ON AFRICA
Scholars and African Studies

Contributions in Honour of
Lennart Wohlgemuth

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Editor’s Preface

Lennart Wohlgemuth served as Director of The Nordic Africa Institute from 1993 to the end of 2005. At the time of his retirement, the Institute had a higher degree of visibility and relevance than ever before. What could have been more suitable to recognize and honour the achievements and merits of Lennart on the occasion of his departure than to organize a seminar on a topic close to his heart?

We invited several of his many friends and colleagues to join us in our reflections on a theme Lennart relentlessly pursued at the core of his efforts to enhance African visibility and relevance. It also related to earlier exercises of a similar nature promoted through the Institute.¹ The public Research Forum on The Role of Africa in “African Studies”: African Positions, European Responses took place during the afternoon of 15 December 2005. Many of the long-standing collaborators and supporters from the academic and policy related spheres of his professional career attended this event.

We are now able to share most of the presentations with a wider audience. Not a Festschrift in the classical sense, this publication nevertheless reflects the tribute paid to a former colleague, whose contribution to the Institute for more than a dozen years deserves this acknowledgement.

Uppsala, September 2006
Henning Melber

African Scholars and African Studies

Adebayo Olukoshi

This essay is a revised version of a speech which was delivered in Uppsala, Sweden, in December 2005 in the context of a farewell seminar organized by the Nordic Africa Institute in honour of its retiring Director, Lennart Wohlgemuth. As the unofficial Mr. Africa of the Nordic countries, and as Africa's foremost informal ambassador in the counsels of the Nordic foreign ministries and development cooperation agencies, it was more than fitting that the valedictory seminar to mark the end of his tenure at the Institute was organized around the theme of the role of Africa in African Studies. In addition to being a subject that is dear to Wohlgemuth himself given that his entire career from the 1960s when it started was focused without interruption on Africa, it is one which also directly speaks to the mandate of the Institute and which, for this reason, constitutes an abiding concern in the management of its identity both within the Nordic countries and across Africa.

The theme of the seminar is one, which has recurred intermittently in global African Studies in the period since most African countries attained their independence in the 1960s even if the context of the debates that have occurred around the subject has varied over time, as have the immediate concerns triggering the reflections. At different times too, the issues that have been carried over into the debate have been coloured as much by specific disciplinary concerns as they evolved over time as by the changing fortunes of the African continent itself; the dominant trends in the

2. The theme of the seminar was The Role of Africa in "African Studies": African Positions, European Responses. It took place on 15 December 2005. I was very pleased to have been able to make the trip straight from the 11th General Assembly of CODESRIA, which took place in Maputo, Mozambique, to be present at the seminar. I wish to thank the organisers for associating me with the seminar and the occasion. I first met Lennart Wohlgemuth when I joined the Nordic Africa Institute in 1994 as a Senior Programme Officer/Programme Coordinator and have been fortunate since then to enjoy a close relationship with him – first professionally, and then more socially. All through the time I have known and interacted with him, two things have stood out about Wohlgemuth which have impressed me considerably: his indefatigable commitment to Africa even when the sense of hope and optimism of many around him have appeared to waver and falter, and his inviting personality that is accompanied by a never-ending desire to inquire and learn.
Euro-American Africanist community that studies the continent, and the shifting strategic considerations of the foreign policy and development cooperation establishments of the West. Thus it was that in the period following the independence of most African countries during the 1960s, a development that was accompanied by the rapid growth of the African university and the emergence of a significant number of African scholars immersed in the study of various aspects of their continent, questions centring on the Africanization of the curriculum and the re-orientation of the dominant interpretative narratives on the history and prospects of African countries from their imperial tone and tenor loomed large on the agenda of African Studies. It was considered no longer tenable that African Studies could be carried out and strengthened without the full and, at a very minimum, equal participation of African scholars. As Lonsdale (2005) has noted correctly in a retrospective and prospective analytic essay on African Studies in Europe, deliberate efforts were made by an important and influential generation of European Africanists to be an active part of this process even with all the limitations associated with their individual and collective location in the hierarchies of power underpinning knowledge production and dissemination on Africa.

From the discipline of History where efforts were made to rewrite the historiography of landmark moments in the ancient and contemporary experiences of the continent to Literature where a lively debate occurred on the place of indigenous languages and oratory, and Philosophy where investments were made in the study of indigenous knowledge/thought systems, the arrival of Africans on the stage of African Studies was vigorously asserted even if, as can be expected, their presence and the perspectives they brought with them did not always go uncontested – even unresented – by vested interests entrenched in the Western academy and determined to resist and/or diminish change. African students of Africa took a frontline role in the effort to stamp an African influence on African Studies, but, significantly, they were not alone, able to count, as they did, on the collaboration and support of eminent Africanists like Thomas Hodgkin, Basil Davidson, and Claude Meillasoux, to cite but a few of them, who were vociferous in countering the most brazenly racist discourses about Africa in the European academy. Some two and half decades later, during the course of the 1980s and 1990s, as the crises of higher education in Africa gathered steam and the drain of talent from universities across the continent to European and American centres of research and teaching accelerated in tandem, a new, if qualitatively different, round of discussions flared up on the future of African Studies in the light of the entry in large numbers of a new generation of highly

3. The founding of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) whose Secretariat in Dakar I currently have the privilege of leading fed into the overall momentum that gathered pace in the period after independence to stamp the African presence and influence on the study of the continent both within the boundaries of Africa and beyond.
qualified African scholars into African Studies in the West. Throughout this period, there was a constant reflection on what exactly constitutes African Studies – reflections that recurred side by side with efforts at (re)defining Africa itself as a first step towards the goal of mapping the terrain and defining the central issues.

Furthermore, in the face of the re-organisation of Western foreign policy concerns after the end of the old East-West Cold War towards the close of the 1980s, the initial decline that occurred in Area Studies produced a distinct set of concerns about the future of African Studies, concerns which, in part, led some to seek survival strategies in the merger of African Studies with Black Studies, and others to contemplate closing down or scaling back their programmes in the face of dwindling funding opportunities. Some would argue that the post-Cold War decline was also directly connected to the irrelevance of much of the output of the Africanist community to the policy establishments in Washington and elsewhere in the West (Martin and West, 1995). However, post-September 11 2001 and with the rise of the “War on Terror”, Area Studies that had been consigned (prematurely) to the dustbin of history in certain circles was very quickly revived as Western, mainly United States, geo-political and strategic calculations called for new investments in knowledge production about “far-flung” regions of the world like Africa with significant Muslim populations, an abundance of strategic natural resources, and a host of flashpoints of instability. If immediately after the end of the Cold War, the prevailing mood that emerged was one of Afro-pessimism that translated into a policy of sidelining countries that were derogatorily referred to in some intellectual milieus as “basket cases”, the period immediately following the events of September 11 2001 resulted in a sea-change in thinking with the result that the very fact of conflict and crises in different parts of Africa became the primary justification for a re-engagement with Area Studies. These different dimensions of the recent story of African Studies have been captured in many review studies such as those undertaken by Berger (1997), Kassimir (1997), Zeleza (1997; 2003), Falola and Jennings (2002), Mkandawire (2002), Sall (2002), and Melber (2005).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the decision of the Nordic Africa Institute to devote the valedictory seminar in honour of its retiring Director to the theme of African Studies represents the continuation of a long-standing debate. But I hasten to include a caveat about the theme of the seminar whose sub-title of “African

4. The immediate post-Cold War environment and the apparent decline in Africa’s strategic value to the United States which some felt it portended was a complete contrast to the upbeat mood of the post-World War Two context that ushered African countries into independence in the 1960s and boosted the expansion of Area Studies with resources from the development cooperation agencies of the West.

5. Some observers also note that the emergence of China as a much weightier player in the post-Cold War, post-September 11 world was a factor in the revival of Area Studies in the United States especially as the Chinese quest for resources began to translate into broader ranging forays into Africa and the construction of various geo-strategic alliances across the continent.
Positions – European Responses” needs to be scrutinized and questioned closely on at least two important grounds. For one, it should be understood that in all matters related to the study of Africa – theory, method, concepts, evidence, and interpretation – there are no homogenous African positions exclusive to Africans or unified European responses exclusive to Europeans. Indeed, if anything, positions and responses are diverse within both intellectual spaces/universes and tend to be shared across the North-South/Africa-Europe divide that is implied in the sub-title. Moreover, these positions also tend to interpenetrate and overlap in complex ways that make a rigid, binary opposition of perspectives difficult to sustain. For another, the sub-title speaks to a debate about the weight of different voices in African Studies and although there should be no questioning of the legitimate right of all scholars – African and non-African alike – to research the continent and project whatever perspectives that might flow from their findings or even their political persuasions and policy inclinations, it must also never be forgotten that there are important underlying relations of power that play themselves out at various levels and with different consequences that African Studies can only (continue to) ignore at its own peril.

The power relations within African Studies have produced hierarchies that are also contiguous with the existing North-South asymmetries that underpin the broader interaction between Africa and the West. It is out of these asymmetries that questions have been posed within African Studies as to who may legitimately speak for Africa: Africans or non-Africans? These questions are important in their own right and, when posed by Africans, should not be dismissed lightly or glibly as constituting a one-sided claim to an “entitlement” that is anchored on an imagined ideology of “nativitism” or “authencity” and which, inexorably, results in parochialism (Mbembe, 2000; Robins, 2004). The import of the questions lies in the fact that African Studies continues to be suffused with unequal power relations that play to the advantage of non-African high priests of the field and which have been accentuated by the context of the severe weakening of institutions of advanced research in Africa, the collapse of an earlier culture of research espoused by a generation of Africanists who consciously sought to immerse themselves in the communities with which they were in contact and its replacement by a new culture that projects the quintessential Africanist as both imperious and impersonal, the sharp decline of investments in collegiality between African and non-African students of the continent, and the expansion of relations of paternalism that are manifested in unequal divisions of labour and facilitated by the precarious conditions of many an African scholar struggling to cope with the impact of the crises of the higher education system.

In the light of the observations which I have made on the sub-title of the seminar, I have chosen to interpret the topic assigned to me as an invitation to offer a critique, as seen from the viewpoint of an African researcher, of the state of contem-
temporary African Studies. I welcome this opportunity in part because of my growing concern that, over and above all the problems that have bedevilled African Studies both historically and contemporaneously, a wide gulf appears to be developing between many African and Africanist perspectives on Africa, and that before the gulf becomes unbridgeable, we might do well to confront the sources of the differing concerns and interpretations that are in evidence in order to rescue the field from a self-inflicted crisis of stagnation and decline. In presenting my critique, I would like from the outset to discount the potentially distracting position espoused by the ex-Africanist Gavin Kitching who circulated a written notice of his decision to quit African Studies on the primary argument, to strip it of all the rigmarole in which it was embellished, that Africa was failing to live up to his expectations as an Africanist who had invested so much hope in the possibilities of continental re-birth and progress. Such infantile outbursts by people immersed in an unreconstructed version of the White Man’s burden and propelled by a misplaced sense of self-importance hardly deserve to be taken seriously for the purposes of the task at hand. Indeed, African Studies may turn out to be well-served by the decision of the likes of Kitching to quit the field and it may well surprise them that their departure has not been noticed by many. The concerns which I address here are meant for those who genuinely wish to contribute to the development of African Studies as a top field in knowledge production, one that is outstanding on account of the quality of its output and the social responsibility that its animators share.

**African Studies in Historical Context**

African Studies such as we know it today has a relatively recent history. Its remote origins are traceable to the anthropological research activities carried out by adventurers, missionaries, and different categories of imperial administrators in the period just ahead and immediately following the onset of European colonial rule in Africa. Its more contemporary origins are tied to the period after 1945 when, in the overall context of the onset of the process of decolonisation and the rise of the East-West Cold War, Area Studies grew in importance in the United States in tandem with the intellectual demands and policy requirements for the strengthening and projection of American power in a post-war world in the throes of an ideological polarization and arms race. The emergence and growth of Area Studies in the United States resonated in the European higher education system, mediated by a preoccupation with the question of how to promote “development” that was beginning to occupy policy and political attention in the period of late colonialism. Whereas in the United States, Area Studies was critical to the generation of research information for the formulation of foreign policy objectives and strategy towards the developing world, in Europe, without being fully disconnected from the Cold War calculus of the big powers, it formed part and parcel of the post-1945 development agenda that emerged
as one of the responses to the growing nationalist pressures for independence. These responses included the formal establishment of centres/institutes of African Studies in Europe and North Africa side by side with the creation of development corporations and institutes; they also involved the setting up of university colleges in different parts of the continent, complete with their own centres/institutes of African Studies. The pioneer staff of many of the centres/institutes of African Studies in Europe and Africa in the period of late colonialism included a significant number of former colonial provincial and district officials.

