sudan	-	2	28	-	30
Swaziland	-	-	1	-	1
Tanzania	-	-	8	2	10
Uganda	-	-	11	-	11
Zambia	-	-	2	-	2
Zimbabwe	-	-	6	3	9

*****Source: Commonwealth Universities Year Book.** Anglophone Africa only.

** University College, Ibadan, opened in 1948; became a full fledged university in September 1962

+ University of Botswana started in January 1964 as a constituent part of the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland (UBBS); became part of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) in 1966; University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) in 1976; University of Botswana (UB) in 1982 (University of Botswana, 2006/ 2007)..

+ + As a result of the merging of tertiary institutions in South Africa in the years preceding 2006, the total number was reduced from 32 to 23.

Emergence of Private Higher Education Institutions

Privatisation of Education

The role of every responsible government is to provide education for all its citizens from primary to university, but with dwindling resources, most countries in Africa were unable to afford this luxury, particularly in the 1990s. One logical way out was to shift a considerable part of the education burden away from government with the Jomtien Declaration of Education for all in 1990, African governments committed itself to the provision of compulsory and free basic education for all children, but gradually evolved strategies for involving citizens in the financing of higher education. The most outstanding strategy was privatization. This has taken different forms, including: *Privatisation of services and cost sharing*. This is more related to academic programmmes. Cost sharing could be of two forms – cost recovery and delayed payment. Cost recovery is effected mainly through levying fees on direct beneficiaries, that is, collecting education levies or school fees from students enrolled for various programmes offered by the universities. 'Delayed payment' refers to the scheme of supporting students through loans, which they had to repay at a later date. In the 1990s, the levying of fees became a very common feature in many countries and student loans were embraced by many countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi, etc. Some countries, such as Uganda and Kenya (Court, 1999; Kubler & DeLuca, 2006) introduced a system of private/ sponsored students where the private students paid a high rate of fees, while the government-sponsored students paid lower fees.

***Public financed privatization*:** The voucher system is an example of promoting competition through public funding. This implied that some private institutions received public funding. Such institutions would charge lower fees. The private institutions that did not receive public funding would charge higher fees or levies, and they became more popular with parents who could afford to pay such fees or levies. Therefore, the 'voucher system' permitted parents to choose schools and universities for their children. Some states in the USA, such as Florida, had earlier legislated on this issue. It was expected that the 'voucher system' would be copied in other states in the USA and in other English-speaking countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. New Zealand embraced a voucher system on a big scale in the 1990s, but realized after a decade that it led to the widening of educational disparities between groups. To the new universities in Africa- struggling to widen access to their academic programmes, the 'voucher system' was not an acceptable option.

***Corporatization of universities*:** Some universities have established cost units, companies or corporations with operational autonomy. The corporation of public universities allows them to borrow money, acquire investment shares and enter into business ventures to meet a major share of operating expenses. Many universities in Africa had by 2006 established cost centres at either departmental or university level to regulate income generated from various sources. For example, the Dar-es-Salaam University, Tanzania, had created for- profit companies within the university. These units/centres enjoyed a high degree of operational autonomy as in the case of private companies and corporations. (Varghese, 2004, p. 7).

The Role of the Private Sector in Higher Education
As in 2006, there were three distinct types of private higher education institutions in Africa. These were:

i. *State-Supported Private institutions*
These were the institutions that received some financial support from government. In return, their activities were regulated by government and its agents. Activities so regulated included fees payable by students and curricular offerings. This type was common

where the Federal/Central government supported state-owned or individual- owned private tertiary institutions.

ii. *Not- for- Profit Institutions*
Private institutions that had no profit-making motives were owned and operated by trusts that relied heavily on endowments and fees collected from students. They were mostly self-financing institutions, common with religious organizations

iii. *Profit-Making Higher Institutions*
These were established with the main objective of making money. For-profit institutions were, and they still are, the most common in Africa, particularly in countries where the demand for tertiary/ university education is higher than the supply, for example Nigeria.

Growth and Expansion of Higher Education in Africa
The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education shows that they were the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa at the time of this study (2006). These countries had a low base in 1980. Despite the progress made, the enrolment ratio still remains at 3.9 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared with a GER of 51.6 percent in the developed world in 1997.

