

**CONFERENCE ON “THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE :
MAKING SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND
RESEARCH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES MORE
EFFECTIVE”**

**THE SPECIAL ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND
EVALUATION OF IMPACTS OF THE OBSERVED
GLOBAL CHANGES ON POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES
RELATED TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN TANZANIA**

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ABBREVIATIONS

ESRF	Economic and Social Research Foundation
HEAC	Higher Education Accreditation Council
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LAN	Local Area Network
MHO	Joint Financing Programme for Higher Education Institutions (Dutch Abbreviation)
MU	Mzumbe University
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPT	Netherlands Programme for the Institutional Strengthening of Post-Secondary Education and Training
OUT	The Open University of Tanzania
SUA	Sokoine University of Agriculture
TEA	Tanzania Education Authority
UDSM	University of Dar es Salaam
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
WAN	Wide Area Network

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten (10) years, the Tanzanian higher education sector has shifted from a wholly public sector to one that has now embraced the public-private partnership in its delivery. The sector has since the Enactment of the Education Amendment Act No. 10 of 1995 (URT, 1995) become liberalized with a total enrolment in universities and technical institutions increasing from 20,740 (1999/2000) to 40,184 (2003/04). Of these, 28,910 were enrolled in public universities, 6,407 study in various technical institutions, and only 2,764 study in private universities. Hence, for universities the private sector contribution was still small by 2003/04 (less than 10% enrolment). However, its contribution is still growing (MSTHE, 2004).

The 2004/05 total enrolment in higher education institutions is estimated to be 48,000 with over 32,000 enrolled in public universities. Although the above increase is commendable, compared to the Tanzanian population of about 34.0 million by 2004, the participation rates of the Tanzanian society in higher education is dismally small (i.e. 0.0012 or 0.12%).

The number of public universities has by 2005 increased from 3 public universities (in 1995) to 4 to-date. There are 13 Private universities that are at different stages of accreditation by the Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC).

2. CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The above statistics have for reasons of current difficulties in getting data on the number of Tanzanians who are registered in various accredited and unaccredited on-line learning courses excluded such a category of candidates. The second problem related to these types of education (on-line courses) is the difficulty of recognizing those qualifications in view of many of them (both the programmes and the institutions delivering) being unaccredited. The standard procedure is that, for anyone in Tanzania to recognize such institutions, one must seek clearance from the Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC), a national regulatory body for universities established in 1995. The Council will soon become the Universities Commission following enactment of the Universities Act No 2 of 2005 by Parliament (URT, 2005).

With the exception of most public universities, the private universities are still grappling with delivery of undergraduate degrees only todate. A few

private universities have been able to enroll students at Masters level and to date, none has produced any PhDs. The future of the higher education sector in Tanzania is likely to be fairly bright, particularly in view of the increased reliance on an enhanced public-private sector partnership.

As regards research, the culture is well established in the two oldest public universities and their colleges i.e. the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA). In both young public universities i.e. the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) and Mzumbe University (MU); the research culture is in the process of being fully mainstreamed. The same is true for most private universities due to their staff pre-occupation with teaching, and also the research funds scarcity or absence from own sources. In Tanzania, outside universities, there are a few institutes that have been and still are conducting meaningful/development oriented research supported by public funds in the Agriculture, Health and Industries sectors. There are only a few local research organizations registered as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Foundations mainly in Policy and Economics like the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) and the Eastern and Southern African Universities Research Programme (ESAURP).

3. THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN TANZANIA

In Tanzania, as early as 1979, the concern of the Government of Tanzania with distance education led to production of the Anglo-Tanzanian Study report titled "Education Media in Tanzania : Their Role in Development" that culminated in a proposal to establish a correspondence institute at UDSM, (URT, 2004 a). The Presidential Commission on Education under the Chairmanship of Mr. Makweta also recommended establishment of a correspondences unit at UDSM. The Kuhanga committee report of 1990 (URT) appointed by the Minister for Education and Culture is the one that recommended establishment of OUT as a single mode distance education university in Tanzania. OUT was subsequently established by the Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992. By 1994, it started its operations with a modest enrolment of only 766 students in two faculties i.e. Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Business Management. At that time, only BA, BA Ed., B.Com and B.Com Ed. programmes were offered by OUT. By the year 2005, the cumulative number of students admitted by OUT was about 20,000 including about 6,000 who had registered for the foundation course. Considering that by March 2005, a total of 1,668 students had already graduated and if one excludes the students who have either died or been formally dismissed, the theoretical number of students who are in the pipeline (excluding postgraduate students) by 2005 is supposed to be

18,000. In 2005, the nominal roll of postgraduate students indicated that 664 were registered. However, like any distance education institution, not all the students are active. A preliminary study conducted in 2004 indicates that of the 18,000 students, approximately 8,000 are the only ones who are active. When one compares the number of students with the total enrolment in Tanzania presented earlier on, it is quite clear that, during the ten (10) years of existence of OUT, it now contributes towards about 25% of the total higher education enrolment and about one third of the total enrolment in public universities in Tanzania. Another interesting contribution of OUT can be seen in the area of support of training of teachers of all levels in Tanzania. By 2005, the Faculty of Education had enrolled a total of more than 4,000 candidates. This number of teachers enrolled is bigger than any other university in Tanzania. Hence, OUT plays a vital role in the current efforts of the Government to increase both the participation rates and the quality of education in Tanzanian Primary and Secondary Schools that in turn has a bearing on the quality of students enrolled in Tanzania universities.