Over the years, African Studies has developed into a distinct field of enquiry, drawing on various disciplinary sources ranging from the social sciences and the humanities to the natural sciences, including tropical medicine and agriculture. Centres and departments of African Studies were to proliferate within and outside Africa as universities and institutions of advanced research launched competing degree and non-degree programmes. Both in Europe and the United States, African Studies interfaced to varying degrees with development cooperation – and Development Studies; not a few African Studies centres and programmes are directly or indirectly financed out of the aid budget set aside for Africa by governments in Europe, North America and Asia. It is partly for this reason that the fortunes of the field have also generally tended to fluctuate with the level of resource commitments to development assistance. Deep cuts in aid have been refracted into the level of resource endowments available to African Studies; crises of development assistance have also tended to be interpreted as crises of African Studies. When the development assistance community has been upbeat, the Africanist community has also tended to be upbeat; pessimism about the impact of development assistance was the harbinger of Afro-pessimism in African Studies in the 1990s.

The sum total of the history of the emergence, growth, crises and renewal of African Studies is its integrated, almost organic connection to succeeding generations of Africa policy communities mostly located in the governmental systems of the countries of the North, although more recently incorporating non-governmental organizations whose activities require the generation of research knowledge, and private corporations that require field studies/intelligence reports that would help guide their operations. In this sense, African Studies in the North is not just about simple, routine academic engagements; it carries – and quite often projects the power – of its sponsors who are also a primary end user of its “products”. And although many an Africanist might make pronouncements about the direction of politics, economy and society in Africa that on the face of things may appear to be “innocent” academic statements, in practice, those pronouncements might in fact become the harbinger of a next generation of bilateral and multilateral development policies. Knowledge qua knowledge in African Studies may not be an exception but the most sanguine of observers have learnt to scrutinize the writings of the most influential Africanists, most of them also doubling as consultants and formal/infor-
mal advisers to the policy establishments of their countries, for clues on the future direction of policy. The recent history of African Studies is replete with examples of this organic relationship between the dominant discourses of the leading Africanists and the policy choices embraced by Western governments towards Africa. Perhaps one of the best examples of this organic relationship is the neo-patrimonialist frame of analysis of African politics, economy and society and the policies of conditional-ity/programmes of governance, which it yielded in the effort of the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors to secure neo-liberal market reforms.

The pioneer centres of African Studies set up in the modern African university system enjoyed close ties in their early years with similar centres in the countries of the North. This was owed in part to the fact that many of the senior foundation personnel of these centres were themselves drawn from and/or trained in the North in a context in which several of the African universities in which they were based were started as overseas campuses or autonomous colleges of metropolitan universities, or twinned with various metropolitan universities. Precisely for this reason also, African Studies in Africa was, during its initial phase, a mirror image of African Studies such as it was developing in the North. It was only with the onset of the quest for the Africanisation of the curriculum as part of the nationalist moment in the African higher education system that some of the basic assumptions of African Studies as initially practised in African universities and centres of advanced research began to be challenged. But beyond the quest for Africanization and the nationalist discourses which it yielded, important advancements in theory and method on African development and the place of the continent in the international system also resulted in spirited efforts at remoulding the study of African affairs in Africa – and by Africans. Nowhere was the effort to stamp an African imprint on African Studies more in evidence than in efforts made to produce alternative, sometimes radical narratives of African history and development associated with the various schools that emerged across the continent to challenge received wisdom about the continent’s past. The best known of these schools in terms of their output and vibrancy include the ones based in Ibadan, Dakar, Zaria, and Dar-es-Salaam. In addition to questions of evidence, method, interpretation, and theory which arose from the outputs of these different schools, they also generated reflections on the appropriateness of African universities running programmes of African Studies as opposed, for example, to programmes of European or American Studies. The latter pre-occupation was not so much a quest for a retreat from the international system as much as a questioning of the structures of scholarly accountability in the production of knowledge and the system of the determination of academic priorities for the developmental transformation of the continent (Shivji, 2002).

It is fair to say that the counter-revolution in African Studies that began with the quest for the Africanization of the curriculum and which reached its peak in the crystallization of various schools that invested in evidence, method and theory in
Africa is still unfinished business, four decades or so after it was launched. Indeed, in many instances, setbacks have been registered, especially in the period from the mid-1980s when, as African countries went into economic crises, the higher education system was thrown into a spiral of prolonged decline and decay from which it is yet to recover. The impact and consequences of the crises of the higher education system are all too recent and well known to warrant a detailed recounting here. Suffice it to note that the book famine, infrastructure decay, brain drain and collapse of the culture of research that occurred had adverse effects on the quest to re-orient African Studies in ways which relate more closely to dynamics deriving from within the continent as opposed to those deriving from the concerns of external interests. Indeed, the severe weakening of the African university arising from the economic crises of the countries of the continent resulted in the erosion of the gains associated with the efforts of the nationalist historiographers and their more radical ideological critics on the left. This erosion was accelerated by the intellectual offensive launched by the ideologues of a globally ascendant neo-liberal frame of analysis which sought to explain the African condition in terms of pathologies of power that were deemed to be detrimental to market efficiency and “good governance”. Massive investments were made by the neo-liberal establishment, with backing from multilateral and bilateral donors, to marketize the mission and vision of the university, re-write curricula, and shift the theoretical terrains and conceptual tools of the social researcher in directions that were in consonance with the neo-liberal vision of African development.

Taking a retrospective look at African Studies over the last four decades, it is easy to miss the point which is really important to underscore, namely that the counter-revolution that was associated with post-independence nationalist historiography and the radical critique that developed within Africa of that historiography took place at a time when the African university was strong and growing on all fronts, with the members of the academic community enjoying the necessary mobility to enable them to constitute local reference/epistemic communities whilst simultaneously participating in international networks. In many senses too, and in spite of the many tasks that remained unfinished, that moment also represented the high point of post-1945 African Studies, a moment characterized by an impressive vibrancy of scholarship within the African continent and an equally robust exchange of ideas between Africans and Africanists on the progress, problems and prospects of development. The recession – and retrogression that set in from the mid-1980s onwards began to take root in a period of decline in the environment of learning and research that was characterized by the collapse of local reference/epistemic communities, including professional associations, the decline in scholarly mobility, the weakening of institutionalized links between the metropolitan centres of African Studies and the centres of African Studies – and, indeed, other sites of knowledge production – in Africa, and the growth of patron-clientelist relations that corresponded to a North-
South power asymmetry. It is to this shift in African Studies and the factors that underpin it that attention will now be turned.

An African Scholar’s Reflection

Although centres of African Studies were set up in the modern African university system as it began to emerge first in the period after 1945 and then more vigorously after 1960 when most African countries attained their independence, one question which was never answered satisfactorily and which remains a live one is the rationale for such studies in the post-colonial context. This question is still a key one for which there are no easy answers but on which serious debates must be engaged. For, finding a proper answer to that question will, undoubtedly, go a long way in enabling the African researcher to better clarify his/her position with regard to African Studies in a way that corresponds to challenges that are historically defined over time and space, in accordance with the dictates of context and the forces at play during a given period. As a contribution to that much-needed reflection, I would suggest that there is, indeed, a case for African Studies in Africa in part because of the need to carefully retrieve and document the history of the continent for the benefit of the present and succeeding generations of Africans, but also because the continent and its constituent units are characterized by an extensive, multi-faceted diversity that provides ample room for the building of intra- and cross-national knowledge of one another by Africans. Regrettably, however, much of African Studies as it is constituted today does not facilitate the kind of intra-African cross-national learning that is called for because its primary motif and the logic that continues to propel it is aimed at decoding Africa and Africans for the world and not vice versa and, still less, the African world for Africans. In this way, mainstream African Studies has constituted itself into a tool for the mastering of Africa by others whilst offering very little by way of how Africa might master the world and its own affairs.

Clearly then, to be truly meaningful to Africa, African Studies, whilst being fully critical in the best of academic traditions, will need to be better anchored locally in ways which are organic to the domestic priorities of African countries, permit the full engagement of endogenous knowledge systems, and are disciplined to the aspirations of the social players that are the bearers of change, as opposed to the situation which currently prevails in which African Studies is primarily geared towards serving extra-African needs whether it be in terms of policy, the training of personnel or the generation of knowledge for strategic decision-making. In other words, African Studies, to be truly in the service of Africa, will need not just a change of methodology away from the dominant approach that reduces it to an exercise in a

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6. There is a popular African proverb that says that until the lion learns to tell the story of the chase, it is the version that is told by the hunter proclaiming his/her heroic exploits that will be upheld as valid.
detached – even distracted – study of the “other” but also a shift of the primary audience away from the external world to the internal one, from the foreign to the local. This way, African Studies might be better positioned to contribute to Africa’s much-needed capacity to come to terms with itself, and to engage the world on terms that are favourable to its advancement. But it is inconceivable that this can be done in the absence of robust systems of higher education with universities at their core that are clearly driven by research, and African scholarly voices that are heard loudly and clearly locally and internationally. It is also certain that the re-orientation that is called for will require a commitment by many an Africanist to unlearn the existing modes by which they study Africa and relate to locally-based academic communities both in the field and in their scholarly output. That re-education exercise will have to be premised on the understanding that Africa is not merely a lifeless object whose peoples (rulers and ruled alike) constitute a permanent enigma for which the Africanist is the “expert” interpreter but a living subject of history whose peoples in their daily struggles for progress, freedom and meaning are, like all peoples elsewhere in the world who are similarly engaged in daily struggles, the true makers of history.

Whereas the first generation of African Studies programmes set up in the late colonial period could be justified on the grounds that the persons who established them had an interest in seeking to deepen their understanding of the African world, and, in so doing, interpreting that world to their primary audiences in Europe, North America and elsewhere, it was not altogether certain what value Africans emerging into the modern international knowledge system attached to African Studies as such beyond the counter-revolution that was referred to earlier. For example, the integration of the African Studies programmes into the task of post-independence nation-building and national development was an exercise that was hardly ever undertaken with the kind of strategic mobilization of intellectual resources that could have been expected. Thus although the programmes of African Studies that were promoted were mainly focused on building knowledge about local history, culture, economy and society, they did so episodically and in ways which were structured by debates generated elsewhere in the world and which did not always or necessarily interface with the concerns emanating from the local environment. And true, there were many useful benefits deriving from the exercises in documentation, re-interpretation and analysis carried out by the centres of African Studies in Africa but there were also many weaknesses associated with the programmes that were undertaken, not least among them the inability to go beyond the counterfactual to produce an autonomous narrative of the African experience that is powerful enough to propel

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7. The condescension that is increasingly in evidence in the treatment of matters African by African Studies, and most recently manifested by writers like Ellis whose sense of the White Man’s burden has now been translated into a strange proposition for “tough love” in what was a thinly disguised argument for re-colonisation is just one aspect of the radical change in attitude that is called for.
a complete paradigmatic shift. Nothing made this more evident than the fact that the driving force for African Studies remained the African Studies programmes and centres located in Europe and North America. It is precisely for this reason that those students of Africa that have reflected critically on African Studies have tended to do so through an assessment of the orientation, impact and consequences of the works of Africanists outside of the continent.

African Studies outside Africa has generally been better endowed from a resource point of view than African studies in Africa itself. Because of this fact which, in itself also mirrors the North-South asymmetries in international knowledge production about Africa, it should not be surprising that African Studies programmes outside the continent have enjoyed a much greater influence in shaping the field itself, influencing policy and attracting the best personnel, including African scholars sucked into the brain drain. The asymmetries in the study of Africa have been sharpened over the last two decades as the economic crises faced by most African countries took their toll on the higher education system on the continent, with consequences for funding, motivation and the retention of qualified academic staff. Increasingly, amidst the all-round crises facing the African higher educational system in general and the university system in particular, African Studies in Africa has come to occupy a much more subordinate position than ever before in the international division of labour in the production of knowledge about the continent. Indeed, many are the centres of African Studies located in Africa that have simply been reduced to sites for the collection and transmission of raw data to centres of African Studies in the North. Recent internationally driven efforts at institutional renewal in African universities have involved the coupling of various academic units with departments/centres from the global North on the basis of an operational division of labour that is erected on existing asymmetries. Under such conditions, relations which should normally be collegial have easily become clientelistic. Thus, although Africa Studies in the North has experienced difficulties which have generated academic cultures that are sometimes as unwholesome as they are disturbing, these pale into insignificance in comparison with the problems faced by researchers on the continent, and in the current conjuncture African Studies outside Africa would seem, on balance, to have been strengthened considerably along with all of its weaknesses.

