

DOCTORAL STUDIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE PLANNED RESSESA INTERVENTION

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Background and Introduction

The extant literature on higher education in Africa attests the existence of African based higher education institutions before the advent of colonialism (Assie-Lumumba 2006). According to Lulat (2005) three African countries – Egypt, Ethiopia and Morocco – had higher education systems that were earlier contributors to knowledge creation and dissemination in the areas of religion and philosophy, and to the production of highly qualified religious leaders and thinkers. Nonetheless, modern higher education in Africa was introduced during the colonial period and had no link to the indigenous systems (Tefera and Altbach 2003). Modeled very closely on their European origins, African colonial universities were established in both Anglophone and Francophone Africa with an overall purpose of providing the necessary indigenous support staff for the colonial administration (ibid.). The number of these colonial universities was very small. Sall (2004,181) indicates that ‘At the time of independence, or roughly the late 1950s and early 1960s, the total number of universities and university colleges in sub-Saharan Africa, outside of South Africa, was fewer than 10.’

During the first decade in post-independence Africa there was a great deal of enthusiasm for promoting higher education systems in the region. Almost all newly independent states started to establish their own universities. There were two major impetuses for opening the universities in many SSA countries. The first is symbolic based on the firm belief on the part of the founder leaders in universities as symbols of independent state hood or fruits of nationalism. The second is instrumental based on the belief that universities could be centres of human capital formation as well as hubs for the production and

distribution of knowledge to eliminate poverty, ignorance and disease (Lulat 2005; AAU 2004; Sawyerr 2004; Gakusi 2010).

Although the newly created universities in sub-Saharan Africa were different from the colonial universities in their essential mission of nation-building and national development, they were modeled after some universities in Europe and North America and depended on ideas and practices of these universities. There were, however, attempts to make some changes on the then existing higher education system. As elaborated by Ajayi et al. (1996) and Akin Aina (1994) cited in AAU (2004), some of the changes include: widening access to increase students enrolment; establishment of new universities or new campuses of national universities in countries with large geographical spread; creation of specialized universities in fields such as technology and agriculture; changes in curriculum and other innovations such as the introduction of vocational and professional educational programs; greater subject choice (rather than specialization), and an emphasis on African culture not only through the study of the humanities but also through incorporating important aspects of indigenous knowledge into courses in medicine, technology and architecture; as well as government control of the administrative side especially in the hiring and firing of senior managers, such as Presidents, Rectors, Vice Chancellors, Directors and Deans.

The enthusiasm of the 1970s to expand and increase university education in Africa did not last more than one decade and half. From the 1980s up to the beginning of the new millennium universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in sub-Saharan Africa were in state of crises characterized by poor quality of teaching, learning and research; absence of investment in libraries and infrastructure and deterioration of physical facilities; diminishing financial resources, declining salaries, and absence of research funding; brain-drain and mass departure of staff from higher education sector; and repeated closures of many universities due to political unrests (AAU 2004; Assié-Lumumba 2006).

The literature on African higher education indicates that there are many causes for the deterioration of African higher education systems from the mid-1980s up to the end of 1990s (Adesina 2003; AAU 2004; World Bank 1986; Robertson 2008). The first fundamental challenge that severely diminished African countries' capacity to enhance the quality and accessibility of their higher education systems and expand