

Developing Innovative Partnerships and Programmes to Deliver High Quality Affordable Education Ecosystems in Sub-Saharan Africa

By

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Introduction

Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, has come a long way. From days of colonialism, slavery and slave-trade, zero infrastructural development (as per western indicators) to a continent with 54 independent countries, regional economic blocks, modest strides in educational development and the economic emancipation of the people.

In spite of all the strides mentioned above, Africa is still far from getting out of the woods. The continent is heavily threatened by economic strangulation; political instability; conflicts and terrorism; fragility of some of our nations; endemic corruption; geopolitical imbalances and hatred; huge capacity development needs; extreme poverty; a preponderance of unemployed, underemployed and unemployable youths.

The data available indicate that as at January 2015 over 10 million seek employment annually and that 60 per cent of the unemployed are youths. A lot of inequalities exist and the gap between the haves and have-nots continue to widen as wealth is concentrated in the hands of a privileged few who continue to bleed the resources of their countries and communities at a level unimaginable in the 21st century. This is, of course, predicated upon by the exploitation of the illiteracy of the people in a continent where at least half of the 1 billion people are still illiterate. Africa has the world's highest illiteracy rates, and suffers from the disadvantages of high demographic multiplication.

Several African countries are amongst the fastest growing economies in the world today and yet Sub-Saharan Africa is home to at least 30 per cent of the world's poorest people. It is recorded that, as at today, Africa has at least six out of 10 most unequal countries in the world. In order to survive the 21st century development imperatives, some of the urgent needs of Sub-Saharan Africa include, but not limited to, the following:

- Building of very strong economic foundation;
- Economic integration regionally and continentally;
- Massive job creation;
- Embarking on effective food security measures;
- Health and environmental provisions;
- Innovations and creativity buoyed by education;
- Energy reforms and directing attention to combating climate change; and
- Massive investment in education, especially tertiary education.

Africa must pull itself out of the depressing situation of an average GDP per capita of less than \$350 in a world economy where the global GDP per capita is about \$950. As quoted by Juniata and Namata (2015), Dr Akinwumi Adesina, the newly appointed President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), has opined that we need a "new Africa with prosperous, sustainable and inclusive growth; one that is peaceful, secure and united, regionally integrated and globally competitive". Indeed, the joint initiative by the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) has set the Agenda for the continent of Africa in a document called, *The Africa We want*. The initiative has prescribed that by the year

2063 there should be 'created an Africa of our dreams that is prosperous, healthy, vigorous, creative and exciting' (Versi, 2015). To achieve this, as has been done in other parts of the world, Africa must re-focus on using education as the fundamental and virile instrument for continental, regional and national development. Education must be situated at the heart of the sustainable development agenda and used as pre-requisite for the success of all sustainable development goals.

If education is the key, how has Africa performed in this sector and what is her score card in this direction? The regional status of education is not at all impressive. The data available indicate that only three out of 10 Africans are in secondary school. One adult in three cannot read or write. The continent has the world's deepest inequalities based on factors such as gender and language; and vocational and technical education is largely neglected. In the higher education sector, Africa has a very long way to go. It is recorded that on the average less than 10 per cent of the population are in the continent's over 800 higher education institutions, no African country has achieved the UNESCO-defined level of 25% participation in Higher Education, and on the average African universities have a shortfall of 60% of researchers and teachers (Jegede, 2011; 2012 & 2014).

A more worrying situation in the education sector is the frustratingly and unacceptably low level of capacity in our institutions at levels. For instance, while Africa has about 32 million children out of school at the primary level, at least 1.2 million more teachers are needed by 2020. At the secondary level, Africa has 35 per cent of its teenagers in school while 750, 000 teachers are required by 2020. At the higher education level, while we have about 10 million in the various institutions of higher learning, Africa needs about 456,000 teachers by 2020. This, in some way, must account for the less-than-successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in relation to Education in Africa.

The role of higher education in the growth and development of Africa cannot be over emphasised. Contrary to earlier perceptions and prescriptions for Africa, higher education remains the fulcrum upon which all other developments (be it health, agriculture, and infrastructure, etc) rest. Higher education is the key to diversify growing economies, provides the driver for EFA, MDG and SDG goals; it provides the essential knowledge and skills that are critical to growth and development in the 21st Century Africa; builds the human resource base; produces the employable graduates and professionals; reinforces the platform to combat diseases, reduce energy costs and address climate change; and provides the compelling argument for seeking greater participation from private sector in the collaborative development of the continent.