Perhaps the “original sin” of African Studies outside Africa lies in its origins in imperial projects that it has had considerable difficulty in completely shaking off. Apart from the outrightly racist pedigree of colonial anthropology which has been much discussed in the literature, the organic interconnection between mainstream African Studies and the development policy community has posed serious problems with regard to the autonomy of the intellectual agenda of Africanists, and the mode of identification of the priority/dominant themes for study. The fact that the themes that dominate in African Studies are those that are also on the front burner of the development cooperation community is more than just a passing coincidence; these
themes have changed as frequently as the priorities of development assistance have shifted. Indeed, the themes have shifted in tandem with the multiplication and proliferation of initiatives about the African continent from the international development community. Africanists are also under pressure to feed the results of their research to policy communities that are ever in search of the “right models” to be applied to the continent. This quest for models has, in turn, resulted in a poverty of truly innovative insights in the study of Africa, with the concepts and conceptual frames favoured by the Africanists and projected into the hegemonic discourses about the continent persistently lagging behind the realities they seek to capture. The deficit of innovation is further compounded by an absence of truly useful insights from the experiences of other regions of the world in the quest for a better understanding of the African context.

Furthermore, the quest for models has produced a culture of knowledge production about Africa which, as Mamdani (1990, 2004) once observed, is based on analogy: Africa is read through the lenses of Europe and not on terms deriving from its own internal dynamics. Contemporary processes on the African continent are frequently considered as subject to a unilinear evolutionism, replicating an earlier epoch in the history of Europe and the solutions to the challenges associated with the processes also, naturally, replicating the “models” that had been employed by Europe. 8 The fact is ignored, that every facet of the development history of Europe and North America is under permanent debate and revision, which makes it difficult to capture past experiences as historical truths that have been settled once and for all. Instead, in the culture of scholarship by analogy, many an Africanist is tempted to present the histories of Europe and America in a frozen form that is bereft of all contradictions. In the worst cases, the result is an attempt by Africanists to read Africa through a simplistic, one-sided, incomplete and an ill-digested history of Europe and America. Furthermore, as yet another consequence of scholarship by analogy, most of the concepts and conceptual frames that are applied to understanding the African continent have too frequently been borrowed from other regions of the world and applied uncritically and hastily to Africa as if context and place do not matter. The historicization of questions under consideration is increasingly absent in Africanist discourses on Africa and, as pressures arising from careerist considerations, the publish-or-perish syndrome, and the culture of research as a rat-race pile, the temptation to invent false problems, resort to easy answers, and proliferate adjectival qualifications of African experiences has become all too common. 9 In all

8. In promoting the study of Africa, Africanists in the North obviously seek to understand the continent on the basis of their own understanding of their own societies – what worked, what did not work, what were the triggers of change, etc. That approach, in and of itself, is not bad. What is worrisome is the excessive stylization of discussions on critical questions in the historical experiences of the North as issues that have been settled intellectually for all time.

9. To cite one example of this bewildering proliferation of adjectives as Africanists sought to outdo one another in characterising the public arena in contemporary Africa: the state was variously de-
of this, on account of the power relations that they bear, the agenda of the Africanists easily crowds out and/or overwhelms competing local intellectual agendas. These power relations and the influence they project also explain the refraction of unwholesome academic practices in Africanist writings into scholarship in Africa among a younger generation of scholars in search of inspiration at a time of crises in the African academy when local mentors and role models are few and far-between.

The mutually reinforcing dependence of the Africanist and the development policy communities may be one reason why the gulf between contemporary Africanist discourses on Africa and African discourses on the continent is becoming increasingly striking, even as it is widening. Development policy communities working under a variety of pressures demand specific kinds of research – “practical” projects, “quick and dirty” investigations, programmes with “measurable developmental impact”, etc. – to which they commit resources which few institutions are able to refuse if they are to remain viable. As aid agencies have increasingly sought to shape Africanist agendas of research and evolve new standards for the assessment of the results of research, many Africanists have felt compelled to move into instrumentalised research, often packaged as consultancies, that takes its cue from and speaks the language of policy. But at the same time, in a radical and unfortunate departure from a tradition that once existed, few are the Africanists today that enjoy an organic relationship with the African social research community; fewer still are those who consider those local researchers’ networks as being worthy of embracing as part of their reference community. If anything, the most promising local researchers are encouraged to plug into Northern networks in a process which reinforces the vertical orientation of African researchers active in African Studies whilst doing very little to support horizontal linkages among African scholars across disciplinary, geographical, linguistic, gender and generational boundaries.

The dearth of organic inter-relations between Africanists and the local academic community in different African countries has been worsened by the onset of the internet and the temptation it has offered some to see it as a substitute for field-based longitudinal studies and the necessary investment in local networking that is crucial for the development of useful insights. In consequence, Africa is the one region of the world in which ideas are dumped as freely as goods, and the mainstream Africanists feel comfortable to pronounce on local processes without any reference to

scribed in a spate of literature issued at around the same period as “prebendal”, “neopatrimonial”, “sultanist”, “unsteady”, “predatory”, “a lame leviathan”, “crony”, “neo-traditional”, “omnipresent but hardly omnipotent”, “crooked”, “a humpty-dumpty”, etc.

10. Two examples can be readily cited: the concept of neo-patrimonialism and the logic of structural adjustment that it led to, and the notion of the failed state, and the discourse on UN trusteeship that it is presently generating. These concepts and the policies arising from them are seriously contested by some of the most active networks of researchers in Africa as much for their intellectual relevance as for the coherence of the policies flowing from them.
the debates and outputs of the African scientific community. In place of the engagement of the local research community, there is, in evidence amongst Africanists, a growing culture of a massive self-referencing and the cross-referencing of a close-knit network of professional friends that ultimately feeds into the process of manufacturing and reproducing gurus and high priests of African Studies through a mutual backslapping that ultimately impoverishes the field as a terrain of serious knowledge production. Rampant scientific impunity, involving astonishing liberties in the documentation of sources, a lack of rigour in the deployment of methodology, and a display of contempt for the subject of research is accompanied by a trend in which the validity of analytic positions taken is hinged not primarily on the coherence and cogency of the facts marshalled but the number of contemporary Africanist gurus cited.\textsuperscript{11}

Within Africa itself, the dominant mode of African Studies with its emphasis on the researching of local particularities has had numerous adverse consequences for innovative knowledge production. For one, while much empirical research is produced anchored on a detailed study of local cases, the tying together of the results of the work undertaken across different countries in order to produce general propositions about the direction of societal development and explore new conceptual/theoretical horizons has been more often than not absent from scholarship within Africa over the last two decades and a half. The poverty of comparative research on Africa emanating from within the continent has not only meant the generalized impoverishment of Africa Studies on the continent, it has also fed into the impoverishment of the academic disciplines in the African higher education system. The entrapment of African researchers into the study of their local contexts whilst Africanists in Europe and North America play the role of the transmitters of ideas from their regions of the world and interpreters of developments in Latin America and Asia for African audiences is clearly one of the serious structural weaknesses of African Studies that is in need of correction.

\textsuperscript{11} One prominent Africanist, writing on the “criminalization” of the state in Africa along with his partner affirmed the role, which the highest levels of state power, including presidents and their first ladies, had come to assume in the functioning of local and global criminal networks. The country that was specifically cited was Nigeria and the personality mentioned was a First Lady. The evidence: overheard in a bar. Another guru was to affirm in an opening statement to an essay on democratization in Africa that the question of why democracy was failing to take root on the continent had long been an object of scholarly enquiry that was also settled. In evidence, the names of Africanist gurus whose works had supposedly settled the question were cited – in spite of the fact that these gurus had different points of view on the issue so as to suggest that it was far from being a settled intellectual question. In any case, the citing of the names could never have been a substitute for the responsibility of the author to argue his case.
Concluding Reflections

There needs to be a sea change of approach and an all-round decolonization of mentalities in order to rescue African Studies from itself. Obviously, part of the process of doing this will inevitably involve an investment in the revival and strengthening of the university in Africa as a foremost centre of research that is primarily focused on the task of generating knowledge. The health and well-being of the African university, as the highest site of research, is central to the fortunes of African Studies. The task of ensuring this might devolve more heavily on African scholars and policy makers than their non-African counterparts but it is not solely their responsibility. The Africanist, even if only out of enlightened self-interest, has a stake in the fortunes of the African higher education system. It is only through the renewal and strengthening of the African university that relations between African scholars and their Africanist colleagues can begin to be placed on a better pedestal. Properly functioning universities serving as primary frames for the nurturing of peer communities would go a long way in addressing issues of quality in knowledge production on Africa. In all of this, it will be important consciously to anchor African Studies in Africa, it being understood also that the field cannot be developed in a sustainable manner without a central role for African researchers. Within the context of the changes required, centres for the study of Africa may have to assume a new additional function, namely, the facilitation of academic exchanges between African researchers interested in African Studies and researchers from around the world who are not necessarily Africanists but share the same broad thematic and/or theoretical preoccupations with the African scholars with whom they are in contact. Perhaps, this way, African Studies may be rescued from its self-enclosure and opened to a fresh set of ideas that would simultaneously contribute to the strengthening of the academic disciplines.

References


The presentation by Adebayo Olukoshi is so rich and many-faceted that it is difficult to know where to begin and how much to cover. I have no choice but to be selective and draw on my own involvement in African studies for the past three decades. Not all I have to say is necessarily a response to Olukoshi’s presentation but I believe it is complementary.

My role will, of course, be that of a Northern Africanist within the perspective that inevitably entails. However, I will endeavour to adopt an empathetic attitude to my African colleagues who are struggling under far more difficult circumstances than I am. I will dwell on the contemporary situation rather than the historical origins and determinants of the present situation; Olukoshi has covered the latter eloquently.

It is heartening to note a considerable degree of convergence in our views, although I am not sure what that means. Could it be a genuine convergence in the sense that we have both been influenced in our thinking by ‘the other side’. Or does it mean that Olukoshi has spent so much time in the North that his perspective has been ‘contaminated’ by non-African influences, or, conversely, that my outlook has been Africanised over the years. While subscribing to most of Olukoshi’s views I intend to elaborate further on what he said and add some points of my own.

Conditions, Constraints and Practices

I fully agree with Olukoshi when he points out the wide disparities in resource availability between European and American centres of African studies, on the one hand, and those on the African continent, on the other. Obvious examples have been repeated ad nauseam, though still without being redressed: lack of funding; dearth of library sources (books and journals); poor infrastructure, etc.

I would like to draw attention to two important aspects, which are not adequately recognised in my view. First, the emergence of the Internet and the information age is often seen as the beginning of the end of the North-South digital
information divide. There may be some truth in that perception and cause for hope in the sense that researchers in Africa with greater ease can now access sources of information available globally. As such the information ‘revolution’ may have a democratising potential and contribute to narrowing the North-South gap. However, the telecommunications infrastructure in Africa is lagging far behind developments in the North. The triple ‘w’ in the website addresses has jocularly come to mean ‘world wide wait’ because broadband technology is still in its infancy. Sometimes colleagues ask whether it is really worth their while to open an attachment in pdf format, and not infrequently they are unable to open such files at all, especially if they are voluminous. Moreover, the per capita number of computers linked to the Internet in Africa is nowhere near the situation of most European countries where even primary school children have their own computers. The consequence of this digital divide is that the book and journal ‘famine’ is being aggravated, relative to the North, which is in fact gaining on the South, even though more sources of information have been opened to Southern researchers.

Second, scholars in Africa are facing difficulties in finding suitable publication outlets. There is a plethora of reports of variable, but often high, quality but they are rarely distilled into publishable products. Instead, they circulate in small numbers as ‘grey literature’ despite their richness in data and substantive analysis. As a result they tend not to find their way into easily searchable bibliographic databases and are thus largely lost to Africans themselves as well as the international research community. Admittedly, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that a publication culture is not being nurtured at African universities and research institutions. Furthermore, there exist multitudes of scientific journals that are open – in principle, at least – to African scholars and many seize upon those opportunities. Yet, there are significant hurdles that have to do with publication conventions and cultures, often presented in the guise of standards. The dominance of Northern publication conventions is overwhelming and effectively prevents the publication of well-researched papers. This bias is reflected in indices such as the Social Science Citation Index.

As far as the publication of monographs and anthologies is concerned, the hurdles are equally high. The publishing business is currently so competitive and commercialised that more or less esoteric titles of African studies have a hard time breaking into markets without some form of ‘publication subsidy’ to the publication company so that it can at least break even commercially speaking. Otherwise, the commercial risk would be too high. The celebrated peer review mechanism, therefore, has been relegated to second place in the assessments by publishing houses. In this regard, African and non-African Africanists alike may appear to be in the same boat. But Northern Africanists are generally closer to funding sources that can help

12. For a discussion of the challenges facing scholars from the periphery in getting their work into mainstream journals in the United States and Europe, see A. Suresh Canagarajah, A Geopolitics of Academic Writing, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002.
to overcome this hurdle. The African academic community is clearly facing a serious challenge on publishing. It is not enough to deplore the current state of affairs, which is of a structural nature. Much can be done through inculcating a publication culture through greater emphasis on publication through proper channels in the merit and promotion systems. Creating new publication outlets within Africa is also an avenue ahead. CODESRIA and similar regional networks have made significant contributions towards that end.

