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CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF CAPACITY BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

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Capacity Development for Higher Education in Africa: The Role of Capacity Building Institutions

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Abstract

This paper looks at the challenges facing Africa and investigates the role played by capacity development, giving particular attention to higher education systems. Key in the consideration of policies reviewed in the paper is the role of tertiary education and its contribution to generating the skilled people needed to transform African economies as well as contribute to innovations through education and research in science and technology. The policies that need to be reviewed in the African context and the investments needed at the national and university levels are also highlighted. The paper concludes with what can be done to revitalize the education sector with special focus on the role of capacity development institutions such as the African Capacity Building Foundation.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF CAPACITY BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

Many African countries are celebrating 50 years since independence. While a lot has been achieved a number of challenges remain and new ones have emerged. Many scholars and policy makers are querying the role Africa will play in the next 50 years, with a particular focus on the unique endowments Africa has and the challenges it needs to surmount to ensure these endowments result in development. The human and institutional capacities that can support Africa in defining alternatives, making choices, and implementing programs rely heavily on how education is viewed, developed, and used, and more importantly on the conception of the capacities needed to move forward.

The education sector has a critical role to play in Africa's development in its contribution to the capacities needed to define and implement policies, to uncover innovations that solve the unique challenges facing Africa, and to generate the cadre of leaders needed to transform societies and economies.

Universities are at the top of the transformation chain that generates the skills and competences needed in development. Yet university systems are facing a myriad of challenges and seeking ways to move forward. What models make sense for tertiary institutions in Africa? What are the opportunities and possibilities in Africa? What can Africa do to leapfrog the development process using the education sector?

Experiences in improving and developing the capacity of universities to take on development challenges shed light into what can and needs to be done. In particular lessons learned from 20 years of experiments in building the capacity of universities and institutions of higher learning in one specific area of Africa's needs—economic policy analysis and development—has a lot of lessons that can be usefully applied in developing the remaining areas challenging Africa. The strategy and implementation experience of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) are used to illustrate what is possible in revitalizing the education sector in Africa.

Challenges Facing Africa and the Role of Capacity

When many African countries got independence 50 years ago, with Ghana being the first in 1957, leaders focused on pan-Africanist solutions to Africa's problems. Many of the leaders of independence movements were educated in Europe and came back to Africa with high expectations of the role of universities and institutions of higher learning. The

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world Africa was facing in 1957 was one where the rest of the world was seeking bigger market shares and more integration as witnessed by the launching of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 composed of six founding countries including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands (Mikesell, 1958).

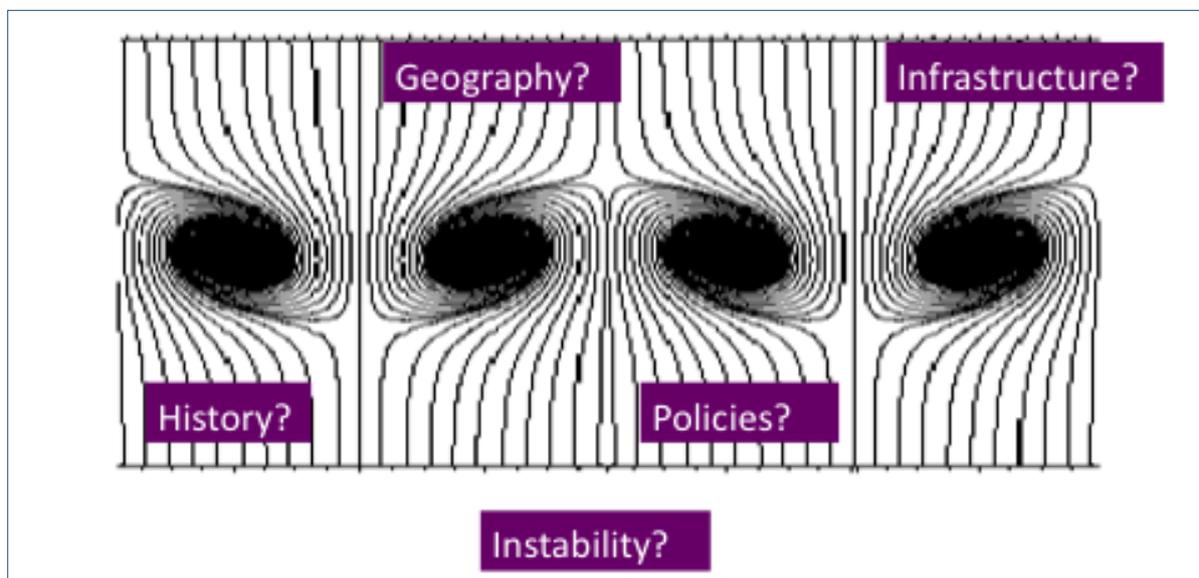
Global trade was shifting as marked by the emergence of post-war economies like Japan as marked vividly by the export of the first Toyota from Japan to the United States of America. Global travel was also growing rapidly due to the commencement of jet passenger travel, marked by the Boeing 707 airline virgin flight in 1957. Many of the African leaders were looking at how to eradicate treatable diseases in their countries while the world was gripped by the H2N2 pandemic that started in China and spread to the United States and other countries in Asia and Europe. The period of Africa's independence was marked by instability and war across the world. Most of the independence movements were peacefully lead by academics and intellectuals like Julius Kambarage Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, but there were also military resistances such as the Mau Mau War under Jomo Kenyatta. Other conflicts around the world included the Malaysian Resistance, the Cuban Revolution, the Algerian War, and the Cold War. Universities that existed in Africa at the time became centers for thinking and reflection on independence and post-independence strategies (see Mosha (1986) for a good historical overview).