However, while all the afore-listed are essential for the effective development of Africa, there are enormous challenges facing the higher education sector in the realisation of the roles itemised above. The challenges include the need to expand access, improve quality, ensure equity, provide massive access to tertiary education, continuously train and refresh knowledge and skills in all areas, direct serious attention to innovation and creativity, rejuvenate the obsolete curricula in higher education, replace the old dilapidated/build the new infrastructure, and inject huge funds.

Given the enormity of the challenges facing education in Africa and the huge investment needed, it goes without saying that African countries must find creative ways of financing development through education. Financing development, as appropriately and sufficiently as it deserves, is the only way to guarantee sustainability. But the financing requirements of Africa continues to grow very large in the face of disappearing donor support, global economic meltdown and serious crisis, unacceptable dwindling local revenue levels that is punctuated by wanton corrupt, and fraudulent practices.

The only sensible thing to embark upon now by Africa countries is to seek new partnerships and private investments to help deliver transformational education. Such partnerships will ensure that too much strain is not brought to bear on the financial resources of the various countries but will attract additional private capital to support development.

There are several models to use for the public-private sector partnerships suggested above. They include (i) supporting governments with funds from the private sector through special taxes into an education fund, (ii) encouraging private sector to establish institutions using laid down framework and regulations of government, (iii) inviting the private sector to directly fund the development of infrastructure on campuses and give scholarships for mission-critical programmes, (iv) enable wealthy individuals and public-spirited organisations to establish or participate in higher education, and (v) providing conducive environment to attract all shapes and sizes of investors but with preferential regulatory frameworks to give priority to investors interested in educational development.

There is a good signal that all the above would work if African governments are ready to guarantee a number of essential factors necessary for investments to thrive. First, government must enact policies that bring in good return to investment which will in turn deliver capacity and bring in the financial resources. As it is known everywhere, it is not just funding alone that brings development, it is investment in a well-structured policy driven environment. Second, African governments must demonstrate the will that they are open to suggestions to properly manage wealth and not allow leakages and under-the-table deals that injure or destroy the building of the infrastructure, which is the essential base for comprehensive development. Third, African governments and the people must show a resolve to entrench and enthrone peace and stability in the political environment. As succinctly put by Ifejiaka (2015), 'stability has always been a pre-requisite for economic stability' and the magnet for attracting investors. I cannot agree more when he says that 'there is nowhere this is more needed than in Africa'.

Current global development and focus on African markets have indicated that the continent is becoming a bride to be wooed by foreign investors. The tremendous investment activities in a number of African countries which include Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda and Nigeria indicate that a stable political climate will attract huge foreign investments. As quoted by Versi (2015), the continental leading think-tank, the African Centre for Economic Transformation, says that "African markets, because most are still being developed, are the most exciting to invest in. The returns are great and the prospects for long-term growth are unmatched anywhere else in the world." Africa has also been described by many others in different superlative terms which, in summary, point to the fact that Africa has become the most promising continent in the world to invest in, due to the myriad of opportunities

available. All we need is for African governments to seize the tremendous prospects for the comprehensive development of the continent.

The way forward for Africa, therefore, is for African governments to form a viable synergy through sustainable partnerships with the private sectors in a creative manner that will develop the continent through investment in education. Several emerging global initiatives are pointing us to the right direction. I would briefly mention four of them which, if properly harnessed and utilised by African states, will usher in a turning point in the irreversible journey towards transformational education in Africa.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by member states at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which held from 20-22 June, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (popularly known as Rio+20) is, in my mind, to replace the MDGs which really did not fully solve the problems of Africa. The SDGs, as a major outcome of the Rio+20 Conference, will serve as the post 2015 development agenda of the world. It was decided in the Rio+20 document, ***The Future We Want***, to establish an *"inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly"*.

A 'Common African Position (CAP) on the post-2015 development agenda' has been drawn to be debated in the forthcoming July 2015 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development holding in Addis Ababa. The CAP 'takes into account a blend of finance sources. These include, improving traditionally low domestic tax collection rates, staunching the flow of illicit flight capital and recovering stolen assets, tapping global financial markets, stepping up intra-African trade, South-South cooperation and public-private partnerships.'