Comparative Advantages and Disadvantages

While there is no denying the North-South disparities it is also warranted to point to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of Northern and Southern scholars in studying African societies. The highly unequal resource endowment has been highlighted time and again. But African researchers have a number of comparative advantages over their Northern counterparts, which to some degree compensate for the lack of material resources. One such comparative advantage is knowledge of vernacular languages. Through such skills African scholars gain access to data that outsiders would have great difficulty acquiring without much expenditure of time and interpretation services. In some fields of inquiry the fine nuances of language may be lost to the outsider without vernacular language proficiency.

Second, the proximity to the research object is clearly an advantage for indigenous African scholars. Living within the very societies that one is studying yields direct observation data on a continuous basis from which outsiders are cut off. In a manner of speaking, African scholars are thus conducting everlasting fieldwork while their Northern colleagues have to make do with intermittent stints of variable duration in the field of study. On the other hand, living in the midst of a sea of data can sometimes be a disadvantage in the sense that social phenomena may be taken for granted or considered facts that do not require explanation. Proximity may thus lead to a sort of ‘blindness’ to interesting developments. In that regard, an outsider may have a keener eye for the unusual or the exotic that warrants further investigation.

Third, constraints owing to repressive political regimes affect African and non-African scholars alike. Certain social phenomena may be left altogether un-researched because they are deemed too sensitive to address, e.g. corruption, land ownership, genocide, etc. True, with democratisation since the early 1990s the research regime has become more liberal. Yet, most African countries have retained the legal requirement that researchers – whether citizens or not – have to apply for research permits before embarking on data collection. If sensitive research objects are allowed to be subjected to scrutiny by the authorities that be, data collection may still be very difficult because key stakeholders have a vested interest in keeping the
matter under wraps. In extreme cases it may even be outright dangerous to engage in research on sensitive issues.

There is a great difference, however, in the way in which citizens of the countries concerned and their non-citizen colleagues relate to repressive political regimes. Indigenous researchers have few options but ‘to face the music’ if their research activities step on sore toes or get too close to power centres that dislike transparency. It would take a great deal of civil courage to persist with their research under such circumstances. Very understandably, most would be prone to stop short of challenging powerful interests in order to safeguard the health and lives of themselves and their families. Conversely, non-African scholars are at liberty to leave the country when the going gets tough. At worst, they may get deported. Northern academics have not always appreciated this type of disparity in conditions.

Practices

The above disparities and constraints translate into certain practices due to the inherent incentive structures. Universities worldwide perform two main functions: teaching and research. Given the intake of students in the face of growing cohorts of eligible applicants, the teaching burden has become increasingly heavy. Owing to pressures from the many qualified applicants who are not admitted through normal channels, many universities have embarked on so-called parallel programmes, which are taught in the evenings and during weekends. These programmes are meant for students who are compelled to pay their own way to a university degree because their secondary school grades were not good enough for them to obtain highly competitive government bursaries. The regular university staff are prepared to take on the added teaching burden of the parallel programmes because they yield additional income. At most institutions of research and higher learning on the African continent the level of remuneration is low. As a result, university staff seek supplementary sources of income; additional teaching is one of them. However, the casualty in this structural imbalance is invariably research, which tends to become a residual category of activity, rather than a pursuit on a par with teaching.

The other source of supplementary income is consultancy work for donors, governments, and NGOs. Such work is generally much better paid than teaching and is therefore very attractive. Scores of university staff have gone into this type of activity and spend a fairly large share of their time on it. Some have even set up their own consulting companies for handling contracts outside the university structures. Yet, they use university facilities – such as computers, offices and libraries – for the purpose of consultancy work from which their employer gets very little, if anything, in terms of overheads. Again, serious long-term research suffers.

This is not to say that advisory or consultancy work is anathema to academic scholarship. Consultancies are not all ‘quick and dirty’. Although most of them
are quick and short-term they are not necessarily all that dirty. Being affiliated to an applied social science research institute, I would insist that consultancies can make valuable contributions to research in a more academic sense as expressed in published articles. First, universities and other research centres not only have a societal obligation to contribute to the knowledge foundation upon which decisions are made but, second, it is also their duty to build bridges between research and policy-making. One such bridge is consultancy work, for, by definition, consultancies involve engagement with policy-makers. If it pays well on top of that, so be it.

Another aspect of consultancies warrants attention as well, and could perhaps make it more palatable for purists within academia. Consultancies open many doors to key informants and data sources that are normally closed to ‘ordinary’ researchers. Although some, but by no means all, consultancy reports are contractually the property of the commissioning body, there is no way the latter can patent the insights gained by the consultants, even if the data collected in the course of the consultancy may not be used in exactly the same format. Increasingly, in the interest of transparency the propensity to withdraw reports from the public eye is diminishing. The entire research community has a common interest in maintaining a spirit of transparency in the consulting world with a view to ensuring that findings accumulate as public goods. If there are no contractual restrictions on publication the consultants, if affiliated to academic institutions, are at liberty to distil their reports into publishable articles in refereed journals. If successful in that effort, they not only add to the body of knowledge available to anybody who cares to avail themselves of it, but also promote their own careers by adding publications to their CVs. Unfortunately, scholars cum consultants – African or non-African – are not particularly skillful at taking advantage of those opportunities. They rather tend to rush to the next consultancy, meaning that the income derived from it overrides the knowledge concerns. This is one of the reasons why some are talking about the ‘consultancy curse’.

I take exception to the view that involvement in consultancy work by necessity plays into the hands of the donor community as the dominant player in that market. It is true that the donors set the agenda by selecting themes and working out the terms of reference according to the ever-shifting fads and fashions of donor concepts which make it difficult for scholars to keep track. Notwithstanding the role of the donor community in setting the agenda for African studies, they are not in a position to ‘buy’ specific findings that underpin their interests. There is no one-to-one relationship between origin of funding and substantive output, although I concede that sponsorship does affect outcome in some measure. As consultants we should be honest enough to admit that there is some truth in the saying: “He who pays the piper calls the tune”. We are disinclined to challenge the sponsor too vehemently. After all, we do not want to be ‘blacklisted’ or branded as ‘difficult’ or ‘heterodox’ or whatever derogatory label is being used. We want new consultancy contracts!
In most cases, however, the consultants have considerable scope for arguing a case that may run counter to the interest of the donors. If well argued, a consultant may thus get a point across that could potentially lead to a change of policy and practice. In my experience, this has been rather more possible when dealing with the Nordics and the likeminded group of donors than with others whose policy preferences permeate the terms of reference from the outset. That said, the ultimate say is with the commissioning body, for the consultants have no real control over the use of their reports. If the users do not like the recommendations made they may choose to disregard them for political or other reasons or to adopt only those they find palatable.

Yet another downside of the low salary levels in academic institutions is the inclination by African scholars to favour participation in conferences and workshops, because they offer allowances of various kinds. These allowances are tax free and may supplement the income substantially. Too often academics take part in such events without themselves making inputs in the form of research papers. They are just there whether they present papers or not.

It is not for me to moralise over this kind of behaviour, which more than anything else is a response to the strong incentives inherent in the structures just described. I am merely stating a deplorable fact. From the point of view of serious research one may dub those incentive structures perverse because they undermine research as one of the main functions of universities. Staff of research centres desperately need to supplement their meagre incomes to finance the education of their children – who are often placed in private institutions from the primary level right up to the tertiary level, because the quality of public educational institutions is poor. And to cope with the tremendous financial pressures from the extended family any additional source of income is welcomed.

The Straightjacket of Relevance

Research relevance is the mantra of donors. All research must be relevant to their projects and programmes in a rather instrumental way. The problem, however, is that the donors themselves seem unaware of the difficulty in applying the relevance criterion, which is many-faceted and complex.

It can be deconstructed into three components: (a) usability; (b) actual use; and (c) utility. Research may be relevant in the sense that it is potentially usable for some purpose, without actually being used or producing utility. Such a situation may arise if the potential users, e.g. donors, remain unaware of the existence of research results after their publication, in other words, if communication between the researchers and the potential users is poor. Furthermore, potential users may simply ignore usable research results, even when known to them, if the findings are found to be objectionable or repugnant in ethical terms, or politically incorrect, or running
counter to vested interests. Research findings may have been dismissed by prevailing knowledge regimes embedded in power structures.

In conventional thinking, however, research is normally considered relevant when it is actually being used. It is generally presumed that research results, when actually being used, also create utility for someone in one way or another. This rationale underlies most thinking about research relevance, and applies *a fortiori* when particular users commission research institutions to carry out research projects with a view to solving specific problems. But this presumption may not hold in all cases. Research results may be used for purposes other than those intended by the researchers themselves or the commissioning body in question. In the social sciences research findings become public goods once published, and may be used or ‘misused’ by any party. What is deemed ‘proper use’ or ‘misuse’ depends on the eyes of the beholder, i.e. what interests are being served.

In other words, it is a fallacy that actual application of research results will necessarily produce societal utility. This means that there is a conflict perspective inherent in the relevance criterion. No research can be relevant to all stakeholders in an absolute sense. Research can only be relevant (i.e. usable, actually used and/or having utility) to a question/issue/matter for particular actors at a given point in time.

There is also a time dimension to the relevance criterion. Research findings may be seen to be irrelevant at one point in time, and have thus been produced prematurely, so to speak. Yet, the same findings may be considered highly relevant some years after. By then, the surroundings or the political climate may have matured so as to be more receptive to findings published previously. Basic research or research with a basic orientation – in any discipline – is rarely considered relevant or applicable at the time the findings are published, simply because their application is not immediately apparent. In fact, it is a defining characteristic of basic research that its application is unknown at the time it is conducted. However, that is not to say that basic research may not be relevant. It only requires a period of maturation for it to acquire relevance, either because complementary branches of knowledge need to catch up or because the social, political and economic conditions need to change.

Applied research institutions capable of exercising ‘foresight’ in setting their agendas may be able to predict with some degree of accuracy what knowledge needs will emerge in the future, and start research well ahead of time to be able to meet those needs. Thus, what is often termed relevant rather means timely in the sense that it matches a perceived need at a given point in time.

The relevance of research depends not only on its substance or the way in which research institutions relate to its wider environment of users. It depends equally much on the users themselves – their capability to define research problems and their readiness and ability to absorb results and to tailor them to their needs. Unfortunately, decision-makers are not prone to reading much, especially not books. At the most they absorb executive summaries and briefing papers. Thus a ‘translation’
task arises. Researchers and research networks have a key role to play in translating findings into digestible formats: policy briefs and summaries. In this electronic age websites are useful means of communication but they normally communicate electronically only what is available in printed hard copy; they are rarely interactive. Hence the need for systematic, face-to-face dialogue on a continuous basis, adapted to the needs of specific user groups.

Beyond the three elements of the relevance criterion referred to above, a further question should be asked: relevant to whom? This leads to a further differentiation between: (a) user relevance; (b) societal relevance; and (c) scientific relevance.

User relevance refers to situations where the users are fairly well defined, e.g. an agency, a government, an NGO, a local community, a company, etc. In the case of commissioned research and consultancies the user is clearly defined and is also paying for the results. In other instances, the users may be more diffuse, making it less clear for what purpose the findings are to be used.

Societal relevance refers to situations in which researchers conducting research have some notion of their activities being relevant to broad sections of society, albeit not necessarily to all of them. Typically, this kind of research is not induced or paid for by identifiable actors or users. The prime mover behind such endeavours may be the normative stance of the researchers. Findings emanating from such research may contribute to ongoing public debates on topical issues, raise new issues for debate or add new perspectives to an old problem. Once results are published and available it is for anyone to make them relevant to his/her situation.

Finally, research may be scientifically relevant when it contributes to furthering the development of a scientific field in an epistemological sense. Examples include generation of new theory, elaboration of new methods of investigation, and empirical contributions to the body of knowledge.

A too restrictive definition of relevance may prove to be a straightjacket, which is not conducive to building a solid knowledge base for policy-making. Donors and other commissioning bodies for research and consultancies too easily forget that relevant studies must be based on a foundation of knowledge that basic research originally produced. The myopic perspective of donors does not seem to serve that purpose and is thus thwarting the evolution of African studies.

North-South Research Collaboration

There is a strong case, in my view, for research collaboration between Northern and African scholars. Not only would such collaborative ventures amount to triangulation by researcher but as by-product it would probably also lead to triangulation by data source and type, by method, and by theory/approach. However, against the above background of incentives and disincentives emanating from structural factors, it has been exceedingly difficult, in my experience, to make such collaborative
triangulation function on an equal basis, no matter the good intentions on either side of the divide. Northern partners tend to perceive their African colleagues as being involved in a multitude of activities totally unrelated to their project, thus neglecting what they were supposed to do as agreed in work plans. Delays result and sometimes the quality of the joint output also suffers. At the psychological level, the climate of collaboration gets tense leading to bickering and frustrated non-Africans. Conversely, African partners are inclined to view their impatient Northern counterparts as arrogant, condescending, pushy and bossy, wanting to take over the steering of the common project and, in the process, relegating the African scholars to junior positions. They consider that their privileged Northern colleagues do not appreciate and understand the difficult conditions under which African scholars work. Resentment ensues on the part of African partners and the collaborative spirit deteriorates further. The factors that salvage such projects are two-fold: accountability to the funding source and a common interest in tangible publication outputs. Only occasionally will such projects collapse entirely.