The period during which African nation states were born was also characterized by accelerated innovation particularly product innovation. Many new global companies were started and there was a phasing off of entities due to increased competition. Logistic market penetration allowed winning products to gain large market share and inventors and manufacturers to interact on a global scale, not possible previously (see Marchetti (1980) for an analysis of how major innovations penetrated).

After 50 years of development strategy and experimentation, Africa has come full circle from seeing universities as they key driver for development in the 1960's, to abandoning them when revolutionary ideas challenged existing leadership structures in the 1970's, investing in primary education at the expense of investments in tertiary education systems in the 1980's and 1990's, to investigating what role universities can play today in Africa's integration into a global economy in the 2000's. Hassan (2006) provides a critical review of the role universities can play in Africa's development in the coming years, particularly as it relates to good governance, research and innovation and implementing policy priorities.

African scholars have also shifted their views on what is needed to address the development challenges in Africa. Explanations have focused for the most part on the role of history, particularly the emptying of Africa's most able and skilled young people due to brain drain and the implications it has in breaking the natural transfer of ideas from one generation to the next (see for example Mugibi (2010) who also investigates the implication to Africa of losing its skilled talent through out migration).

Fig. 1: Views of African Scholars to explain African stagnation



Other scholars (Naudé, 2007) have looked at the role of geography and particularly on the challenge of a large continent trapped by its lack of connecting infrastructure, its treacherous rivers, debilitating diseases, and demanding landscapes; arguing that there is a need for better regional integration, presumably also of its universities and systems of higher education.

Yet other scholars have looked at the impact of decisions made by African leaders in terms of policy and investment choices and in light of the instability that hit African countries as leaders found it difficult to shape common visions and integrate diverse societies into modern nation states (Ong'ayo (2008).

Most of the scholars however do agree that there is a set of critical needs for Africa that need attention if the region is to develop in the current context of globalization. The first critical need is **infrastructure** to integrate economies and societies and provide opportunity to tap into unique natural resources currently trapped in landlocked countries. How to finance this infrastructure development is also an area getting attention from a number of scholars (Brixiova et al (2011).

Secondly, many scholars and policy makers have woken to the fact that Africa needs to build **resilience** and seek achievements beyond the Millennium Development Goals. Resilience to external shocks and particularly those shocks that impact food security (see Carter et al., 2005).

Securing **stability** both social and political is the third critical need most cited by outside observers as a necessity to secure Africa's development, particularly in the reforms needed for effective economic governance at the national, sub-national, as well regional

levels. See for example Bouchat (2010) for a developmental approach to security and stability in Africa.

With the pressures of climate change pressing on global leaders, a frequently cited priority for Africa is the need to embed **sustainability** in the development policies and programs of countries, which also takes form in the type of trade advantages that can be garnered by a green economy (Annan and Stern, 2009).

Finally, recent waves of instability and the change that has swept Northern Africa and the Middle East has raised the profile of **employment** creation, and the need to address the time bomb embedded in the burgeoning number of young people coming into the job market and the constant pressures from those who are currently unemployed.

A definition of capacity and its dimensions is needed before going to what sorts of options Africa has to address the critical needs. Capacity means having the aptitudes, resources, and relationships as well as facilitating conditions required to act in an effective manner to achieve specified mandates (ACBF, 2004). Capacity is conceptualized at three levels—individuals, work environment or organization, and institutions. As such it captures interactions between individuals and organizations. Capacity takes meaning in specific settings leading scholars to query “capacity for what?” and resulting in numerous working definitions.

In the context of the challenges facing Africa one can conceive of capacity to generate development results in varying scenarios. One possible scenario is where African leaders show **continental ownership and leadership** for resolving problems on a continental scale, providing coordinated guidance on global issues using a common platform for negotiation on a global scale. Capacities needed under this scenario include the ability to manage across different development sectors, such as education and employment, infrastructure and trade, and so on; having the skills and competences to define policies and programs that connect diverse geographies and secure future generations.

A second scenario is one of a **sub-regional mosaic** where groups of countries work closely together on a series of development issues, such as seen in today’s regional economic communities (RECs). Capacities needed under this scenario relate to decisions on investment priorities that balance national and cross-border or multi-country needs, and the ability to observe, collect and analyze facts and data to inform decision choices across a group of countries in a sub-region. Decisions on migration and trade policy, customs and logistics choices, monetary policies and so on, take on particular importance and countries need to have the capacities to provide the information needed for decisions to be taken on a sub-regional basis. The interface between national and regional economic institutions is critical to evolve regional governance structures that deliver development results.