Table 2
Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) for Higher Education

	1980	1997
World total	12.3	17.4
Developed countries	36.2	51.6
Least developed countries	1.8	3.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.7	3.9
Arab States	9.6	14.9
Latin America and Caribbean	13.7	19.4
East Asia and Oceania	3.8	10.8
South Asia	4.3	7.2

Source: USIS 2003

The Sub-Saharan African countries had one of the lowest GERs in tertiary education. In 2000, the GER in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was 3.5% only. In 1970, a majority of the countries in SSA had an enrolment ratio less than one percent. The situation had changed considerably in the three decades preceding 996. No country (for which data were available) had reported an enrolment ratio of less than one percent in 2000 (Table 3). A majority of the African countries in 2000 had an enrolment ratio of less than five percent. This, no doubt, was a positive development and indicated the progress of higher education. In this region, however, the distance between African countries and countries in other regions had widened due to the slow progress made in this region. This is reflected in terms of variation in GER. A more detailed analysis would indicate that most of the countries in Africa had enrolment ratios of less than five percent in year 2000.

Table 3
Gross Enrolment Ratio for Higher for Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

	1980	**1990**	**2000**
Botswana	1,2	3,2	5,0
Ghana	1,6	1,4	3,0
Kenya	0,9	1,6	3,0
Lesotho	1,0	1,3	3,0
Malawi	0,5	0,6	...
Mauritius	1,0	3,5	11,0
Namibia	...	3,3	6,0
Nigeria	2,7	4,1	...
Sierra Leone	0,8	1,3	2,0
South Africa	...	13,2	15,0
Sudan	1,7	3,0	7,0
Swaziland	3,6	4,1	5,0
Uganda	0,5	1,2	3,0
Zambia	1,5	2,3	2,0
Zimbabwe	1,3	5,2	4,0

Sources: (UNESCO, 1999)   ... figures not available

The GER in higher education remained low in most of the sampled countries. In a majority of the countries, only two countries (South Africa and Mauritius) had GERs higher than 10 percent. This clearly shows the urgent need for these countries to bridge the gap in enrolment between developed and developing countries. UNESCO data on higher education show that there is an urgent need for countries in the African region to expand their enrolment in higher education. The growth of the private sector is seen as one of the viable alternatives.

The Growth of Private Higher Education Institutions

Private higher education is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing segments of post-secondary education in early at the turn of the 21st century (Altbach, 1999). There are numerous reasons for their emergence on a large scale (Varghese, 2004):

1. The inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing general demand for higher education has necessitated the entry of the private sector in order to expand access to higher education.

2. The changing political view of large scale public subsidies to social sectors will reduce investment possibilities in the 'productive sectors' and hence the overall growth potentials of the economy.

3. In many countries, the demand for courses and subjects of study had changed and public universities were thus unable to respond to this demand.

4. In countries where the public sector is critisised for inefficiency, the private sector is increasingly promoted for its efficiency in operation.

5. In many centrally planned economies, the transition from state planning to market forces was associated with the expansion of the private sector in higher education. In fact, privatization of education – especially higher education - was an integral part of the reform measures and, at times, of the conditionality for receiving external funding support during the transition period.

Kenya is one of the few countries where private universities have a longer history and co-existed with public universities. In Kenya, the *Kamunge Report* (Presidential Working Party on Education, 1988) recommended cost sharing in education and the establishment of private and *Harambe* institutions. In 1991, the World Bank, in advancing credit assistance, prevailed upon the government to restrict the growth of public universities to no more than three percent per annum up to the 2017. These developments encouraged the development of a large number of private universities and institutions in Kenya.

Nigeria had a long history of legislation in favour of private higher education institutions. Although initiated in the 1980s, the aspirations for the establishment of private higher education institutions became legal and authorized only in the 1990s. When the law on private higher education became effective in the 1990s, many private higher education institutions were established during the period (Jibril, 2003).

In Uganda too, the legislative measures on private higher education institutions got momentum only in the 1990s.

Size and Spread of Private Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE) in Africa

Today, the private sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries in Africa. This is more so in terms of the number of such institutions. Indeed, by 2006, the number of private universities had outnumbered the public universities in many countries, particularly in Nigeria, where the resources are apparently unlimited. However, in many instances, private universities continued to be small and they accounted for a relatively lower share of total enrolment. Initially, Kenya led the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa. Nigeria and Kenya were soon joined by Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Cameroon, etc. In general, Francophone African countries lagged behind their Anglophone counterparts in terms of the move towards the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa (Levy, 2003). As at 2006, the Sub-Saharan countries had more than 100 private universities, and more than

half of them were established in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1999, nearly 65 private universities were established in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2002). It is difficult to obtain information on private sector institutions in many countries. Table 4 below provides information on the limited number of countries. The number of private higher education institutions is large in many countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Tanzania, etc. In many countries the private institutions outnumber the public universities and institutions of higher education. However, in terms of enrolment, the public institutions still dominate the scene in Africa (NUC 1998a, 1998b, 2002. 2003).

