The Impact Of Massification On Higher Education In Public Universities: A Kenyan Example
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Introduction
Universities all over the world are going through a time of disquieting turmoil that has no end in sight. As the difficulties of universities are experienced across the globe in this early part of the twenty first century, higher education tends to lose whatever steady state it may have once possessed. This is the popular feeling among Kenyans where the expansion of student demand continues to grow virtually without control. More students and more different types of students today enter universities and colleges demanding to be registered in relevant programmes and to be educated in a growing array of subjects. The present knowledge and economic based society accelerates the changing professional labour market for which Kenyan universities are expected to provide competent graduates.

The Kenyan government, on the other hand expects the universities to do much more for the Kenyan populace in solving economic and social problems, yet at the same time it backs and fails in its financial support. This apparent inability enhances the public universities’ problem in dealing with the present mass high education practice. The confronting question to be dealt with in this paper is: What should the Kenyan public universities do, in order to remain producers and transmitters of innovation and market oriented relevant knowledge?

To facilitate our discussion, we shall attempt to contextualise the Kenyan public universities, pointing out the space within which they were established. The second part of the paper is empowering the discussant, that is an attempt to show the challenges and rationale for the massification of higher education. The third part points out the way forward, what to do in the face of financial challenges occasioned by mass higher education and finally few suggestions as a way of conclusion.

Contextualisation of Kenyan Public Universities
Participation in knowledge economy often requires a new set of human knowledge. This is because knowledge makes more impact when it can be explained both from
theoretical and empirical dimensions. Accordingly, there is need for a high level of continuous research and experiments.

This method of knowledge production links universities’ research to industrial revolution, that is, the creation and establishment of universities coincided with the emergence of industrial societies. It explains universities as centres of teaching, research, service to the community, transmission of knowledge and promotion of areas of specialization. The linkage between the birth of universities and human need for development underlines the initial goal for the establishment of Kenyan Universities and those in other parts of the continents.

The first Kenyan University, The University of Nairobi, came into being in 1970, seven years after the country gained its independence form the British colonial power. It was initially meant to help meet the urgent needs of post-independence and to promote and meet needs of development. In 1978, Kenyatta University College was established as a constituent college of the University of Nairobi. The college was mainly meant to train high school teachers. After 1983 there was a pressing demand for university education and many young Kenyans were not able to secure adequate places in the two institutions. In 1984, Moi University was created initially to offer degree programmes in forestry, wildlife management and technology. But soon it included other humanity programmes, already existing in both University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College. In 1985, Kenyatta University College was upgraded to university. Egerton, a former agricultural college became a university in 1987, while Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology was fully fledged in 1993. Maseno, the youngest public University had its first graduation ceremony in March 2001. Within a period of twenty on years, Kenya is already boasting of six public Universities.

All these have been established primarily to provide appropriate knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of Kenyans and the international community with thorough teaching, research and active participation in the development of humanity. Unfortunately, long after the attainment of political independence, Kenyans seem to have dismally failed to develop to the leave of expectation. A crisis of poverty, in many cases worse than before independence, has afflicted many parts of the country
and seems to continue unabated. What has gone wrong with the initial enthusiasm and purpose for the creation of Kenyan public Universities? This question brings us to the second part of the paper.

Empowering the Discussant
In this part of the twenty first century, it is argued that Kenyan public universities have entered an age of turmoil. The protagonists are claiming that the expansions of these universities were improperly planned (vide Daily Nation, 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1996 and East African Standard, 20\textsuperscript{th} April 1996). It is further argued that the expansion had a negative impact and severe strain on the available facilities, let alone producing graduates who can hardly interpret development polices into practice (Daily Nation 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1996).

These accusations and counter claims may probably be true. The real disjunctive is however rooted in a simple fact: \textit{demands on universities outrun their capacity to respond} (Clark 1998: 129). This is not only true of the Kenyan situation. Rather it is a global university' problem. As our author has right noted: ‘from all sides inescapable broad streams of demands rain upon the higher education system and derivatively upon specific universities within it (Ibid 129).

In Kenya, the transition from elite to mass higher education became a reality in the early 1980s. This explosion of University entrants was facilitated and accelerated by the expansion of secondary schools in almost every part of the country. The Kenya National Examinations Council's practice of publicizing and grading schools according to their examination results in the local dailies, underlines the competitive spirit among teachers and candidates. The more students a school sends to the University the more the institution is recognised.

More different types of students have equally sought and obtained access to universities. The more accessible higher education in Kenyan public universities has become, therefore meant endless numbers of students entitled to various types of education in their lifetime. The general trend of elite through mass, to universal higher education is not peculiar to Kenya. It is a common phenomenon in other parts of Africa. The trend may see no immediate end because the present economic
society has created different and numerous demands on universities. Today, there are hardly any residential experts, continued learning and retraining is the order of the day.