A third scenario is when Africa is characterized by **externally driven nation states** reacting to forces beyond their control because they have not built the requisite capacities to negotiate and manage conflict or to transform agriculture and feed growing populations. In this scenario conflict and instability is rife and country borders are closed with

migration across countries limited to refugee movements and the majority of countries dependent on food aid and development assistance.

Regardless of the potential scenario, there are six capacities that are needed for Africa's development. These are (1) the ability to manage and negotiate conflicts and ensure stability that can attract economic activity and investment; (2) the policies and programs needed to transform agriculture and guarantee food security within and across country borders; (3) the skills, competences and decision-making systems and processes to decide on investment priorities; (4) the skills, competences, and systems for data collection and analysis including those that secure the demand for good data and support the desire for evidence-based policy making; (5) skills, competences, systems and processes to manage across sectors, geographies, and generations; and (6) the mechanisms and practices to engage civil society, the private sector and the international community on development issues.

Countries need to address how the education system can generate the types of people and research needed to resolve the challenges facing Africa. Particularly, what areas to prioritize in **building capacity** for new and emerging challenges, which will render universities and training centers relevant for Africa's future development. Countries also would need to consider how to best **utilize existing capacity** to deliver on key objectives, with higher education institutions providing their talent in critical areas of capacity. How to **develop new capacity** where what exists is not sufficient for enhanced performance is also an area needing consideration. Universities can provide the space for re-skilling, retooling and continuous learning, adjusting their output of graduates and research to better match demands, and bridging the performance gap in the public and private sector.

One key role universities also need to play is in the innovation and learning systems at societal and economy levels. How can universities be used to generate economic prosperity and contribute to increased economic productivity is one key research question. Universities can generate the right types of graduates and relevant research outputs if the incentives to reward learning, creativity, innovation and effective use of good ideas are in place.

Universities can contribute towards producing skilled people who can create and use knowledge effectively, thus raising the quality of administrative decisions and capability at the country level. Universities have a role to play in generating a culture of social equality, tolerance, and environmental sustainability. Such a culture, coupled with organizations that can source ideas locally, tap into the stock of global knowledge and ideas, and adapt or assimilate practices to local contexts, would allow countries to leapfrog into higher levels of performance. A polity that represents the will of the people is a key prerequisite for development. Young people are shaped by their university experience. Provided with access to an information infrastructure that facilitates dialogue and exchange, they can get easy access to ideas and can contribute even further to national transformation.

Status of Capacity in Africa

So how does one measure the extent to which countries have put in place the capacities they need? How does one use these measures of capacity to gauge achievement? How does achieved capacity relate to the reforms needed at the country level, including those needed in the system of higher education and learning? These are questions the African Capacity Building Foundation asked and put together a series of data collection efforts to address.

A series of indicators were defined to aid countries gauge how far they have come in putting in place the capacities they need to better plan, manage, implement and account for results of policies and programs. The purpose of the assessment done in the Africa Capacity Indicators (ACI) survey was to effectively see how capacity can be measured not only to track progress as mentioned above, but to also assist countries in their efforts to effectively integrate capacity development objectives in national development strategies and agendas for service delivery. Another purpose was to understand the underlying factors driving change and to foster the change needed in areas identified as a priority. As such, an assessment was made of how the education sector has contributed to capacity development and the achievements by countries in Africa.

The ACI covered 34 countries, and the theme for 2011 was capacity development in fragile states. The approach used by the researchers was to collect original data in the field and complement it with secondary sources. Individual indicators of capacity as well as an aggregate index are provided to aid researchers and analysts as well as policy makers. The data thus collected can be used to examine issues and challenges facing countries in cross-border capacity development and cooperation as well as help develop better theoretical underpinnings to the various capacity interventions undertaken. The ACI aimed at serving as a definitive knowledge product for not only policy makers, but also private sector and civil society experts and for university leaders and administrators. (See Africa Capacity Indicators 2011 for more detail available at <http://elibrary.acbfact.org>)

Table 1. Achievement in capacity development across four clusters

Level	Policy Environment	Processes for Implementation	Development results	CD Outcomes
Very Low	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	61.3%
Low	0.0%	2.9%	58.8%	35.3%
Medium	2.9%	29.4%	26.5%	2.9%
High	8.8%	50.0%	11.8%	0.0%
Very High	88.2%	17.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ACBF, 2011

The results of the survey were analyzed using cluster analysis and produced results in four main clusters of relevance to the issue of the role of higher education. The first is the **policy environment** that enables decisions to be made—including decisions around university reforms. The second is the performance of countries at the organizational level as measured by the effectiveness of processes for implementation—which caters for the quality of university administration and decision-making. Finally results are presented in the area of achievements in development results—which could interpret the role played by universities in generating economic prosperity and higher productivity—and capacity development outcomes such as improvement in individual skills and competences in particular—the primary purpose of universities.