Bearing in mind that OUT has already entered into a special agreement with the Ministry of Education and Culture to enhance the quality of teachers (Primary and Secondary levels) without taking them away from their stations, the crucial importance of distance education cannot be downplayed. It should also be understood that by June 2004, OUT had opened regional centres in all the 23 regions of the entire United Republic of Tanzania in order to bring about its services closer to the society. One of its main challenges is to develop further its infrastructure and human resources to ensure it can cope with the increasing number of applicants and the teachers who must be further developed. At the time of preparation of this paper the OUT (in collaboration with Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT), had won the bid to co-ordinate a special NEPAD initiative on enhancement of the Teacher Education Programmes in 10 African countries that is in turn co-ordinated by AVU at regional level.

Specifically, for OUT to do well, it needs funding to fully develop its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Master Plan (OUT, 2004b) as guided by the ICT Policy (OUT, 2004c). The most critical needs include development of its Wide Area Network for all 23 regions. Currently, only 2 region are properly linked to the OUT headquarters through its WAN. It also needs to establish computer laboratories for all its regional centres with at least 10 PCs. and 20 PCs (for Dar es Salaam Centre) to start with. OUT also needs to have its own physical facilities in all regional centres so as to reduce running costs and also cater for the increasing number of the applicants to OUT apart from securing any

longterm investments. The fourth constraint is to recruit sufficient numbers of full time staff in all regional centres to ensure the students are well served. The target is to have between 3 and 5 staff at the regional centres, depending on the number of students admitted.

If the above four constraints can be addressed along with a rational increase of funding from the Government for student direct costs, OUT will become both the biggest public university in Tanzania in terms of enrolment of active students and also the biggest trainer of teachers. This way, it will live to contribute to the effective development of Tanzania during the 21st century. The research culture has now been mainstreamed in a number of the OUT policy and operational procedures.

4. LESSONS LEARNED FROM PROJECT/TECHNICAL COOPERATION MODES OF SUPPORT

During the eleven years of existence of OUT, it has received only a few strategic development support of the "project" type from such institutions as UNESCO, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Ford Foundation, Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), AVU, Sida, Rockefeller Foundation, David Anderson Trust Fund (DAAT). Most of the support has been in form of fellowships although UNESCO support has been mostly in capacity building. OUT has never had the luck of benefiting from any form of extended "Development or Technical Cooperation" since its inception. The local funds for OUT have been mostly from Government and the modest student tuition that in 2005 increased to about US \$ 150 per student per annum. From 2004, the university has benefited from local funding from the Tanzania Education Authority (A Government Agency established in 2001). The funds from TEA have been mainly used for development of ICT infrastructure at OUT thus ensuring full development of the Local Area Network (LAN) at OUT headquarters and the Wide Area Network (WAN) at the Dar es Salaam regional centre.

5. PREFERRED FORM AND MEANS OF SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INCLUDING NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS

Since OUT and most of the Tanzanian universities have existing Rolling Strategic Plans that are being implemented that are in turn also aligned to plans of their Parent Ministries and respective sectors, it is important that the support that is provided fits well within the sectoral strategies of the respective countries. The national priorities have to be respected as well as support to the most pressing needs that cut across many educational institutions. For example, all post-secondary education institutions would

benefit very well if say the much said project but not yet implemented titled TENET (i.e. Tanzania Educational Network) was implemented as part of the NPT support to Tanzania. The project is meant to link all the higher education and research institutions into one Virtual Private Network to ease access to international internet bandwidth but also to ensure economies of scale and to have a bigger negotiation capacity for bandwidth costs through a common forum. TENET will ensure that it is easier for universities to communicate with each other through such technologies as VOIP (Voice on Internet Protocol). There are a number of such cross-cutting projects that are vital to Tanzanian post-secondary education institutions if they are provided the necessary forum to identify and prioritize their joint needs.

One of the major difficulty faced is that there has not been sufficient communication of the transition from the MHO to the NPT programme for Tanzania and in particular to other post-secondary institutions that were not part of the "MHO" or the "SV" programmes. The Tanzanian post-secondary institutions have not been sufficiently involved in the transitional planning stages. Only institutions that were active in the MHO programme like UDSM are sufficiently aware about the policy changes. A secretariat consisting of university staff chaired by the MSTHE needs to be put in place to facilitate planning through a participatory forum including all public and private universities in Tanzania (the NPT policy permitting for private universities!). Although I have just recently learned that the priorities for NPT support to Tanzania are in decentralization and the business environment, the other public universities (possibly with the exception of UDSM) were not given the opportunity to air the views on the most crucial needs of Tanzanian educational institutions that are crucial for national development. One hopes that there will still be an opportunity for them to be more active owners of the programme in the near future. For NPT funds, it may be useful to agree on the portion of funds that will be for common national projects and the portion that can be accessed by individual institutions within the prioritised areas. Again research funding can also be pooled but to be accessed competitively through the participatory forum outlined above.