It is not only enough to train highly specialised experts for segments of labour force. Graduates at different levels continue to expect qualifications in other diverse specialties. It is believed that the need for retaining professionals throughout their careers is essential for economic viability. This therefore means that training requirement for the labour force is equally endless. Unfortunately, the demand in itself tends to cause numerous problems to the running and management of public universities.

Although we pointed out already the linkage of the establishment of public universities with governmental patronage, today, the Kenya Government can hardly support mass higher education at the same unit-cost level as it did for the previous elite arrangement. Instead, it encourages the public universities to open their doors to more students and insists on accountability in all directions of university management. The problem of managing mass higher education is enhanced by the fact that no single university can today boast of controlling the growth of knowledge.

Following from the research imperative built into modern disciplines and inter-disciplinary fields of study, knowledge expansion, and specialization, and reconfiguration are self-propelling phenomena (Ibid: 130)

It is not only the growth of knowledge that accelerates and justifies the massification of higher education, but the speed at which knowledge grows. New ideas and descriptions are constantly being developed at an alarming speed. For example, in the 1980s the concern was for quality control in almost every aspect of business and academic world. The 1990's were known for re-engineering and the early art of the twenty first century is known for velocity of knowledge. The society today is primarily concerned with how quickly business should be transacted and how information access should alter the lifestyle of consumers and their expectations of a business. The function and use of digital tools to reinvent the way people work point to our society as a knowledge conscious society.
The most constant question that confronts Kenyan universities is: how can we create a knowledge system and process that is internal, directed and effectively responsible to the development needs of the majority of Kenyans? It is no longer a concern for the few in a local environment situation. No, we live in a world impacted by the concept of globalisation. Both international and local boundaries have been rendered irrelevant, because modern activities and achievements transcend common boundaries. This globalisation concept accelerates the speed and growth of knowledge. Nobody wants to be left behind.

If the fields of knowledge are ultimately an uncontrollable force, then every university has to learn how to cope and expand its financial base, students, personnel and space. But the rapid and efficacious growth of knowledge should be interpreted as a penetrating demand that shapes the university system, in its orientation and organisation.

The demand for knowledge together with the rise of mass higher education, place public universities in difficult management and administrative situations. The most outstanding of these is the problem of funding. Traditional funding sources prove inadequate as the government insists on paying only in decreasing amounts its share of the budget. As the under funding become a consistent problem, the university infrastructure becomes more of a constraint. “As demands race on, and response capability lags, institutional insufficiency results” (Ibid.: 132). This, to our thinking, is one of the reasons why Kenyan public universities are accused of apparent ineffectiveness.

The way forward

It is imperative for the Kenyan public university administrators to realise that an institution ready to transform itself to the needs of its students will have a better competitive advantage in this part of the twenty first century.

Universities cannot continue operating in their traditional way in this age of rapid growth of knowledge and mass higher education. This is underpinned by the fact that a university is a contractual business where students and the university staff are partners. The staff has to satisfy the needs of students. At the same time, university
personnel should be aware of constant change and the challenges of management, for which solutions must be provided. This in itself is a starting point towards controlling issues and/or challenges that undermine public universities.

The massification of post-secondary education has given birth to the problems of space, staff, teaching material and, above all, financial support. This last concern seems to be at the bottom of everything. Any viable recognition and management of change should include a clear vision of financial source. Options are pretty few: the university administrators have to transform their post-secondary educational institutions into organisations responsive to the realities of this age.

There is a demanding urge to develop new kinds of relevant training services using growing convergence of computing, telecommunications and television technologies. Open universities of Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Kenyatta Virtual Learning Institute are examples towards proper direction. These institutions are applying and will continue to apply technology to the development and delivery of on-campus, near-campus and off-campus programmes, courses and services.

In Kenya, Kenyatta University is opening satellite campuses in different parts of the country. Students from each region will register and receive their lecturers through the use of new technology without physically moving to the University Campus. In this way, many more students will have access to university education. At the same time Kenyatta University will not have the problem of space because students will register and pay tuition fee in proportion to the courses they need. This to us is one of the ways forward for African post-secondary institutions that will help then cut down their financial obligations and still offer services or relevant education towards the development of the society.

Kenyans should challenge themselves and determine what kind of institutions they want instead of attempting to stick to the original western system of centralised universities. For Kenyans to accommodate the presently increasing dynamic social and political environment, they need not build another Oxford or Cambridge in this continent. They should instead, determine their kind of university, one that reflects their own economic and development circumstances.
Financial pressures go hand in hand with the spirit of competition. We have already made reference to Kenyan public opinion about the suitability of private universities against government sponsored institutions in Kenya. With the reduction of financial assistance to public institutions, privately run universities seem to have an edge over the public ones because of their solid financial base. Students would not pay tuition fee to join universities, which do not have adequate teaching and learning materials. They may not register in the institutions which do not have the cutting edge of ICT or which do not offer relevant and market oriented courses.