The results indicate that there has been steady progress in improving the policy environment, and indeed that the universities and training centers have generated skilled people who were competent enough to define and formulate policies for development. However, insufficient progress has been achieved in getting processes for implementation—the critical area of capacity “to get things done”—and we have yet to see significant development results and capacity development outcomes (individual skills and organizational competences). Universities and institutes of higher learning have not met the skill needs of the economy and have not generated enough people who can solve problems on the ground and implement solutions in innovative ways to achieve development results.

Developing Capacity and the Role of Education

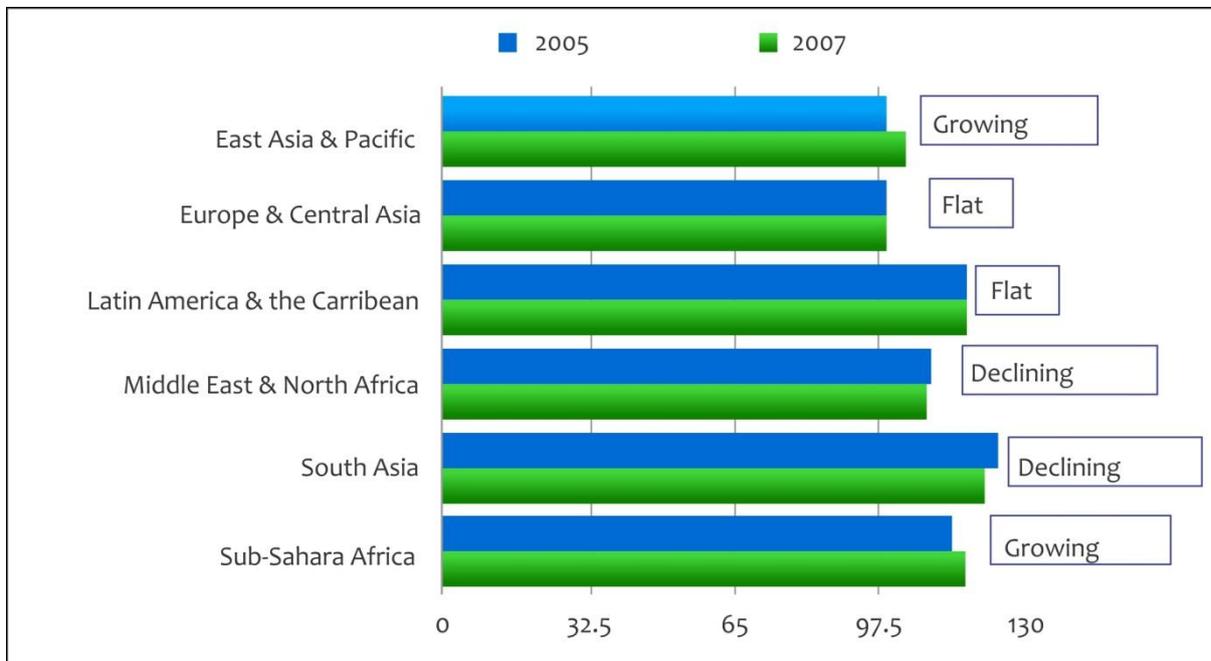
So what have been the challenges facing universities in Africa and what will be needed to revitalize the education sector? What possibilities and opportunities exist for Africa to tackle the education sector reforms needed? These are questions addressed in this section of the paper.

A number of scholars including Sen (1999) cite that “Capacity is Development” and that when countries have the capabilities they need in place, they would be developed states. What role does education play in augmenting capacity?

Education provides the foundation for strategic thinking and development initiatives. This includes providing a pool of people with the basic knowledge and skills for strategic thinking, whether in farming, family planning, or running a logistics company. More complex capacities in the areas of formulating policies and programs that work and finding ways to implement those programs efficiently are another output of educational systems structured to directly support development activities. Having people with the skills for observation and follow through is also a critical requirement of any educational system. Education also provides the ground for research and innovation. This includes generation of new ideas through research and development and experimental actions that supports testing and piloting. There is also the role of education systems to provide the basic skills for assessment, evaluation, and benchmarking which aids evolution and improvement of initial ideas. Then there is the critical learning in educational systems around using and sharing information and ideas such as in the use of libraries, participation in workshops, involvement in seminars and conferences.

Africa is improving in its ability to provide basic education, as can be seen in the achievement in the gross intake rate in grade 1, which has been growing since 2005, particularly aided by the Millennium Development Goals.

Fig. 2: Africa is improving in providing basic education gross intake in grade 1. Total (%)