Currently, there is some sort of a semi vacuum regarding information about the NPT programme because of the absence of concerted follow up from Tanzanian universities or other Post-Secondary institutions (due to lack of information). This should not be allowed to continue and measures should be put in place to make information about NPT activities more readily available to all institutions whether shortlisted or otherwise in the interest of promotion of transparency. As regards the VETA project on distance education despite being prioritized in the business environment

forum, one wonders what local capacity building is expected from this project without involving institutions like the OUT as it appears to involve too many external experts who seem to be once again mainly planning from Europe with only few missions in Tanzania. We need NPT projects that will in the first place genuinely foster the ownership by Tanzanians of the NPT programme and secondly it should enhance the partnership between Tanzanian and Dutch higher education experts.

As regards support to research, Tanzania will have to prepare its national research policy possibly as part of the NPT support or using its own funds prior to deciding how the research funds from NPT can be used. One obvious area of policy shift for the NPT projects will be the need to be more permissive of extending the support to the private universities that may not have been foreseen then. The second area is the insistence upon supporting projects that enhance partnerships between the Dutch and Tanzanian educational institutions. Another policy shift necessary is in the guidelines for identification and selection of the projects to be funded by the NPT programme that needs to be revisited rather than only linking them to the national needs and the Dutch bilateral co-operation programmes. In this case, there is a need for Southern partners to create a more acceptable participatory forum for making decisions on projects.

6. IMPACT OF OBSERVED PROFOUND CHANGES ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- *Globalisation* – This has become both an opportunity and also a challenge in the sense that it demands better quality of outputs that are now benchmarked at global and not only national and/or regional levels. As an opportunity, globalization provides a rare chance for higher education and research institutions to form partnerships with the best in the world if such opportunities are offered by the new co-operation policy and programmes. On the other hand, if the later do not offer the possibility to form partnerships with the best, then the alternative is to perish even within own national borders.
- There is increased competition for both the local and the international markets and a promise for enhanced equity, access and quality of outputs.
- Enhanced observation of the WTO provisions (almost without limits) is dangerous for developing countries and particularly where the global trade policy conflicts with the national education policy thus jeopardizing the local higher education capacity to carry out its

social and cultural mission that may have no boosting on global trade matters (IAU *et al*, 2005).

- Experience on the ground shows that there is real cause for concern of flooding the local markets of developing countries with qualifications from doubtful but strong and well connected international providers if unfettered market access is granted to foreign providers without local accreditation and quality guarantees from WTO. There are already many such unaccredited institutions that are operating at global level for the sake of reaping profits only (Robinson, 2005).

Therefore, as regards globalization, development partners, agencies and donors need to realise the shortfalls that surround the WTO declarations and GATS that beg to be questioned thoroughly, lest we promote dubious providers in the name of global free trade. The Government local policies have to take cognizance of these facts i.e. the limitations associated with the unregulated open market approach.

- *New Forms of Education Delivery* – These demand that in the first place there are sufficient and sustainable Information and Communication Technology facilities and services in all higher education institutions. These must be linked to sustainable international bandwidth access. The local Government policies on both licensing of Communication services to educational and research institutions have to be favourable as well as regarding costing of bandwidth and taxation of ICT – related goods.

The higher education and research institutions have in turn to ensure the academic staff are aware and enabled to facilitate the paradigm shift whereby the student becomes the centre of attention in the teaching and learning process.

In order to play part in closing the digital gap, development partners and partner institutions have to give a much higher priority to projects that attempt to provide for such facilities at national level. This is the only way in which the current digital divide will be minimized if it is coupled with good local measures of sustaining ICT services in terms of both policies and resources.

- *Implications of the Enhanced Government – Private Partnerships*

The liberalization of delivery of higher education in Tanzania that started in 1995 after liberalization of the education sector is a major watershed in the history of the higher education sector in Tanzania. This is because, despite the low capacity of the private higher education institutions established at the moment; in the future and as they grow, their role will be crucial. In particular, the contribution of such private institutions in training personnel that can be deployed in the most needy areas of special skills, ought to be supported by good local policies including provisions for scholarships in selected disciplines for all accredited institutions as done by the Government of Tanzania for the Medical field by awarding scholarships to all Tanzanian students admitted in accredited Medical schools in Tanzania for the last few years. Additionally, the Tanzania Education Authority (TEA) provides supplementary funding support to develop facilities and services to all accredited educational institutions from Primary to university level as a way of appreciating the role played by the private parties in the field of education.

The above narration implies that the current approach of most parties either selecting only some public institutions to support or excluding private higher education institutions in their development plans will soon have to either come to an end or be revisited. In other words, whether an institution is public or private, as long as it is accredited by the relevant local bodies, it should be considered for support at least in the most needy disciplines.

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