Conclusion

In this commentary I have highlighted some structural features that affect the respective roles of African and Northern Africanists. Most of these structural effects are adverse. The durable solution to the problems created by structural imbalances requires long-term measures that have to do with remuneration levels for African scholars and improvements in working conditions across the board. That is a tall order. Pending such structural changes, however, some progress can be made in triangulation by researcher and North-South collaboration, which includes an element of affirmative action designed to redress some of the worst structural imbalances.
Policy Advice and African Studies

William Lyakurwa and Olu Ajakaiye

The strict definition of policy is a purpo-

sive course of action followed by an actor or

set of actors (Anderson, 1975). A broader
definition refers not only to policy on pa-

per, but also its implementation as an in-
tegral part of the decision making process. This broader conceptualization of policy
is akin to what Porter with Hicks (1995) referred to as an “authoritative policy deci-
sion”, i.e., a policy that is actually implemented. Any implemented policy is like a
drug that has three types of effect: the intended and desired effects; the unintended
but desired effects; and the unintended and (normally) undesired effects (Ajakaiye,
1992). The primary goal of policy formulation, therefore, is to arrive at the most
efficient policy or battery of policies that will maximize the first two effects and
minimize the last one.

The environment in which policy formulation takes place is fluid and continu-
ally evolving. Globalization, for example, with its promises and possible perils, has
transformed the policy-making process, bringing with it a new set of actors, agendas
and outcomes. International relations were once the exclusive domain of diplomats,
bureaucrats and states, but today’s policy makers must consider a diverse set of inter-
national actors when formulating policy. Moreover, in recent years, Africa has wit-
nessed an increase in the level of public interest in evidence-based policy-making, a
paradigm shift that has led to higher public expectations of governments’ ability to
make sound policy decisions. Such changes are of particular relevance to sub-Saha-
ran Africa (SSA), where the space for participation in the economic policy-making
process has been expanding, thanks to the unprecedented political liberalization
following progressive elimination of dictatorial regimes and the insistence of the
international community on participatory development processes in these countries.
As a result, there is considerable room for the domestic and international actors to
participate actively in the policy-making process.

This paper considers the contributions of African studies to policy-making in the
SSA context. The paper takes the following format. Section 1 outlines the policy-
making process in contemporary SSA and how African studies can contribute to
that process. Section 2 looks in detail at the importance of networking in enhancing
the contributions of research to the policy process, while Section 3 offers the exam-
ple of the African Economic Research Consortium’s capacity building experience.
Section 4 discusses the challenges to capacity building networks, indicating the imperatives of strengthening links with African studies.

1. The Policy-Making Process in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa

For a prolonged period during the post-colonial era, a majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa were managed by dictatorships of one sort or another: states ruled by an authority with absolute power and clout. The present situation has gradually evolved in the recent past as the people have put in place democracies – government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. The term “democratic” is also used in a looser sense to describe participatory decision-making in groups or organizations. Without belabouring the merits and demerits of the two, it is worth noting that both dictatorships and democracies have been managed by leaders with varying abilities and styles to bring about growth and development with a view to enhancing the prosperity of the people.

The policy-making process is much affected by these leadership styles – charismatic dictators, for example, may be more prone to spontaneous policy pronouncements than their counterparts while addressing the agora. A dictatorial government is also more prone to take advantage of resources allocated to the policy-making process without internalizing the expected outcomes of specific policy choices. The democratic government, assumedly with greater checks on the observance of procedures, may take a longer time to make and enact policy. On a more positive note, a well-informed government official (whether dictator or democrat) is probably more likely to enact sound policies of long-term benefit to a country’s citizens. This depends both on whether the government has put in place various structures with advisory roles and on whether the government takes such advice into account in its decision-making processes.

1.1 The Changing Policy-Making Context

In circumstances of dictatorial policy proclamations, it was generally risky to evaluate such policies, especially if the outcome was likely to be at variance with the declared intention of the dictator. With the advent of more enabling political environments supported by the insistence of the international community on participatory governance systems, in sub-Saharan Africa in particular the policy-making process is witnessing a major paradigm shift. In several African countries, the putting the cart before the horse syndrome in policy-making – making policy pronouncements without adequate consideration for policy impact – is less pervasive and it is now less risky for any stakeholder to carry out and publicize evaluation results showing that the outcomes are undesirable and unacceptable.
Nevertheless, problem identification and definition are inherently political and this affects which policy problems are recognized as such and how they are framed. In the political struggle over problem definition, research is likely to play a subordinate role, apart from how it may be used to underpin the position of a particular political interest constellation. The bulk of policy research is directed at analysing and understanding the nature and magnitude of the policy problem. Rarely will researchers advocate one particular line of action, preferring instead to make some predictions as to the likely consequences of various policy options. Once the choice of action is decided, policy implementation is ordinarily the preserve of the civil service, although researchers are occasionally included in monitoring functions.

1.2 Policy-Making Models

The literature on policy-making processes is vast and growing, and its growth has received considerable impetus in recent times owing to the activities of the Global Development Network (GDN). For example, the theme of the first GDN Conference, held in 1999, was Bridging Research and Policy (see Stone et al., 2001, for the papers presented at this conference). Earlier works on models of policy-making process include Lindblom (1980), Hall (1990), Garret and Islam (1998), and Sutton (1999). Among the plethora of more recent works in this area are those of the Evaluation Unit of the International Development Research Council (IDRC), especially the works of Neilson (2001) and Maessen (2003).

Four policy-making models can be identified. The rational model of policy-making posits a logical and ordered sequence of phases from problem identification, data and information gathering and problem diagnosis, to the presentation of a range of policy options to address the problem, review and assessment of the options in terms of their costs and benefits, and selection of policy options, through to implementation, monitoring and ex post evaluation of outcomes. The role of research in this model is to collect data and diagnose the problem so as to make sure that the policy choice is evidence-based. This model presumes that knowledge is neutral and apolitical, and can easily be handled by experts and technocrats.

A second model acknowledges that rationality is “bounded” i.e., that decision makers to some extent wear blinkers, are influenced by non-rational factors such as cultural values and customs, or face organizational constraints. They are therefore prone to compromises and pragmatic solutions that may be satisfactory even though not necessarily optimal. As a result, they settle for gradual modification of existing policies through a process of incrementalism – also referred to as “muddling through” (Lindblom, 1980). In this model, research input is less important; data collection and precise problem diagnosis are not critical and innovation tends to be discounted.
A third model derives from the knowledge utilization school, which considers knowledge as cumulative. In this perspective, accumulated research findings continuously influence the perceptions of policy makers of the problems at hand, as well as the likely effects of policy prescriptions. It is postulated that the accumulated body of knowledge somehow percolates into the minds of decision makers and gradually leads to policy modification (Weiss and Buculavas, 1980). Similar to the rational model, it is presumed that knowledge is apolitical and that authoritative insights will eventually prevail. Thus, the social and political context of knowledge utilization is overlooked or downgraded.

A fourth model takes as its point of departure certain prevailing policy paradigms that structure policy-making (Hall, 1990). These paradigms are linked to powerful interest groups that are prepared to see only gradual policy change in an incremental fashion within the paradigm. The similarity to incrementalism is obvious in terms of eventual outcomes or results. In times of upheaval, however, a radical shift of paradigm may occur.

These models are not mutually exclusive – they may all blend into each other and contain features of the others. All, however, are grounded in the need for adequate, accurate and appropriate information. It is here that the reliability of the sources information becomes especially important.

1.3 Sources of Policy Information

For many policy makers it is often not the lack of information that is the problem, but the avalanche of information (McGann, 2002). Indeed, policy makers are frequently besieged by more information than they can possibly use: complaints from constituents, reports from international agencies or civil society organizations, advice from bureaucrats, position papers from lobbyists and interest groups, and exposés of the problems of current government programmes in the popular or elite media – to say nothing of the reports churned out by their own internal analysts.

The problem is that this information can be unsystematic, unreliable, contradictory or tainted by the interests of those who are disseminating it. Some information may be so technical that generalist policy makers cannot use it or even understand it. Or it may be politically, financially or administratively impractical, or contrary to the interests of the policy makers who must make decisions based on information that they often feel is less than adequate. Other information may not be useful because it differs too radically from the worldview or ideology of those receiving it. In developing and transitional countries, the basic data needed to make informed decisions often do not exist and must be collected, analysed, and put into a form that is usable by parliamentarians and bureaucrats.

In politics, information no longer translates into power unless it is in the right form at the right time. Governments and policy makers are often moved to seize the
moment because the right social and political forces are in alignment or because a crisis compels them to take action. In either case, they often move quickly and make decisions based on available information, which does not always lead to the most informed policy. In short, policy makers and others interested in the policy-making process require information that is timely, understandable, reliable, accessible and useful.

In this connection, it is pertinent to recognize at least three broad sources of policy advice – policy makers themselves, “foreign actors” and locally based researchers. Policy makers, more often than not, prescribe, modify and implement policies based on their own intellect, intuitions and experiences. Depending on the mix between their academic background and political/life experiences, the outcomes of policies fashioned in this manner are varied, with some encouraging results at one end, and disastrous effects at the other.

Foreign actors are those from outside the country who have an interest in the policy-making process. They may be consultants, hired directly or engaged by bilateral and multilateral institutions to provide technical assistance. Consultants, though generally technically competent, may not have the necessary resources, especially time, to conduct thorough research to guide the policy from its formulation through to its implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation. Bilateral and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are fortunate to have both expertise and resources. More often than not, however, the speed of implementation of the policy advice they offer is determined by its populist appeal – action on less popular counsel may be stalled depending on the government of the day. An example in point is the now infamous IMF structural adjustment programmes, which were quickly labelled as “externally imposed policies” as the control measures proposed implied large cuts in government spending in key areas such as the civil service, education and health.

The third source of policy advice comprises locally based researchers – the unsung heroes of policy-making. They conduct policy relevant research based on empirical evidence in their local realities, resulting in what has often proved to be sound policy advice, specific to their countries. These researchers are dogged by resource limitations and alienation, however, with the majority of them opting to work in newly created, state-funded national policy research institutes.

1.4 How the Policy Process Works

While there are several classifications of the models used to trace policy-making processes, the iterative interaction model is, perhaps, a better approximation of the contemporary situation in SSA. This model assumes that as a policy-making process proceeds, several actors participate and their actions determine the fate of the policy. The policy-making process involves the following sets of activities:
– Agenda setting activities, during which problems are identified.
– Solution seeking activities, during which alternative courses of action are identified and analysed and decisions made as to the most suitable and acceptable option.
– Implementation, monitoring and impact assessment activities, during which implementers interpret the policy, take necessary steps towards implementation, monitor the implementation and evaluate impact.

In the contemporary African situation several actors can and, in many countries, do take part in each of these activities. What varies is the degree of their participation. These actors can be grouped into three:
– Government policy makers and implementers made up of politicians in power and the bureaucrats.
– Special interest groups outside government, encompassing politicians not in power, business interest organizations, labour unions, civil society organizations, non-government organizations and a host of sundry interest groups.
– Development partners and the wider international donor community.

As the various players interact in the activities involved in the policy process, there can be major revisions in and, indeed, outright abandonment of a given policy. It is important to point out that oftentimes it is the perception by a sufficiently powerful group of the impact of a given policy that generates resistance to policy implementation and, in some cases, compels policy abandonment. Thus, an otherwise good policy may not be implementable because of resistance by a group of actors based entirely on limited or inaccurate information, wrong perceptions of its impact, or protection of self-interest. This is why the process has been tagged “iterative interaction model”, à la Porter with Hicks (1995). Clearly, the success of a policy depends on active participation by all stakeholders especially in the agenda setting and solution seeking activities if implementation is to proceed and desirable outcomes be realized. Table 1 summarizes the level of participation by the various actors in the policy-making process in contemporary Africa.