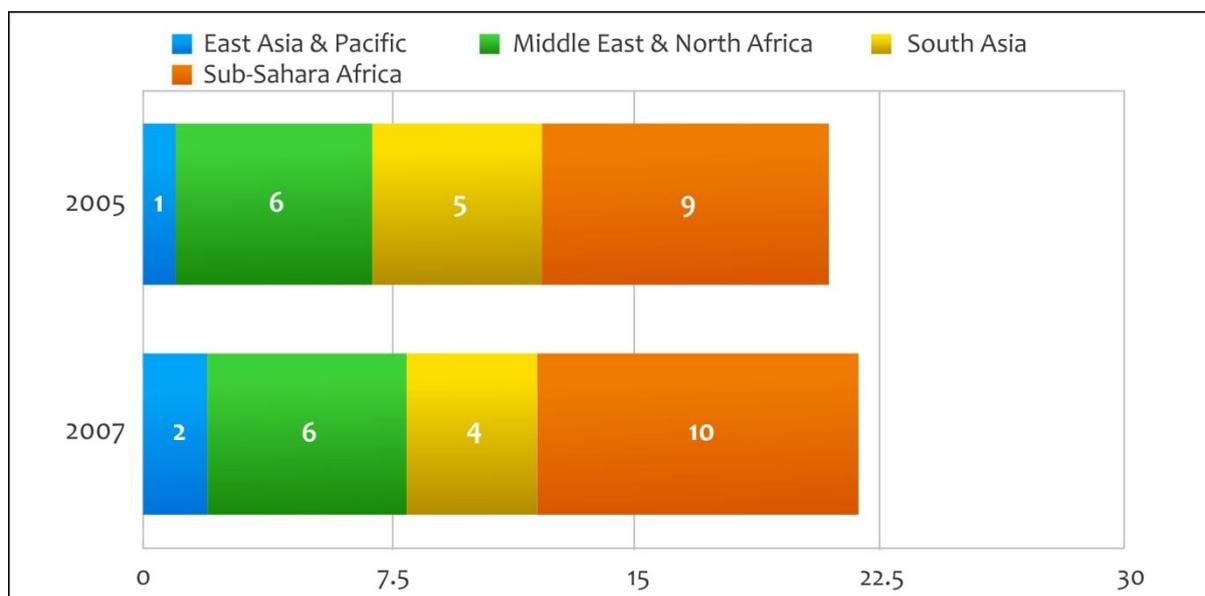
Source: Calculated using data from World Bank Datafinder

The main challenge has been assuring the quality of education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels which has been weakened by poor inputs at the primary level and poor outputs as well. The number of students repeating primary education as they failed to pass common exams has increased since 2005, indicating a worsening of quality of primary education. This means that graduates from the basic education system have been growing but have not been graduating with the requisite basic skills for effective functioning in society.

The quality education has also been affected by the lack of sufficient investment in the education sector by countries over the years. Insufficient investment in the education sector is manifested in the following areas:

- a) *Policy level – Lack of adequate research to inform public policy*
- b) *Infrastructure – Inadequate physical infrastructure like classrooms, libraries and laboratories but also in the area of Information Communication Technology (ICT)*
- c) *Faculty development – Insufficient investment in growing the numbers and quality of lecturers including refresher training to re-tool existing faculty*

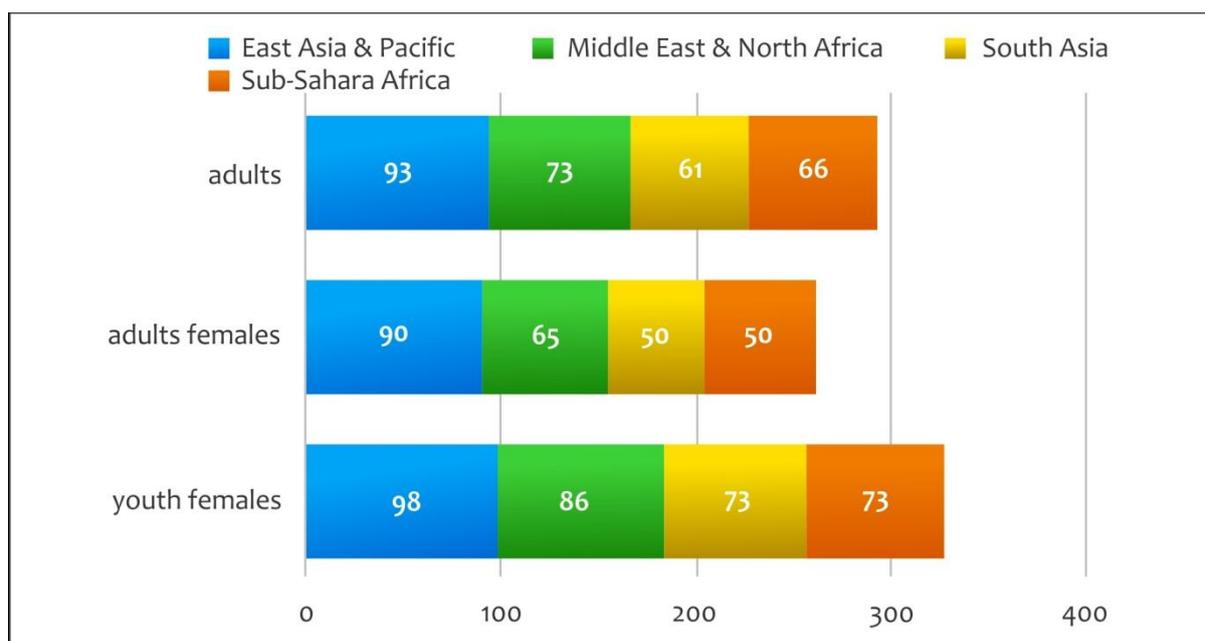
Fig. 3: Africa’s education quality a challenge at all levels, driven by weak inputs at the primary level: repeaters, primary, total (% of total)



Source: Calculated using data from World Bank Datafinder

Literacy rates have improved in Africa during the period under review, particularly among young females. As part of efforts to meet the MDGs, a number of countries adopted affirmative action to address education of the girl child. However, challenges remain when it comes to adult female literacy rates that remain lower than those of men. Given the importance of a mother’s education in early childhood development, it is not surprising to see the deterioration in quality of outputs at the primary school level.

