



# THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS CENTER FOR AFRICA

## Mobilizing Higher Education for SDGs

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With a burgeoning African youth population that is increasingly challenging the quality and quantity of tertiary educational institutes in Africa, a revitalization of educational policies that stagnate the pace of development has become central to progress. Tertiary education, especially in Sub Saharan Africa, has come a long way from the 1980s when most funding was limited to primary and secondary education. In an increasingly technologically sophisticated world, highly specialised skillsets were essential to Africa’s global economic role.

Correspondingly, as per UNESCO and the World Bank, new studies revealed that for every year of tertiary education attained by a student, a 0.39 percentage annual GDP growth is projected, which eventually yields 12 percent increase in GDP (AAI, 2015). The interest and focus on tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa has since propelled with roughly 200,000 enrolled students in the 1970s to 4.5million in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010). Although Sub Saharan Africa still has the lowest enrolment rate, 8% of college aged students (ICEF Monitor, 2015); it is the fastest growing rate in the world.

This upsurge in student enrolment has burdened the higher education system, making it difficult to keep up with global standards of education that can have a catastrophic impact on the African and world economy. Some of the cited challenges, amongst others, are (i) low quality of teaching, (ii) lacking of research and development facilities, (iii) mismatch between labour market demand and skills, (iv) lack of relevance in curriculum, (v) shortage of faculty and (vi) poor policy frameworks. Many of these challenges have been attributed to inadequate funding, which is often

provided by central governments with minimal support from the private sector (AAU, 2013). The role of government as the main source of funding has undermined the value of educators' intellectual property, viewing their contribution as civil service that is government compliant. When intellectuals lose their right to freely think and impact society, they lose social legitimacy, as they become mechanisms of social influence and control that adhere to the political and economical motivation of the government.

Due to policies that enforce social conformity, African universities have not experienced much academic freedom, minimizing the pivotal role of African intellectuals in galvanizing society as agents of change and innovation. Protecting the intellectual property of African educators is a basic human right that raises the standard of the knowledge economy as a whole. Policy makers need to stand in solidarity with intellectuals in ensuring that effective laws that protect and accommodate the intellectual right of researchers and educators are put in place (Appiagyei-Atua, Beiter, Karran, 2016). As regional collaboration intensifies over common issues that require development in policy, there has been a push for more private higher education institutions to open while in collaboration with public institutions. Additionally, solidifying government-university relationships has also been deemed imperative, in order to respond to local and global developmental agendas (AAU, 2013).

Moving forward, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) – an organization with a vision to promote sustainable practical problem solving around socioeconomic and

environmental issues - has proposed a stage that accommodates global cooperative learning on technical and policy work. By fostering an environment that takes an integrated approach to organise scientific and technological knowledge, the SDSN is acting on initiatives that support the design and implementation of the SDGs (SDSN, 2016). As part of that plan, there is a resounding call to action for African intellectuals to spearhead the 2030 agenda for the SDGs. The SDSN platform can be utilized to engage and inspire people's mindsets around committing to development that is economically and socially viable. The plan is to reinforce the SDGs, which have a local and global focus, with the African Union Agenda 2063 – a vision for the continent's development.

As primary candidates to lead the SDGs, African intellectuals will be best fit to raise awareness on local challenges while planning and contextualizing the goals that may not directly speak to local circumstances. Through the monitoring and evaluation process, their knowledgebase and accountability to stakeholders will be highly valued as experts and leaders in introducing technology that is best fit for local solutions. Their role on regional and global integration will be critical, as this would create an opportunity for sharing knowledge and strengthening global, regional and local partnerships. Finally, intellectuals will have the support of higher education participants as they play the essential role in advancing the quality and standard of higher educational institutions on the continent. As Africa competes with global institutions of much higher standards where the top African universities, University of Cape Town, ranks 148th in the world today followed by University of the Witwatersrand (182th), Stellenbosch University (401-

500th bracket), Makerere University (401-500th bracket), University of KwaZulu-Natal (401-500th bracket), (World University Rankings, 2016), there is an urgent need for improving the quality and quantity of higher education.

With the challenge of high unemployment rate amongst graduates, a growing discourse amongst higher education stakeholders has been for students to become equipped with more active learning and skill based approaches (AAU, 2013). This brings in the ideas of concrete learning versus abstract learning, often experienced in different contexts. Amid a global move towards an educational system that is immersed in information communications technology (ICT), the progression is towards inspiring critical thinking through active learning while utilising technology as a platform to learn and integrate on global, regional and local issues. With a commonly shared stage where standard global values are upheld by African institutions and those in the developed world; disparities in development can be minimized while communication and collaboration on development related projects are converged upon.

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