Table 1: Level of participation by actors in the policy-making process in SSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of actors</th>
<th>Agenda setting activities</th>
<th>Solution seeking activities</th>
<th>Implementation, monitoring and impact assessment activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government policy makers and implementers</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development partners</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special interest groups</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Africa, the *agenda setting and solution seeking activities* tend to be highly dominated by the development partners, especially international finance institutions (IFIs). The influence of the IFIs tends to be especially dominant in countries that depend heavily on foreign aid and/or have a high debt burden. Such countries are required to undertake certain reforms prescribed by these institutions before they can be eligible for international financial assistance from the IFIs themselves or before they can receive the support of the IFIs for debt rescheduling. In short, the influence of African governments during the first two sets of activities tends to be severely reduced while that of the special interest groups tends to be negligible. In these countries, the government typically claims that the policies are “home grown” and participatory while the IFIs claim that the policies enjoy “national ownership”. The reality, however, is that the policies are essentially the imperatives of IFI conditionality. It should also be realized that the dominance of these two activities by the development partners is due, in part, to the lack of local capacity to carry out credible and sound policy analysis, especially by the special interest groups, and therefore they are unable to engage actively in the debate on the merits and demerits of a policy during its articulation.

The *implementation activities* are almost the exclusive preserve of the bureaucrats who interpret the policies and adapt to changing circumstances as they proceed. In several cases, they also *monitor the implementation* of the policies. Again, it must be acknowledged that the development partners play an active part in implementation monitoring, especially where this is a requirement for the release of tranches of development assistance. Participation by the special interest groups in implementation is almost nil, but some, especially the private sector organizations and better endowed civil society organizations, tend to take a reasonably active part in implementation monitoring activities.

With respect to *impact assessment*, it turns out that the interactions among actors in the policy process are based largely on the perceived – as opposed to the actual – impact of a given policy on the relevant group. Whenever the special interest groups are either excluded from or incapable of participating in the agenda setting and solution seeking debates, implementers may face massive resistance based on the perceived impact of the policy.

A feature of the special interest groups is that they can be further decomposed into two sub-components: the sub-component that perceives the policy to be beneficial to it and is therefore in support and the sub-component that sees the policy as not beneficial and so opposes it. Experience abounds in Africa and elsewhere to show that oftentimes the government deploys its powers to suppress the opponents of a policy while promoting those who favour it. Where there is popular support for the policy, it is usually easy to suppress and perhaps permanently silence the minority among the special interest groups who may be against the policy. If, however, the opponents are in the majority or they are politically powerful, any effort to suppress
them may be successful only in the interim as members of this group tend to persist in their criticism and resistance, which includes organizing protests and civil unrest. Eventually, government may either concede and abandon the policy or continue to implement it without the desirable effect because of the perverse response of the stakeholders. In extreme cases there may be a change of government or key government actors, after which the policy will be reversed or seriously modified. Experiences of a number of reforming African countries illustrate each of these possibilities.

Reactions to structural adjustment programmes, the emergence of multi-party democracy and the termination of authoritarian regimes have opened up space for more active engagement by the hitherto passive special interest group of actors in the agenda setting and solution seeking activities in the policy-making process. As such, all actors can now participate in the debates and contestations involved in these activities. These are knowledge intensive activities, however, and unless the capacity to carry out sound policy analysis in most African countries is massively increased, the participation of all stakeholders, especially the special interest groups, will be quite limited. The consequence is that they will continue to act on the basis of perceptions and the associated resistance to implementation may result in policy failure.

1.5 How African Studies Can Contribute to Better Policy Advice

The link between research and policy has traditionally been viewed as linear, whereby a set of research findings is shifted from the research domain over to the policy domain, where it is presumed to have some impact on policy makers’ decisions. The process is rarely that neat, however. Rather, it is complex, messy and convoluted to the point of working in mysterious ways that may seem to defy logic and rationality. Researchers and policy makers are often said to inhabit parallel universes – debating the same issues but never fully engaging with each other’s work (Court and Young, 2005).

Lately, formative process research has emerged to describe a research activity running parallel with the implementation process, recording what happens and in some instances suggesting corrective measures if the implementation is deemed to be moving off course. Thus the implementers continuously interpret what they assume to be the intentions of the framers of the policy, adapted to the specific and changing circumstances at hand. This interpretation may be affected by bureaucratic incompetence, and/or inadequate resources, infrastructure or expertise. Interested parties and pressure groups are likely to intervene in the process to negotiate certain interpretations in their favour, while the implementers may sabotage the implementation of policies with which they disagree, either by delaying action or by deliberately distorting the policy import (Stone et al., 2001: 9).

It is important to note that policy advice based on consultancy and external technical assistance is basically short term in nature. Such an approach does not
create the infrastructure necessary for sustained advice, hence the next time around, governments have to start afresh. At times, it leads to wrong choices with serious long-term consequences. A prime example can be found in the education sector. For a long time bilateral governments and multilateral institutions led by the World Bank consistently advised African governments to emphasize primary and secondary education, while downplaying tertiary education. It is only recently that there seems to be a change of attitude toward tertiary education by the World Bank, possibly due to the findings of several studies suggesting, among other things, that expanding tertiary education may promote faster technological catch-up and improve a country’s ability to maximize its economic output. Sub-Saharan Africa’s current production level is about 23 per cent below its production possibility frontier. Given this shortfall, increasing the stock of tertiary education by one year could maximize the rate of technological catch-up at a rate of 0.63 per cent points a year, or 3.2 per cent points over five years (Bloom et al., 2005). In the meantime, it is unlikely that SSA countries can afford the necessary resources to restore, let alone improve, the conditions in tertiary education, which has suffered neglect for over two decades.

A possible explanation of this catastrophic policy advice includes the large disparity between policy and practice due to corruption and governments’ limited ability to implement proposed actions on account of the severe challenges faced by a government with limited economic, human and financial resources. The situation is compounded by heavy aid-dependence, making it difficult for governments to openly disagree with donors. Indeed, many SSA governments are willing to prepare policy documents largely to satisfy donors, who for their part are very willing to provide technical assistance in the preparation of these documents. This may lead to two outcomes. One is that the government will resist not at the policy-making stage, but subsequently at the implementation stage. Another possible outcome is that policy statements are “fudged” – that is, they are formulated in a way that leaves wide room for different interpretations (Bloom et al., 2005).

The point is that policy prescriptions must be tailored to the reality on the ground, and must take into account a full range of evidence-based considerations. This is where African studies can come into play, as opposed to the technical as-
sistance mode, where consultants parachute in, make their recommendations with limited awareness of local conditions and leave the locals to pick up the pieces.

The ideal scenario would be an integration of the policy-making process to include the three key sources of policy advice – locally based researchers to provide empirical evidence based on local conditions, foreign actors to assist with the technical knowledge and resource provision, and the policy makers to provide input on the viability and political aspects of the policy-making and implementation process. Put differently, a network of the locally based and technically competent African researchers who have knowledge of local realities and the technically competent Africanists and African researchers based overseas to conduct policy relevant research can be very instrumental in enhancing the contributions of African studies to better policy advice in Africa.

2. Strengthening Links between African Studies and Policy Advice in SSA
   – The Importance of Networks

Research findings have determined that “power does not reside in institutions, not even the state or large corporations. It is located in the networks that structure society” (Castells, 1997). In many contexts, especially in this globalized cyber era, policy-making has been diversifying to include more non-government actors and has become more supranational in nature. There is growing pressure on national governments and international organizations to link better vertically and horizontally in order to ensure legitimacy and effectiveness. For this purpose, cross-sector networks offer an interactive environment where information can flow among actors in all directions (Kickert et al., 1997). Networking has thus become a key strategic instrument in the linking of individuals and institutions in a knowledge- and experience-sharing framework. Networks are structures that link individuals or organizations who share a common interest or a general set of values related to a specific issue. When they work, networks are particularly good at achieving communication across horizontal and vertical dimensions; nurturing creativity owing to the free and interactive communication amongst diverse actors; and building consensus whereby like-minded actors identify each other and rally around a common issue (Perkin and Court, 2005).

This is particularly so in the policy arena as influencing policy is rarely straightforward. There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that networks can help improve policy processes through better use of information. They may, for example, help marshal evidence and increase the influence of good-quality evidence in the policy process. They can foster links between researchers and policy makers; bypass formal barriers to consensus; bring resources and expertise to policy-making; and broaden the pro-poor impact of a policy. Stone et al. (2001) address the issue of whether and how networks can be effective in promoting research-based policy-
making: “Networks can play an important part in helping to create a policy process that is research rich, inclusive, and accountable.”

Ideally, a network involving African studies will pull together international scholars, African institutions and the international community, all in support of that locally based researcher seeking to have an impact on the policy process. The African Economic Research Consortium is one example of how such a network can operate in pulling these actors together to build the capacity of both the locally based researcher and the policy maker.

2.1 The Role of International Scholars

To deliver cutting-edge research output in sub-Saharan Africa, active, well-informed groups of locally based professional economists benefit from collaboration with international scholars. Such collaboration facilitates access to advances in modern research techniques and comparative research, elements that are not readily available in SSA but are key to the currency of research. International scholars also collaborate with senior African scholars – their counterparts – to address issues of policy relevance and global concern. International scholars additionally fit in the role of supervising graduate students in their thesis work to ensure that the work is competent, relevant and exposed to current research techniques. Increasingly, donor governments use international scholars who have worked in SSA to provide technical policy advice in support of grants and other assistance.

2.2 The Role of African Institutions

In many countries around the world, politicians and bureaucrats alike have increasingly turned to specialized research institutions to serve their needs (McGann, 2002). Independent public policy research and analysis organizations, commonly known as “think-tanks”, have filled policy makers’ insatiable need for information and systematic analysis that is policy relevant. This information imperative led to the creation of the first set of think tanks and continues to be the primary force behind the establishment of public policy research organizations today. There has, in fact, been a proliferation of think tanks around the world that began in the 1980s as a result of the forces of globalization, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of transnational problems. Two-thirds of all the think tanks that exist today were established after 1970 and over half have been established since 1980 (McGann, 2002). The impact of globalization on the think-tank movement is most evident in regions such as Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and parts of Southeast Asia, where there was a concerted effort by the international community to support the creation of independent public policy research organizations. Today there are over 4,500 of these institutions around the world.
At the continental level in Africa, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is being elaborated as a far-ranging instrument for advancing people-centred development, based on democratic values and principles. NEPAD functions internally, for example through governance audits (e.g., the African Peer Review Mechanism), to commit African governments to good governance and detailed programmes of action and to projects linked to specific timeframes. Externally, NEPAD represents a platform for Africa's engagement and equal partnership with the broader international community. It therefore provides a strategic framework for the establishment of partnerships aimed at encouraging development initiatives and programmes in Africa – which is particularly relevant to Millennium Development Goal 8, “Develop a global partnership for development”. In this sense NEPAD has brought about a veritable paradigm shift in the restructuring of the continent's patterns of interaction, particularly with the highly industrialized countries of the North.

The creation of country-level policy research institutes in a number of countries in SSA has established an avenue for interaction with policy makers and policy analysts in government through national policy forums. These institutions often conduct policy relevant research to inform national policy-making and at times act as policy analysts for the government. They generally have close ties to the policy community, to which they act as consultants. They also serve as a conduit between policy makers and international researchers, and more importantly, are critical to the dissemination of research results.

Other key operatives in the policy arena are organizations such as the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the regional economic communities. AERC, AfDB and the ACBF play a major role in supporting research both within and across countries. The regional and subregional economic communities (RECs), such as the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been referred to as “the building blocks of the African Union” as they form the regional level for planning, coordination and monitoring of the integration process. Nearly all SSA countries are members of at least one regional body and some have multiple memberships. With this broad membership base, the RECs, UNECA and AfDB have the convening power to bring together large bodies of senior policy makers to disseminate research output.
2.3 The Role of the International Community

The contemporary view of capacity building goes beyond the conventional perception of training to include both institutional and community-based capabilities. This would give due recognition to the idea that the social whole (people, households and communities) is more than the sum of its individual components. Capacity building is therefore a medium- to long-term undertaking that requires resources for at least 10 to 15 years. The international community is a key stakeholder in capacity building owing to its long-term benefits and circumvention of problems arising from the lack of it. It is in the international community’s interest to see Africa progress and participate effectively in the international arena for a number of reasons. First, as Africa and its citizens develop, an increase in purchasing power will provide a handy market for commodities from the international community. Support – both technical and financial – of research capacity coupled with policy dialogue and implementation can reasonably be expected to lead ultimately to poverty reduction and economic growth. With a better economic environment, outward migration from Africa and its accompanying spillover effects will be substantially reduced. This applies to migration not only of the professional, skilled workforce, but also of the low calibre, blue-collar workers who leave the continent in search of better livelihoods. The latter category forms a large percentage of illegal immigrants in foreign countries.

3. The AERC Example

The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) was established in 1988 to strengthen local capacity for economic policy research in sub-Saharan Africa. AERC’s mission centres on three key objectives: to enhance the capacity of locally based researchers to conduct policy-relevant inquiry into economic problems facing the continent; to promote the retention of such capacity in sub-Saharan Africa and in relevant institutions in the region; and to encourage the application of the capacity in the policy context.