Fig. 4: Basic skills better than South Asia but not as high as East Asia: literacy rate (%)



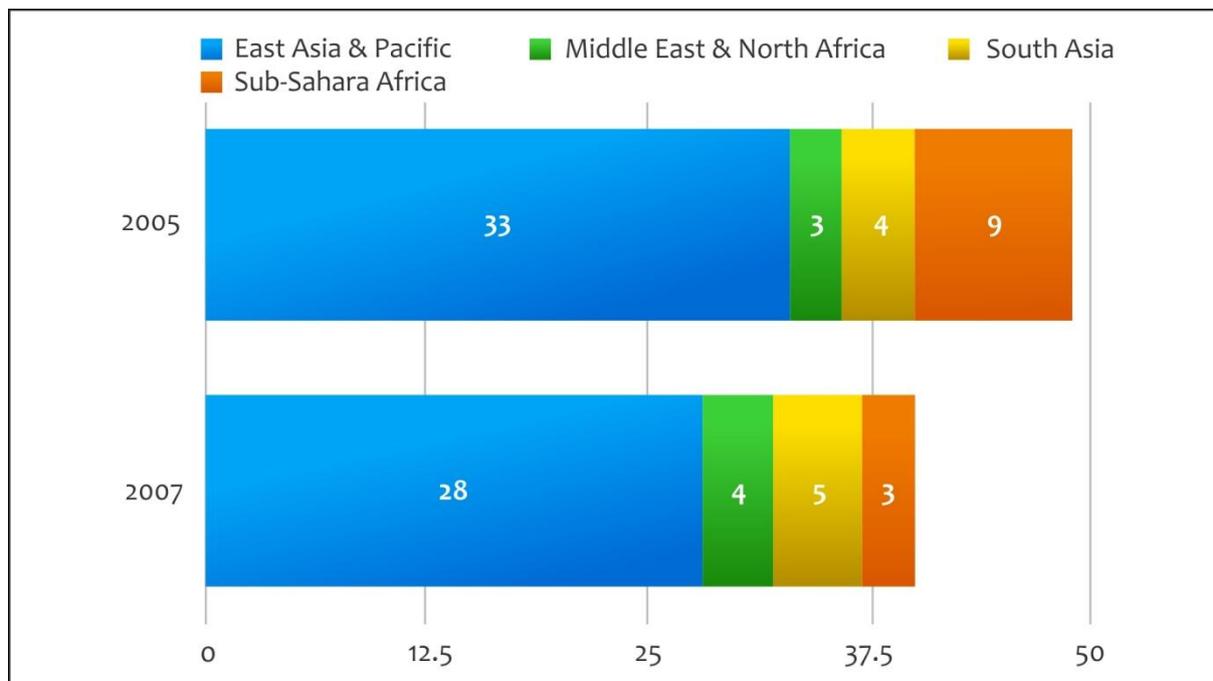
Source: Calculated using data from World Bank Datafinder

It is not surprising therefore to see that while many countries have managed to improve the capacity to develop strategy and common vision in Africa, many challenges remain, with Africa Capacity Indicators Report for 2011 (ACBF, 2011) citing the fact that up to 21% of the countries can do this only at a very low capacity. Many countries just do not have the people that can define the processes for implementation and oversee the putting in place of critical development programs. According to ACBF (2011), more than 30% of countries have been unable to make strategic policy choices using their statistical systems—which means the analytical capacity and the fluidity of skills and competences for observation and analysis of facts and data are missing in many of these environments.

Such limitations show up in the difficulty countries have in defining and implementing appropriate sectoral policies, starkly illustrated by more than 80% of countries being able to define agricultural policies effectively. Transforming agriculture is a critical capacity in all scenarios for Africa in order to guarantee food security and manage food price shocks, yet according to ACBF (2011), less than 5% of countries can define agricultural policies at a high level in Africa. Inability to define appropriate agricultural policies is a result of countries not according agriculture the right priority position in the national development process.

Africa is also losing ground in terms of new idea generation and has not been able to compete in the area of high tech products as can be seen by the poor performance since 2005 in generating products for high tech exports which deteriorated from 9% of manufactured exports in 2005 to only 3% in 2008.

Fig. 5: Africa losing ground in new idea generation: (high tech exports as % manufactured exports)



Source: Calculated using data from World Bank Datafinder

There is a silver lining however in the innovation of using high tech imports. Even though Africa has deteriorated in the development of high tech products it has dramatically improved in the use of high tech products like mobile technologies partly as a direct result of inadequate infrastructure for supporting fixed line telephone systems. The education system however, has not been at the forefront of these innovative uses and has even lagged behind other sectors like banking and finance (such as MPESA for mobile banking) and the health sector (mobile nursing services in rural areas).