Table 4
Private Higher Education Institutions and Universities in Africa (2003)

Country	Private
Benin	27
Cameroon	17
Ghana	28
Nigeria	13
Kenya	14
Senegal	48
Tanzania	10
Uganda	15
Zimbabwe	4

Source: (Teferra and Altbach, 2003)

Ownership of Institutions of Private Higher Education
The ownership pattern of private institutions of higher education varies among countries. Basically, there were six types of such institutions, as follows:

i. PIHEs operating like multinationals;
ii. PIHEs operating in collaboration with foreign institutions;

iii.   Foreign collaborations established through the government or public universities;

iv.   Religious organizations;

v.   Private firms established by nationals and operating within the national confine;

vi.   Collaboration within institutions of the same country. (Varghese, 2004):

Current Opportunities

Most countries in Africa are currently at peace, both internally, and with one another. Universities in Africa therefore have the needed peaceful, social and political environment to develop as centres of excellence in a variety of disciplines. Countries like Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Nigeria are also to a high degree economically stable. Universities in Africa have the opportunity to use this economic stability to develop and market their programmes. Human resources are also, to a large extent, available to push the universities forward. Further, the universities in Africa have the global market at hand to draw highly qualified academic and top management staff. With the steady growth in population and the consistent growth and development of the secondary school systems in Anglophone African countries, the universities have the opportunity to search for and draw adequate number of students from a readily available pool of qualified candidates (World Bank 1994, 1995; Abagi and Nzomo, 2001; AAU 2004; Court 1999; Kubler & DeLuca, 2006; Jibiri 2003; NUC, 1996; Tembo, 1984).

Current Constraints to Development

The continued disturbances in Sierra Leone, Niger Delta, North-Western Nigeria and Sudan have the potential to militate against the development of higher education in those areas. Also, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the infected and the affected is clearly a disturbing factor. In spite of the buoyant and stable economies, some of them remain poor, with a high proportion of the population living below the poverty level. In some cases , unstable political and unwholesome social environment have caused some able bodied Africans to migrate to other more politically stable neighbouring countries. All

these tend to threaten the survival of the university system in the affected countries, stalling the wheels of progress in the various universities (Kelly, 1971; Delors, 1998; Graham-Brown, 1991; The World Bank; 1994).

Challenges for the Future

The political class in English-speaking African countries does recognize the importance of higher education but tends to concentrate more on the provision of basic education, which is believed to have greater potential in alleviating or reducing poverty. In effect, there are challenges that the universities have to face for their future survival and development. These include the challenges of:

- developing strategies to handle the declining capacity for teaching and research;
- controlling the internal and external efficiency mechanisms in teaching and the assessment process;
- adopting appropriate strategies that would enable respective countries achieve the goal of greater efficiency, standard, quality and equity in higher education;
- differentiating institutional missions;
- mobilising greater private financing, including cost sharing between the universities, parents, industry and the alumni associations;
- providing financial support for needy students (e.g. fixed repayment loan schemes);
- devising more resource allocation and utilization formulae;
- devising a sustainable staff recruitment and retention plan;
- utilising a more effective and flawless staff appraisal and assessment technique; and.
- making distance learning and Open University instruction available to all prospective learners who are unable to register for full time studies (World Bank, 1994, 1995; Williamson. 2006).

Conclusion

Upon the foundations of higher education in Africa, as highlighted above, giant strides have been taken in most African countries, including Nigeria, to develop and manage the higher education, particularly university, system. Universities in Africa have the opportunities to grow and develop into **centres of excellence** in various disciplines; recruit and retain highly qualified staff; resolve the issues of access, quality and standard; forge closer links with regional and international institutions; engage in a variety of fund-raising activities; diversify its academic programmes so that products of the institutions could be employable; and take advantage of the prevalence and demands of Performance Management System (PMS) in many universities, particularly in Southern African countries (for example Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa), to intensify their staff's research activities. However, there are constraints they have to grapple with, such as the impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic and insufficient funds for research and conferences; problem of effective implementing PMS (where they are in practice) and the maintenance of a sustainable assessment practice in all universities. African universities have, *inter alia,* the challenge of developing their respective institutions to the level of **centres of excellence** in a variety of disciplines and producing graduates who would be able to compete for jobs with their counterparts at the international level.

Further research is needed to update this paper, to include the developments that have taken place in the various African countries, particularly the English-speaking countries of Africa, since 2006. The place of the private tertiary institutions in the development of higher education in Africa, particulary in Nigeria, is another area that requires extensive research.

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