This mission rests on two basic premises: that development is more likely to occur where there is sustained sound management of the economy, and that such management is more likely to occur where there exists an active, well-informed group of locally based professional economists to conduct policy-relevant research. AERC is thus a specific and limited intervention that targets the economics discipline and local capacity of researchers to conduct policy-relevant inquiry into economic problems facing sub-Saharan Africa economies. The experience with this intervention shows that there is room to build networks in other disciplines that will address the lack of capacity in other policy-relevant areas.
3.1 The Networking Approach to Capacity Building

Networking is the strategic framework for implementing AERC’s activities, a framework that links individuals and institutions in a knowledge-sharing experience (Lyakurwa, 2004). The Consortium itself is a network currently consisting of 16 funders who support a mutually agreed programme of research activities, the dissemination of research results, and the training of potential researchers and academics at the master's and doctoral degree levels. This allows a critical mass of support for a set of coordinated activities with shared overheads.

The overall AERC network functions through two main programmes: Research and Training. The Research Programme links individual researchers in the region supported by resource persons to carry out research in selected areas designated by the AERC Programme Committee as most pertinent to policy needs. The Training Programme brings together 27 universities in 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa in a collaborative approach to both Master’s and PhD training. AERC’s networking approach breaks the barriers of professional isolation, encourages exchange of experiences and creates peer pressure for enhancing quality. The high standards contribute to strong linkages between the Research and Training Programmes, translating into high quality research, and thus these network components support and augment each other. Both components also take a proactive approach to ensuring the participation of women and other under-represented groups in AERC research and training activities.

The two capacity building programmes are supported by an outreach activity that ensures that AERC’s research outputs are published and disseminated in a timely, cost-effective manner in both print and electronic formats.

3.1.1 How the Research Network Operates

The AERC research network revolves mostly around learning by doing research. The Research Programme has four principal objectives: to build a credible local capacity for policy-oriented research; to generate research results for use by policy makers; to promote links between research and policy; and to promote the retention of high quality researchers on the continent.

Thus the Research Programme emphasizes quality and relevance of research to policy and this is intended to ensure credibility and encourage utilization of its results. The key elements of the AERC thematic research network and strategy are threefold – grant support, technical support and quality control. Small grants enable groups of individuals drawn from both academia and policy institutions to conduct research on a limited number of pertinent themes. As an illustration, the current thematic research areas are: poverty, income distribution and labour market issues; macroeconomic policies, investment and growth; finance and micro/sectoral issues; and trade, regional integration and political economy issues.
The technical support system for research comes in the forms of peer review, methodology workshops and access to relevant literature. The Consortium has a solid library available to researchers and is electronically linked to several other resource centres worldwide. International resource persons enrich the researchers’ technical base with a variety of relevant experiences. Methodology workshops are organized to sharpen research skills and expose the network to the relevant methodological developments.

Quality control is the major function of biannual research workshops. These workshops provide a way to monitor the quality of research on a continuous basis, create effective peer pressure, foster interaction among the researchers themselves and with both international and Africa based resource persons, and enforce scheduled delivery of reports. The biannual workshops are, moreover, central to building and maintaining a sense of ownership of AERC activities by giving participating researchers and institutions opportunities for feedback on the design and implementation of the Consortium’s programmes.

AERC’s other major research activity, collaborative research, networks senior researchers to address pertinent policy issues. AERC is currently implementing three collaborative research projects, on poverty, trade and growth, all of which have generated considerable interest in policy circles and played key roles in the configuration of participating countries’ policy positions.

3.1.2 How the Training Network Operates

The Training Programme features the Collaborative Master’s Programme (CMAP) and the Collaborative PhD Programme (CPP). CMAP currently brings together a network of 21 universities in 17 African countries. CPP involves eight degree awarding universities, two in each sub-region of Africa – West Africa, Francophone Africa, Eastern Africa and Southern Africa. CMAP has been in operation since 1993. Launched in 2002, CPP is the first doctoral programme in economics in sub-Saharan Africa that incorporates coursework and comprehensive examinations as formal components of the programme of study.

The collaborative approach in both study programmes rationalizes the use of limited teaching capacity, attains a critical mass of students, permits a larger menu
of electives and jointly enforces high academic standards. In addition to making it possible for individual students to join postgraduate studies, AERC support builds the capacity of the institutions participating in the programmes. This system, too, involves both African and international expertise.

3.1.3 How the Dissemination Network Operates

One of the innovations aimed at bringing together researchers and policy makers and disseminating research findings directly to policy makers is the Senior Policy Seminar (SPS). Seven such seminars have been held to date. These events are designed to provide a forum for the discussion of policy-oriented syntheses of AERC research and to obtain feedback from policy makers on the relevance of the Consortium’s research agenda for policy-making. The senior policy makers are drawn from governments, non-government organizations and the private sector. Those who have participated in the seminars have appreciated the Consortium’s contribution, judging from their responses to questionnaires administered at the end of each seminar.

Moreover, research output must be widely disseminated if it is to provide information and expand the existing body of knowledge. AERC publishes a series of externally reviewed AERC Research Papers to ensure timely and cost-effective dissemination of the results of thematic research projects. Working Papers from long-term collaborative projects are produced to reach the research and policy community as quickly and as widely as possible. These papers are then revised and submitted for publication to international commercial publishers. The AERC Special Papers series consists of commissioned studies on specific issues of concern to the network and the economics profession generally.13

3.2 AERC’s Experiences in Linking Research to Policy

AERC research over the years has been concentrated on macroeconomic management, with a view to eliminating rent-seeking behaviour and thereby promoting responsible governance in African countries. For example, as part of its collaborative research project on Explaining Africa’s Growth Performance, there has been considerable emphasis on political economy issues as a way to explain why Africa has lagged behind other continents. With respect to the micro and household level dimensions of the AERC Research Programme, the collaborative research project on Poverty, Income Distribution and Labour Markets focuses on the wider issues of poverty and

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13. As an indication of output, AERC has published a total of 148 Research Papers and 42 Special Papers and has a current pipeline of 50 papers at various stages of publication. Many of these publications, as well as numerous Working Papers, are also available on the AERC website, www.aercafrica.org. Other information on AERC and AERC research is published in the periodicals, AERC Newsletter and Research News, both also available online.
inequality. There has also been considerable emphasis on the consequences of HIV/AIDS and malaria and the need for an appropriate policy environment conducive to combating these two major threats to development on the continent.

In these and other research projects of AERC, attention is paid to gender analysis. Specifically, the poverty research theme has opened up research opportunities relating to gender issues, i.e., intra-household incidence of poverty, the plight of female-headed households and the role of women in the intra-household decision-making process, access to productive assets, and gender-based differentials in remuneration, as well as socio-cultural barriers to female participation in the labour market.

The interface between AERC research and the policy community in Africa highlights mutual benefits and responsibilities of both parties. The interface essentially occurs at three levels: support for country-level national policy workshops, organization of region-wide Senior Policy Seminars, and targeted dissemination workshops. National policy workshops showcase AERC research findings with a view to informing policy-making; obtaining feedback on the policy relevance of the output; and indicating policy research issues of interest to the policy makers. On average, AERC supports three national policy workshops annually in different sub-regions across the continent. Recent national policy workshops supported by AERC were held in Senegal, Ghana, Congo-Brazzaville, Zanzibar and Nigeria.

Senior Policy Seminars, as noted above, bring together senior African policy makers at the level of ministers and permanent secretaries, central bank governors, advisers to presidents, and directors of government departments. This target audience shares and deliberates on the findings of AERC research with a view to becoming better informed about the need for evidence-based policy-making. The feedback obtained at these seminars provides a basis for ascertaining the policy relevance of AERC research as well as providing guidance on future research directions.¹⁴

Dissemination workshops generally conclude AERC collaborative research projects as a mechanism for informing policy makers, private sector organizations and other stakeholders about the results of the studies. Proceedings of the workshops are usually published – quite apart from the results of the research projects themselves.

¹⁴. In 2004, participants at the Sixth Senior Policy Seminar – on the theme Financing Pro-Poor Growth in Africa – included Hon. Prof. Gilbert Bukenya, Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, Mr. Emmanuel Mutebile, Governor of the Bank of Uganda, Ms. Florence Kuteesa, Budget Director, Uganda Ministry of Finance, Dr. Servacius Likwelye, Director, Poverty Eradication Division, Office of the Vice Presidency, Tanzania, Mr. Joseph Brou, Deputy Director National Treasury, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mr. Situmbeko Musokotwane, Secretary to the Treasury, Zambia. In March 2005, the Seventh Senior Policy Seminar, on the theme Poverty, Growth and Institutions, attracted the Gabonese Deputy Minister of Economics and Finance, Mr. Senturel Madoungou, Zambia’s Deputy Minister of Finance and National Planning, Mr. Mbita Chitala, the Governor of the Bank of Zambia, Dr. Caleb Fundanga, and the First Vice Governor of the Bank of Burundi, Ms. Speciose Baransata – among other notable personalities in the African policy arena.
These examples illustrate the continuous dialogue between policy makers and researchers in the process of formulating the AERC research agenda. This was epitomized in the preparation of AERC’s Strategic Plan for 2005–2010, which was drawn up after an elaborate process of consultations involving senior African policy makers, senior African researchers, international resource persons and members of the Academic Boards of the Training Programmes over a period of nearly eight months.

The effectiveness of the AERC approach is probably best evidenced by quotations from participants in the AERC Research and Training network, as well as through the conclusions of independent evaluators of AERC programmes, as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

This is the only serious African institution training economists. It is very well run and truly very much needed – the region has a chronic shortage of trained economists. An example of AERC’s past success is Charles Soludo, the new governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, who is a key member of the reform team. I have been actively involved in AERC for 15 years and can vouch for it.

_Paul Collier, AERC Resource Person, Centre for the Study of African Economics (CSAE) Department of Economics, Oxford University, UK_

AERC’s training at master’s and PhD levels is making significant contributions to development policy in Africa. Many policy ideas are now available in the continent on account of the programmes and the capacity for continued generation and application of policy ideas continues to grow with every graduating cohort.

_Peter Kimuyu (2003), Evaluator of the AERC Training Programme_

A majority of the research alumni in seven countries expressed confidence that their ideas and their research findings were becoming evident in policy documents and policy decisions in their respective countries.

_Hassan and Rempel (2005), evaluators of AERC Phase V_

I have been engaged actively in the discourse on the essence of pro-poor growth and how it can be addressed in the policy reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) through [the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa] ECA for Eastern and Southern African countries. There have been a series of regional workshops (four to be exact) that involved key technical experts working on PRSPs where I served as a resource person and used our resources at this meeting. In addition, the work we have done from this project has been published in journal articles and in a book that is now widely circulated among policy practitioners and researchers.

_Abebe Shimeles, Ethiopian researcher participating in the AERC Poverty I and II Collaborative Research Projects; interviewed in July 2005 on the use of AERC research results in policy_
4. Challenges to Networking in Africa – The Imperative of Links with African Studies

It may appear since AERC has worked well and has managed to earn international recognition, that networking is the panacea for capacity building in Africa. Although this may seem so from the AERC example, there are enormous challenges that must be overcome before a success story of human capacity building in Africa can be told. In terms of AERC experiences, here are a few of those challenges:

– Changes in higher education in Africa

Over the last few years, there have been significant changes in higher education in Africa. To counter dwindling government support for higher education, African universities have had to come up with innovative ways of raising additional resources. These have included, but are not limited to, charging fees for higher education, privatizing services at universities, running parallel programmes that rely on full fee recovery and initiating strategies of fund raising to augment available resources.

These initiatives have led to changes in the incentive structure for faculties with the aim of stemming brain drain from universities. A major challenge arising from these changes, however, is declining teaching capacity in the face of very high enrolment rates. Recently, for example, students at Nairobi law school boycotted lectures citing constrained facilities resulting from the parallel degree programme. For AERC specifically, a negative outcome of the shift of human resources to parallel degree programmes has been the erosion of personnel for the regular degree programme that AERC depends on for its input to the CMAP and CPP.

– Resource constraints and high demand for AERC training programmes

Although there has been a significant reduction in the unit cost of the master’s programme, from US$26,000 to a little less than US$15,000 per student per year, very few individuals can afford to pay full fees for the programme. The challenge is that AERC must continue to provide scholarships for the needy and thus must strive to raise additional resources. Universities are encouraged to approach their traditional funders to supplement AERC resources, but this has not been well implemented – and in most universities has not been implemented at all.15

– Policy reception in African governments

Even though AERC has attempted to build a stock of knowledge in policy relevant areas, African policy makers are not always open to and willing to call on

15. There is an equally high demand for the PhD programme, as exemplified by the shortfall in the number of scholarships vis-à-vis the number of qualified students. Some 80 qualified candidates apply each year, but AERC has resources to provide only 21 scholarships. For the 2004 academic year, an additional four students obtained scholarships from other institutions. The resource constraint will be aggravated as the profile, visibility and success of the CPP filter into the wider academic and policy domain.
this expertise for policy advice and thus often fall prey to the policies prescribed by donors. The problem is largely due to lack of ownership of the domestic policy-making process.