The Common African Position has as its pillars the follow:

- Structural economic transformation and inclusive growth
- Science, technology and innovation
- People-centred development
- Environmental sustainability, natural resources management and disaster risk management
- Peace and security
- Finance and partnerships

Donald Kaberuka (May, 2015), in his valedictory speech as the outgoing President, to the annual general meeting of the AfDB has perfectly summarised the CAP and how finance and partnerships should interplay in the dreams to fully develop Africa. He says that SDGs will be largely funded through economic growth and transformation; through trade and investments; through sustained domestic efforts and domestic resource mobilisation; local capital markets; minimising illicit flows; better financial management; leveraging natural resources; and of course, smarter use of aid". The CAP must be used as a veritable instrument for educational transformation of Africa.

Framework for Action Education 2030

Another global platform which Africa should explore and exploit for the transformation of education through partnerships and private investments is the Framework for Action Education 2030.

With the realisation that the world will not achieve, in 2015, the six Education for All (EFA) goals which were ambitiously set in 2000, the world is attempting to set fresh education targets for the period from 2015 to 2030. This Framework for Action aims at mobilising all countries and partners, and all stakeholders including the private sector to implement, coordinate, finance and monitor the 2030 education agenda – globally, regionally and nationally – to ensure equal education opportunity for all.

What makes Education 2030 an initiative that Africa should be interested in is that it has been made an integral part of the sustainable development agenda, forming Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The draft version of The Framework for Action, which was extensively discussed at the World Education Forum 2015 (WEF 2015) in Incheon, Republic of Korea will be adopted at a special high-level meeting alongside the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2015.

Global High Level Policy Forum

The UNESCO, in partnership with the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), has organised a High Level Policy Forum to develop a best practice framework for the higher education sector focusing on access, flexibility, affordability, engagement, success and quality.

The Forum aims to prepare a report with policy directions for the future higher education we want. The report will synthesis the Incheon Declaration and the Qingdao Declaration, which was the outcome of an International Conference on ICT and Post-2015 Education held in May, 2015. The significance of the Qingdao Declaration is that it marks “the first global declaration on ICT in education, provides Member States with policy recommendations about how effectively to use ICT to address current educational challenges and to ensure equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all. The Declaration is a clear statement in favour of the use of ICT to foster access and equity in education, as well as to promote the effective pedagogical use of ICT”.

The importance of this Global High Level Policy Forum cannot be over-emphasised as it links the SDGs and the Education 2030 to the world of partnerships and private investment in education. Integrating online, open and distance learning within the mainstream of global discourse on education is an indication of the level of seriousness the global initiatives on access to mass instruction and education have been considered. It is expected that the

policy agenda to guide and govern actions on transforming education through partnerships will become a normal part of the global actions on education.

Conference of Parties (COP21)

One of the main gains already recorded by Africa with the SDGs initiative is that it has galvanised a Common African Position (CAP) focusing on pertinent issues in Africa. The CAP has called for the need to address ‘the challenges posed by climate change, desertification and land degradation, drought, loss of biodiversity, sustainable natural resource management; ensuring peace and security; and promoting responsive and accountable global governance architecture, including through the full and equitable representation of African countries in international financial and economic institutions’. According to Makhtar Diop, the World Bank Vice President for the Africa Region, “reliable and real-time weather and climate information is a prerequisite for multiple sectors of the economy, including water, agriculture, transport, energy and public health.”

At the 21st annual Conference of Parties (COP) holding in December, 2015 in Paris member states will, through its **Sustainable Innovation Forum (SIF15)**, which is the largest business-focused side event of the conference, discuss business innovation in the climate change arena especially as it affects Africa. As reported by Versi (2015), a Zimbabwean telecoms tycoon, Strive Massiva, in his expert view has said ‘that food is rapidly becoming the new oil and Africa, with the world’s largest tracts of arable but still uncultivated land, can and should become the breadbasket of the world over the next two decades’. The use of higher education, especially research in agriculture and climate change will ensure that the problems of food insecurity, which pose serious threat to growth and development across Africa, will be considerably reduced. There is no other way to do this than to embark on sustainable partnerships between governments and private investors.

Conclusion

In a globalised 21st century technology-dependent world, sub-Saharan Africa requires a progressive education that lives on knowledge economy, and an academic community that would enforce national and continental regulatory frameworks, including professional ethics. Higher education in Africa must develop multi-skilled and multi-tasked educated persons who subscribe to advancing their careers through research, within the overall terrain of comprehensive transformation of Africa. The only way to the future is for Sub-Saharan African governments to engage the private sector and willing individuals and organisations in partnerships to finance higher education.

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