# Managing and Leading African Universities in a Globalized World

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The leaders of African universities face an urgent need to expose the critical aspects of operating universities in a globalized world. In the 21st century, managing and leading universities present enormous challenges—owing to their complexities, such as, multifaceted institutions with large budgets and the effects of cross-border education. This article explains the need for African university leaders to undertake some training in the nature of university governance, as a prerequisite. In 1960, only 20 universities were operating in Africa. Today, there are more than 500 universities (both public and private). This sudden explosion in the number of universities attributes to certain factors, including universal secondary education and the perception of higher education as a lucrative and viable commodity. However, with the rise in the number of universities, a high level of demand arises, for good leadership to manage these universities.

## LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Within most African states, the selection of university management and leadership has been based on academic achievement and government

endorsement. In most countries, top university leadership, such as the vice chancellors and rectors, gains access to such positions on the basis of being renowned scholars. While such a phenomenon may be considered a positive value, in reality it would be worthy to engage potential university leaders in training, to enable them to face the related challenges. In Uganda, few vice chancellors have participated in rigorous leadership and management training programs, and few programs have been set up to provide a localized African context. Yet, most African university vice chancellors are faced with numerous administrative and human-resource challenges.

### EMERGENCE OF THE PRIVATE PROVIDER

In the African context, an emergence of new providers to university education has occurred—"the private providers." The rise in the number of these private providers in the university arena raises a number of issues, because most of these universities fail to deliver quality education. Moreover, they experience enormous hardships—sometimes forced to close operations as soon as they are licensed (see the Ugandan newspaper, the *Monitor*, May 21, 2010, on the closure of Lugazi University). Conversely, within the private sector, many times the vice chancellors are not chosen as good scholars but because they are part of the ownership (promoters or members of the board of trustees). Thus, the problem gets compounded since the person entrusted with the stewardship at a private university may lack the basic know-how of running an institution of such a magnitude—hence, creating a high rate of weaknesses, such as poor teaching.

## THE WAY FORWARD

As the custodian of higher education institutions in Uganda, the National Council for Higher Education embarked on a three-year management and leadership training pilot program, to bolster Uganda's emerging university leaders. The Management and Leadership Training Program, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, aims to identify, prepare, and equip 150 emerging university leaders with crucial higher education management skills.

Based on a needs assessment, it was resolved to develop nine modules. The first module, entitled "African Education in a Globalizing World," introduces the concept of globalization and other related factors—such as, internationalization and cross-border education. The second module, "Leadership, Institutional Innovation and Development," covers the subject of leadership in universities, which is viewed as a crucial lever in moving the institutions toward their desired destinations. The third module, entitled "Corporate Governance of Universities," is designed to facilitate a deeper understanding of the corporate governance issues facing universities. The fourth module, the "Management of Resources of Universities," aims at equipping universities managers with the knowledge of resource acquisition and management. The fifth module, the "Management of Academic Processes," looks at the processes of academic provision in universities. The sixth module handles the issues of socioeconomic development and articulates the notion of universities as key actors, in reshaping the economic landscape of nations. The philosophy underpinning the module selection is based on the premise that participants (trainees) are given opportunity to determine what to be rolled out as the eventual module. This aspect of module development is captured during

respective training sessions and refined by carefully selected module writers, with good knowledge of curriculum development. The seventh, eighth, and ninth modules shall adopt a similar strategy but are forecast to embody the strategic issues (thinking and planning)—engulfing higher education as a whole.

To achieve its objective of attracting credible actors to the program, the Management and Leadership Training Team undertook an intense participant selection process, by conducting initial workshops at universities to identify potential leaders committed to the three-year training program and the higher education system. The outreach strategy, adopted by the Management and Leadership Training Team of engaging universities to directly in the selection process, realized excellent results. The plan provided a wonderful opportunity for both the Management and Leadership Training Team and the university community, to clarify issues and deal with anxieties and potential problems— early before the training time. The program identifies current and former vice chancellors as trainers, who would refrain from lecturing but adopt a facilitative approach. Such an approach constitutes developing a pool of training facilitators in university leadership and management, on the continent. However, as part of the training, participant cohorts are required to provide reform projects for their institutions. The program is currently working with 12 universities (public and private chartered), in Uganda, and is monitored by the Evaluation Research Agency, based at Stellenbosch in South Africa.

## THE OUTCOME THUS FAR

Three cohorts of middle and top managers and leaders from the participating universities have been trained. In each case, the project has witnessed great

enthusiasm and openness, to revising their worldview and to learning new things. The eagerness to implement the reform projects in the respective universities promises outstanding success for the project. Participants have been able to demonstrate the ability to distinguish the roles of and relationships with the various stakeholders in higher education. Moreover, participants have shown a good degree of analytical assessment and are determined to chart strategies for aiding their progression.

## CONCLUSION

The number of universities in Africa will continue to grow, as nations seek to acquire knowledge for economic development. Managing and leading the emerging universities pose theoretical and practical challenges. The onus is on university leaders to prepare themselves. Embracing innovative initiatives such as the Management and Leadership Training Program, by Carnegie, can propel potential leaders to embrace the reform process and set the leadership style for university graduates who become the nation's own leaders.