– Retention of capacity built:

By and large, retention of human capacity is very much dependent on the institutional structures, the reward system and the incentives structure in a particular country. The main responsibility for retention therefore lies with institutions and governments in the region and AERC’s capability in this area is limited. Thus, while AERC’s intervention cannot be termed comprehensive in any way, without AERC, and given the changed environment in which the private sector plays an increasingly major role, there would be very few professional economists remaining in academia and conducting policy relevant research.

Clearly there is no “magic bullet” solution to either capacity building or policy-making, although the former is a significant contribution to the latter. The networking experience of AERC plainly indicates, however, the necessity for linking African studies and the policy-making process in Africa. It is imperative that the local perspective be backed up by the international access to cutting edge methodology and technology, and this linking of local and international forms an important element of the AERC capacity building process. The AERC network itself could thus be termed African studies – it involves both Africans and Africanists in the quest to understand more fully the operations of the economies of the continent, to contribute to the body of knowledge on the impact of internal and external policy prescriptions, and to enhance the economic policy environment in Africa so that Africa can take its full place in the global community.
References


Before I make any substantive points, let me first add my own appreciation of Lennart’s work. Lennart, you have served the research and policy community well over the years, not the least in your years at the Nordic Africa Institute!

I shall make two main points, both drawing on the contributions that previous speakers have made. One focuses on research, the other on policy. The common thread is the importance of being able to challenge the mainstream.

Adebayo Olokushi emphasized in his presentation that the study of Africa is much more than African Studies, as it has evolved in the West with its interest in development assistance. Its effect has been to encourage applied research that is carried out within a relatively narrow conceptual and theoretical framework. Very often, as Adebayo suggested, such research has aimed at confirming hypotheses that suit particular donor interests.

Such applied research tends to limit the discourse. The question is how it is possible to get around such limitations. There is not necessarily anything wrong in testing a hypothesis that Structural Adjustment does not lead to poverty. The jury is still out as far as the full effects of structural adjustment policies are concerned. The point is that facts must be examined from divergent viewpoints and perspectives, not just a singular one. Thus, sometimes research, if done well, confirms a given hypothesis, at other times it disconfirms it. Good research, in my view, implies, among other things, a systematic and comparative investigation. It requires both depth and breadth.

The problem of challenging mainstream theories and concepts in Africa is exacerbated by the lack of domestic funds for research and the heavy reliance of researchers on funding by development assistance agencies. There is simply too much commissioned work which entices scholars to focus on these short-term consultancies rather than more basic and independent research.

I believe that one of the best ways of getting around this problem is for funding agencies to acknowledge the importance of funding independent research. SAREC has already taken the first steps in this direction by establishing research funds in

Göran Hydén

Göte Hansson, Sven Hamrell and Göran Hydén
universities. These funds are open to faculty and graduate students in these institutions. They compete for the money and are subject to a peer review process. At present, SAREC, which calls this “the SAREC model”, has such funds in operation at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Makerere University in Uganda and Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique.

The money provided through these funds typically falls short of what consultancies for donors can offer. This imbalance is a problem. I believe that for a more independent research agenda that permits a different perspective on many pertinent issues facing the continent to evolve in Africa more money needs to be channelled through such funds. They do not need to be confined to particular universities. They could be national funds, managed through a national research council. In fact, many African countries are currently rethinking the old bureaucratic research council model and the proposal to establish independent, peer-reviewing research funds is timely. If donors in the West wish to hear an African voice and help build research institutions such as those represented here today by Adebayo Olokushi and Olusanya Ajakaiye, support for such research funds is one, if not the most, important way to go.

The second point starts from a point that Anders Danielson made earlier. He said that offering policy advice implies that you know the society to which your counsel applies. This tells you that Anders is not your ordinary economist. How many economists have you heard make that statement?

The idea that the advisor is familiar with the place has taken on new significance in the light of recent changes in the way development assistance is being provided and administered. This new aid architecture, as it is often called, is built around the following points.

First, it is meant to reduce transaction costs for donors and recipient governments alike by providing funds in the form of direct budget support. This is not quite the same as “foreign aid on recipient’s terms” as was the case in the 1970s because attached to budget support is a series of financial accountability conditions. Donors today are not less but more concerned about how taxpayers’ money is being used. Thus, transaction costs tend to be shifted to such phenomena as expenditure tracking, i.e. a way of tracing where the money donors gave eventually ended up and whether the intended beneficiaries really got the goods or services they were meant to get. The point here is that this kind of control is exercised within the local bureaucracy, not in the context of specific programmes or projects that allow aid administrators and workers a more “hands-on” contact with the reality of the countries to which they are assigned.

The second aspect of the new aid architecture is the insistence on policy coordination. Following the adoption of the “Common Responsibility” report by the Globkomutredningen here in Sweden, the new policy towards Africa and other regions of the world is characterized by bringing all aspects of the relations, whether trade, aid,
defence, or anything else, under one roof. Aid is not seen in isolation from other activities. This means, of course that many more domestic Swedish considerations are made before a policy toward, say Tanzania or Uganda, is approved. It tends to complicate policy-making and allow it to be guided by information that is collected by staff in diplomatic missions and bureaucrats at home rather than staff in the field or African voices.

The third aspect is the preference to achieve policy coordination with other donor governments. Some years ago, each donor tended to operate on its own. At best, they tried to avoid duplication. Nowadays, they go further by trying to agree on a common stand on particular issues, not the least in the controversial governance field. This may be a largely voluntary exercise but the presence of Governance and Democracy Working Groups made up of donors in most African countries is indicative of the importance attached to policy coordination. It tends to have the effect of strengthening the voice of the donors over the governance and policy agenda and calls into question the extent to which the new aid architecture really lives up to the concept of partnership. Many Africans certainly raise that question.

Like the case with research, the policy agenda in African countries today is more than ever controlled by the donors. Budget support is being offered only as long as African governments stick to the agenda of the assembled donors, including the international finance institutions. Challenging the mainstream is not easy in these circumstances.

Researchers in Africa and in Sweden have an important role to play in challenging the mainstream policy agenda. With agencies like Sida increasingly becoming a think tank serving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm Africa looms even more distant and fuzzy than before. Independent and systematic research conducted free from the terms set by the donors is perhaps the most important way of allowing a nuanced view of Africa to influence the public discourse about Africa in Sweden – and Europe at large.
Further Comments

Kari Karanko

Allow me first to congratulate Ms. Carin Norberg on her new position as the Director of The Nordic Africa Institute from January 2006. I appreciate that in her previous position in Transparency International in Berlin Carin looked after Finland very favourably. After all, Finland ended up at the top of the TI-Index of least corrupt countries. To be at the top is very lonely. I therefore invite others to come along.

I met Lennart Wohlgemuth for the first time in his position at the Treasury of Tanzania, where he was working on loan from SIDA with external finance matters. Ever since Lennart has been such a wonderful teacher and guide in international development matters. His 12 years in office at The Nordic Africa Institute underlined the Nordic character of the institution, which should not be forgotten. It has the full support of all the Nordic countries and operates within a large network of Nordic Universities and institutions as well as individuals. At the same time, and as important, due to The Nordic Africa Institute’s capacity building activities the institution has also established a growing network of African universities, other institutions and individuals.

Allow me to draw your attention to a new innovative approach by the Finnish Universities Partnership for International Development (UniPID). The UniPID network has been developed in a collaboration of all 18 Finnish universities to contribute to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The targets were set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) – Johannesburg Plan of Implementation – in the fields of education and research in close cooperation with the southern African universities by also developing and enhancing their network.

Thereafter some of the Finnish universities assembled at the University of Jyväskylä to create a knowledge-based sustainable co-operation and partnership to start a preparatory project. The Director of Science and Technology for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) participated in the meeting and the Council of Finnish University Rectors gave its acceptance-in-principle for UniPID’s approach and ideas in December 2002.

In 2003 and 2004 several meetings on the issue were held and proposals were made to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and finally in April 2005 the...
Ministry for Education gave start-up funding for 10 months for the UniPID-network building. The first official UniPID-conference was held at the University of Joensuu in September 2005. UniPID participated in the Helsinki Conference in September and published their first UniPID publication. It addresses the role universities have in society to act as “translators” in understanding and implementing the MDG and goals for sustainable development. The book looks at how universities at the same time can

- do excellent scientific research;
- operate effectively in society through the best concepts of organisational management and leadership;
- introduce scientific models and results into practice in a participatory manner;
- act as an ‘Effective Good Citizen’ in the surrounding society; and
- organize national and global networks for better productivity and better results by working and learning together.

The answer to all these important points is – through innovativeness and innovations and by building institutionalised partnerships and collaboration.

- Partnership must be based on a multi-stakeholder strategy.
- It should be different to the usual old way of doing things.
- It should have a management system for multiple actors.
- It should be more dialogue oriented than the old way of doing things
- It enables cross-disciplinary interactions
- It is active in knowledge sharing, which makes an impact on development

The UniPID approach is to empower through collaboration.

As the whole idea of UniPID is based on the Johannesburg Partnership model there are different tasks allocated to different partners:

- **Finnish universities** have to strengthen development research and knowledge by networking and capacity building
- **Partner universities** have to look at capacity building of research institutions and scientific research, and identify core development issues for practical operations and networking among themselves.
- **Business communities** have to be available as reliable ‘researcher brokers’ and bridge-builders on long-term basis. A good partnership with surrounding enterprises has also been part of the success of the Finnish universities in their various locations. This has tremendously increased the universities’ funding from private sources. Some of the benefits are obvious:
  - Universities provide the academic expertise to the business communities’ corporate responsibility projects;

16. H.E. Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, delivered the keynote address.
– This encourages dialogue between the academic world and the business community on issues related to sustainable development;
– It also integrates Finnish companies into the university programmes by helping them to find new co-operation partners in developing countries.
– Funding communities have to analyse the State-of-the-Art of Development Research Network.

The Nordic Africa Institute has some very important challenges ahead:
– As Africa is in the focus of the G8 and the EU, universities in the Nordic countries also have a role to play together with their partners in Africa. The Nordic Africa Institute should intensify its network in the Nordic countries. Although Uppsala is in Sweden, the Institute is a Nordic institution. It could be an important catalyst on the great variety of activities, which are going on in the universities with their partners in Africa.
– Universities should also establish contacts with the Nordic Africa Institute. It looks as if the Nordic universities do not know what the Institute can offer.
– Aid agencies need knowledge based information and analysis on daily issues but also deeper analyses about Africa.17
– African university networks should also be strengthened. This is in the interest of donor countries as well.
– Higher education will as a consequence of networking and joint efforts by universities benefit in all countries.

17. One good example was the Rwanda study in 1998, which was commenced by the Nordic Africa Institute as part of the major evaluation. This provided deeper knowledge on the root causes of the tragedy.
Further Comments

Klaus Winkel

There are many possible policy perspectives when the Nordic countries look at Africa. When seen from the perspective of the aid agencies the question is often one of a particular Nordic country dealing with one particular African country in the context of the policy dialogue. There have been occasions when several or all the Nordic countries come together to interact with an African country. In these situations African Studies can offer good help in getting meaningful information on the country in question.

However, much of the political debate – and the public interest – is not about one or another African country but about Africa in general. In reality, what is actually meant is often Africa south of the Sahara or even tropical Africa, because the Republic of South Africa is in many ways such a special case. At this general level it seems to me that there is less help to be got from the researchers, notably in the social sciences. And especially from African researchers as illustrated by what Adebayo told us about the paucity of research on Islam at the level of Africa. When it comes to African agriculture or the African disease burden then the relevant researchers appear to be more prepared to present the all-Africa picture. The same applies to the macro economists who can rely on statistics. But do not ask a sociologist or an anthropologist to write about the main features of African societies – most of them would consider such an attempt to generalize as completely unscientific. In the absence of scholarly attempts to produce overviews that can guide us to a better understanding of African societies we get the simplistic one factor explanations where e.g. religion accounts for almost everything.

I have probably overlooked a good deal of what the Nordic Africa Institute has produced, but as far as I can remember there are only a few publications that present an overview of key Sub-Sahara Africa issues. A very positive example is the book from 1998 on institution building and leadership in Africa, published thanks to Lennart’s efforts. I would encourage the Nordic Africa Institute and other Africa

researchers to do more of that type of work. “Leadership in Africa”, for instance, may deserve a separate follow-up and other themes might be:

– The role of the family in the life of an African,
– The role of ethnicity in the life of an African,
– The significance of keeping indigenous African languages alive,
– Why AIDS is particularly widespread in Africa,
– The attitude to work among African men.

These may not be very feasible themes but my point is: help the public and the policymakers to get the broad picture right.
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