

## Book Review

### **Higher Education in postcolonial Africa: paradigms of development, decline and dilemmas.**

M.O. Afolayan (Ed.), 2007. Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 381 pp + xvii.

ISBN: 1592214150 (Hardcover).

A new book on African Higher Education is always an exciting contribution, and refreshing to read, especially if it is a product by African scholars. *Higher Education in Post Colonial Africa: Paradigms of development, decline and Dilemmas*, is a scholarly work that will attract diverse readership including university leaders, teachers and students as well as policy makers from government. There is a significant shift in the interest of the African audience in the past few years, from World Bank commentaries, papers and books on African higher education to African authored works.

Banya and Elu (2001) for instance, observe that there has not been enough research in financing higher education. *African Higher Education in postcolonial Africa: paradigms of development, decline and dilemmas* bridges the gap. It is an up-to-date compendium consisting of 19 chapters covering a range of discourses about African higher education in selected countries. Some of the issues discussed include the lingering colonial past and its influence on development of higher education, funding, access, quality, and the more pressing challenge of the brain drain in the backdrop of economic instability. In reality, the economies are declining and higher education is critical to development (Puplampu, 2005). It is an engine to economic development. This book is a milestone in African tertiary education publications in that it attempts to provide solutions to African higher education challenges. This book provides some insights regarding the way forward. However, the discussion on solutions is rather limited given the crisis of higher education in Africa today.

The contributions from the various scholars make the book an interesting compendium on issues and challenges facing African higher education. There are 17 authors with various backgrounds including, English, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Education, Science, University Administration and Law. Putting together such diverse perspectives is one of the book's challenges. On the whole, it is readable and themes are grouped together logically. However a book that attempts to cover the continent's higher education systems faces difficulties arising from the diversity in African higher education. Africa historically, has different cultures, economies and paths of development, largely because of its colonial past. Universities in post-independence Africa have always had the problem of reconciling their ethos and culture with the metropolitan institutions in the colonizing country. African universities have Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and other origins. This diversity makes it difficult to come up with solutions that apply uniformly over the continent.

The problems affecting African higher education have been diagnosed enough over the last thirty years (AAU/World Bank (1997). The AAU and World Bank conclude that the present constraint is therefore not lack of knowledge or a sense of what is required, but rather the inability to take the necessary action. Notwithstanding, universities the world-over have similar problems. In this respect the approach in the

book of using top scholars drawn from each region is commendable and very effective. The chapter on the brain drain highlights one of the central challenges for any African university. This chapter could be enhanced by focusing on the positive aspects of the brain drain (Tetty, 2002). The use of technology and the internet and the virtual university is one way of making a positive use of the intelligentsia in the diaspora.

The discourses on funding of African higher education could be enhanced by inclusion of some of the success stories such as Universities of Makerere (Court, 1999) and Dar es Salaam and Maputo (Bollag, 2000) on strategies for turning around decline. Unlike earlier publications, the book covers the development of higher education in South Africa. This is positive in that there is a wealth of information in South African higher education. The country has some of the best universities on the continent that compare very well with universities in the advanced countries using the western concept of university. However, the book does not address the issues of redistribution of resources between the historically disadvantaged institutions and the advantaged ones. This is a critical issue for the future of higher education in the new democracy. In conclusion, this book is well worth reading for anyone interested in following the history and trends in higher education on the continent.

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