This century is known as customer oriented century. The customers and what they want determine the business. Our Universities, we are arguing, must be run like any other business in this age. This requires recognition of the reality of change in the management of universities. The present knowledge society, and its hand maiden globalisation have changed the lives of our students in ways that we have thus far made few efforts to comprehend or respond to (Ibid: 84).

The apparent inability to recognize change may be one of the reasons why most Kenyan universities are not making an impact to prove their relevance. Changing institutional culture involves changing the value structures and outlook of the individuals who are part of the institutions. There is need for a firm and long-term commitment on the part of both the administrators and faculty members to focus on adjusting actions and attitudes. It is rather a slow process that only becomes measurable by looking back at what used to be. The universities have to run like an industry with the capacity to acknowledge the rate of change. The administrators of the universities need to learn and know that their survival depends on effective response to the needs of their customers - students. We can hardly improve the economy or develop our society without the business competitive spirit of today’s world. It is a matter of the survival of the fittest, and our universities must prove that they are fit or relevant. One such means of providing solutions to the problem of financial support and the impact of mass higher education is the creation of entrepreneurial universities (Clark: 1998).

Entrepreneurial is here understood to mean a characteristic of social systems whose concept is a wilful effort in institution-building that requires much special activity
and energy. Taking risks when initiation new practices whose outcome is in doubt is a major factor (Ibid.: 4). An entrepreneurial university is forward-looking and future-centred. It is a more focused and stronger term than “innovative university”, which is sometimes preferred in order to prevent the popular argument against a university being run like a business enterprise.

We must immediately note here that carrying out transformation in a university is not an easy exercise. It can easily be misunderstood. For example, the establishment of innovative programmes or solitary entrepreneur cannot be sufficiently interpreted as viable transformation. Rather, for transformation to be genuine and inclusive, individuals from different sections of the university have to come together in an organized initiative to design and agree on how the university should be structured and oriented. This is what Clark (1998) calls collective entrepreneurial action. It is at the heart of the transformation phenomenon. It has to be seen and conceived as a process that runs form bottom-up and not top-down

The advantage of collective entrepreneurial action is that it is a group-centred and not individual exercise. It allows for effective participation of departmental faculties and administrative members. Instituted in this manner, collective entrepreneurship does not interfere with the mission of a university. Rather, it simply provides resources and necessary infrastructure capable of subsidizing and enacting an up-market climb in quality and reputation (Ibid.: 5). But the collective entrepreneurship transformation being a process must have checks and balances if its goals are to be realized. Clark (1998:5-8) has suggested the following elements to ensure such success:

- The strengthened steering core
- The expanded developmental periphery
- The diversified funding base
- The stimulated academic heartland and,
- The integrated entrepreneurial culture

These five elements prevent common assumptions and glorification based on tradition or reputation. The belief in political court to ensure resources should not deter us from acknowledging the prevailing change in our universities. There is need for linkage with the outside world to ensure knowledge transfer, industrial contact,
continuing education, fundraising and alumni responsibility to the university. Such concentration on diversified financial base may be more advantageous for sourcing for fund. For example, the university should reach out to various organisations such as industrial firms, local government, philanthropic foundations, earned income from tuition fee, alumni fund raising and campus services. The single sourcing for the university’s survival should be discouraged.

Unfortunately, diversified fund base would have very little meaning if the earned academic tradition and the mission of a university are seen and interpreted as the purpose for financial support. Accordingly, every unit within the university should be seen as part of the entrepreneurial unit. Alongside stimulated academic tradition is the creation of work culture that embraces change. Change as a process must start from within it should not be imposed from without. People see the need for change and seek for it before an environment for its management is created. The creation of a particular work culture has an advantage in that it facilitates and cultivates institutional identity and reputation.

Finally these elements do not only ensure checks and balances, but they help to create confidence and explain the question of ownership and management of change. Normally universities are resistant from the bottom-up and can hardly be forced to change from the top-down.

Conclusion
Our discussion started on the assumption that Kenyan public universities are under increasing pressure to reshape themselves. They were started to help meet the urgent needs of post-independence economy. Accordingly, like the other universities, they were initially meant for the elite of the country. We have attempted to show that today, because of the influence of globalisation, the rapid growth and multiplication of knowledge, the use of digital tools, the impact of information and communication technology, the need for continuous retraining and learning for professional and economic viability. This trend has opened up the university to a large number of different kinds of students. The university can now admit more students that it did in the past.
The massification of higher education has created new challenges and opportunities to our universities, such as the inadequacy of space, personnel, teaching material, innovations of new programmes and financial support to manage these changes. The paper has shown that options are somewhat few. The best alternative is to underscore relevance of market oriented subject alongside the establishment of an entrepreneurial approach to the management of universities. This method of operation will assist the university to be managed like a business enterprise but without undermining the academic tradition and mission. These changes should not however, leave behind the new methods of university teaching and learning that now emphasize information and communication technology.

Reference

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