Poor record keeping, in addition to insufficient investment in the area of research, makes it difficult to gauge the level of research and development done in Africa, compared to other regions such as East Asia where countries have leapfrogged to surpass Africa even though they were at the same level or worse 50 years ago.

Table 2: Africa has done well in use of mobile technologies but the education system not at the fore front of innovation: Mobile and cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)

Region	2005	2007
East Asia & Pacific	29	53
Middle East & North Africa	22	58
South Asia	8	33
Sub Saharan Africa	13	33

Source: Calculated using data from World Bank Datafinder

Major strides have been made by countries to invest in information and communications technologies (ICT) but Africa is still behind in the Internet backbone that is critical for innovation systems. The advances in the use of mobile technology muffles this gap as many services can ride on the mobile platform but it does show up in limitations in the continents ability to really transform its economies and societies using ICT.

What Does Africa Need in the Education Sector?

African universities and centers for higher learning have faced myriad challenges in the past, which partly explains their poor record in aiding development. Financing deficits due to disengagement of the state from social provisioning is a major reason, with few notable exceptions, including countries like South Africa that have succeeded in shielding their top universities (Government of South Africa 2010). Education continues to receive the biggest share of the country's budget. It is not surprising therefore that South Africa is the only country that has two of its universities listed in the top universities following the Shanghai Process (ARWU, 2011).

Many universities are facing rising student-to-teacher ratios, making it harder to offer quality guidance and mentoring to the students. University professors and lecturers are also poorly paid and use their time seeking consulting and other business opportunities instead of engaging in improving their curriculum and content and doing research. Political intrusion in academia has also eroded the quality of teaching and graduates. Universities face a growing divide between the need for consistency and the concurrent need for continuous change via good management and effective utilization of limited resources. Universities are compelled to seek a balance between the “new” and the “old” while striving to develop the needed capacity to negotiate the complexities of networked and interconnected spaces, which has come as a result of globalization and the increased mobility of people and ideas.

So what can universities in Africa do? First, there is a critical need for mentoring and training programs that transfer knowledge from the current generation of professors and university leaders to the next. There is also a need to identify possible future leaders at an early stage and to grow them into the next generation of university leaders. Using local challenges to define the curriculum and content of university programs is also another area needing attention. Universities need to devise ways in which they can tap into the collective intelligence of society and use interaction with communities to source ideas and share knowledge, becoming the place where people come to learn from all walks of life. Such partnering with communities can encourage social innovation and learning and contribute to really solving Africa’s development challenges. Universities need to leverage the power of networks to connect actors, problems and solutions. Coming up with solutions for mobile learning systems and faculty is one innovation that can break open the challenge of limited capacity and small numbers of high quality faculty.

Revitalizing the education sector also needs to transform universities into centers for leadership development, research and innovation. This requires unique models for capacity development of tertiary institutions that generate individual capacity in terms of skills, knowledge and competences. Attention needs to go at the institutional level as well, to develop faculty, library facilities, lecture room facilities, modern teaching aids (e-learning, distance learning, group learning), ICT innovations (video conferencing facilities) and laboratories. Organizational capacity is also needed to help universities develop the leadership they need to manage in a modern era, build skills in networking across professional groups and build partnerships with the private sector and civil society. Such partnerships could help tackle the problem of unemployment, which is so critical for Africa’s development.

Some universities in Africa have begun to pursue opportunities as can be seen in the rise in partnerships that have transformed the production, utilization and creation of knowledge. Many university faculties now work across borders and source content for teaching on the Internet even linking up classrooms with each other to bring unique content and interactivity. Take the example of Sciences Po in Paris which links up to four universities in Africa including in Accra, Bamako, Dar es Salaam and Ouagadougou in a classroom setting where participants learn from each other in a live exchange by video

conferencing. Countries have also adopted dual structures in which universities are supplemented by centers engaged in knowledge generation and application with countries and across the world. An example is the Millennium Village Program at the Earth Institute at Columbia University in the United States of America, which links 10 African countries in an attempt to uncover innovation in development (Columbia Global Centers, 2010). A number of universities are also seeking ways to integrate various perspectives from the plethora of disciplines and approaches such as the adoption and utilization of e-technology that has allowed University of Stellenbosch to completely transform its approach to teaching (Stellenbosch, 2011). The 2iE Institute in Ouagadougou, which educates engineers and technicians from 14 francophone countries, has been highly innovative in its use of e-Learning to restructure engineering education and the use of laboratories and partnerships with the private sector to innovate in the areas of green technology for efficient energy and water use. A number of self-directed learners use the MIT Open Course Ware system and have learned a great deal from such interaction.

Wide acceptance of learning from each other using the Internet and other mobile systems has also helped African universities cope with the challenges highlighted above. These innovations are allowing universities to seek cheaper ways of providing basic education so that they can focus on the highly time consuming but value adding personal attention needed for the high-end skills. Universities are also using the easy access to information to attract learners from the job market who are seeking to improve their skills, using the much-needed earnings in other areas of university needs such as improving the facilities and infrastructure. Doing research for pay to support universities are also models in use that provide incentives to faculty to earn more but keep them with a minimum teaching load and stringent research and publication requirements to ensure quality staff and faculty.

With such innovations there is a good chance that Africa can use universities and centers of higher learning to leapfrog the development process. This would require commitment by government to support universities and for leaders of education establishments to find effective ways to work with the private sector. Leadership is key for this to happen, both at the political level as well as at the organizational level. Today's university leaders need to embrace change, drive for discovery, be aware of opportunities and drive hard bargains. Strategic partnerships are also needed across countries to save on infrastructure and expensive retooling. There are also numerous opportunities to tap into the Diaspora, many of whom are willing to give back to Africa for free. E-learning offers a good opportunity and tool for tapping into Diaspora capacity.

Countries need to think of four areas of capacity for universities and systems of higher education. Ensuring education institutions have the requisite **transformative capacity** because they can generate people with the skills, competences, and motivation for transforming their societies. That curriculum and engagements with education materials and pedagogical tools highlight and focus on real skills to get things done that are so needed for **implementation capacity**. Classroom exercises, internship activities, and reading materials need to focus on not only theory but also practical approaches and examples that challenge learners to try things out on their own. Challenging learners to

be original and to experiment would also be key to build the **innovative capacity** so needed to leapfrog development. Having universities partner with communities and the private sector to bridge the world of learning and doing could bring in the needed change. With such poor showings in the type, amount and quality of research in Africa there is a critical need to have universities build their own and contribute to developing in the practice world the needed **research capacity**.

Such changes call for attention to generate leaders of universities who have the ability to function in areas of low predictability; that are prepared to handle diverse futures. University leaders would be skilled in generating strategies and handling risk scenarios. They would be highly ethical people with values and behaviors that guide them in making choices under challenging circumstances. Leaders, who can identify important shifts, extract important relationships and select from a variety of approaches for handling challenges would be critical to lead universities through the needed reforms. Academic excellence would no longer be sufficient for this type of change.

What Role for Capacity Building Institutions like ACBF?

There is a role for capacity building institutions such as ACBF in helping universities get there. First, there is a need to address the financing gaps. ACBF has invested over US\$150 million in grants to more than 90 universities in a variety of arrangements that support transformation and reform.

Second, there is a need to build institutions that pull the quality of all universities upward. ACBF has supported entities like the African Association of Universities (AAU) that have developed a series of programs that have aided in the development of leaders, collection of research and support of faculty improvements in addition to providing platforms for scaling up ideas that work.

Third, it is important to build research capacity, which ACBF has supported by financing joint electives programs for universities such as the PhD program run by the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC).

Fourth, attention is needed to get specialized skills that have been developed through collaborative programs for universities and training institutions like the Economic Policy Management (EPM) and Collaborative Masters in Agricultural Economics (CMAE) programs supported by ACBF.

Fifth, is the need to address the development needs of nations through university programs, such as developing the needed administrative capacity of the public sector through programs like Public Sector Management Training Program (PSMTP).

Sixth is role of focused training programs for retooling and refreshing professionals in the field, helping training centers support universities in continuous learning, as in the ACBF support to the Macroeconomic and Finance Management Institute (MEFMI) and the West African Institute for Finance and Economic Management (WAIFEM).

Finally, ACBF has contributed by ensuring that the programs for higher learning are inclusive through its work in ensuring the targeting of women and the inclusion of participants from fragile states and countries in conflict. This has been done through reserved scholarships for women and targeted recruitment from fragile and post conflict states.

The new strategy for the Foundation covering the period 2012-2016 focuses on experimentation and learning with attention to strategic partnerships with policy units and think tanks, support to leadership development and accountable governance, and partnerships for scaling up results that sees universities as critical loci for change and supports them in addition to other organizations and institutions to ensure that the capacities needed for Africa's development will be in place.

Conclusions

Capacity in the education sector is vital for supporting effective and sustainable development. Challenges facing African universities call for creative solutions and a new leadership. University leaders need to be conversant with complex adaptive systems thinking and be able to make effective decisions under different strategic and risk scenarios. Africa needs to reposition universities to become the centre for new ideas that support its development. African universities are uniquely placed to tackle these challenges if they can improve on the approach they take to a knowledge society, their relationships with the private sector, their ability to tap into opportunities offered by new pedagogical and communication tools, and their boldness in bringing the needed change.

Assessing the level of capacity achieved by African countries through the Africa Capacity Indicators Report provides benchmarks on what to strive for by countries, institutions of higher learning, and policy makers. Attention needs to go beyond basic skills and tackle the difficult areas of innovation-versus-implementation.

The African Capacity Building Foundation is a strong institution for capacity development in rich but fragile continent. The Foundation has experimented over the years with different approaches for building capacity including on the role of universities to change society and transform economies. The future strategy of the Foundation is to support the emergence, development, and scaling up of solutions to institutional leadership in African universities.

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