

## **African academic diaspora and the revitalisation of African universities**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to contribute to existing, albeit limited, knowledge on the engagement of the African academics in Germany in African universities in research, teaching and public service. Revitalisation of African universities appears to be the *raison d'être* of internationalisation. Inasmuch as revitalisation denotes development in its conceptualisation, it seems appropriate that a theory of development informs the current analysis. Building on the people's organisations development theory (PODT), a university revitalisation theory (URT) explains the centre stage which African universities occupy in the academic diaspora-Africa equation. The qualitative approach informs the analysis particularly through interviews in answering the research question, namely how Germany-educated African academics engage in the revitalisation of the African universities. The work employs Alan Bryman's steps in analysing data. This analysis indicates a modest engagement of African academic diaspora in revitalising African universities. The discussion redounds to URT construction, which is the main goal of this article. It culminates in articulating a methodological framework followed by practical and policy recommendations. Theory construction in this empirical study is informed by Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory (GT). The recommendations include the strengthening of the relationship between African academics, students, African universities and international universities, the establishment of an African academic diaspora association and the employment of a larger quantitative sample.

**Keywords:** University revitalisation, internationalisation, theory construction, academic diaspora, development

### **Introduction**

The engagement of the African academic diaspora in African universities is probably the single most important intellectual remittance geared at revamping

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academic development in Africa given the qualifications of the academic diaspora. The available literature has for several decades focused on other types of remittances (Foulds and Zeleza, 2014: 16) and the recourse of the diaspora to revitalise African universities is recent (Oanda, 2015). The African Union (AU) Commission defines the African diaspora as peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union. The AU considers the diaspora to be the ‘sixth’ region of Africa (African Union Handbook, 2018).

The purpose of the current analysis is to debunk the engagement of the academic diaspora in revitalising the African universities. The study also seeks to identify and synchronise workable practices from numerous countries which may help various countries and universities meet their goals. The analysis redounds to the construction of a theory and methodology for revitalising the university-diaspora engagement because the development of universities depends upon, amongst other things, a vision and theory towards that end. The paper advances an argument that the engagement of the African academic diaspora with the African universities may be effective and sustainable if the latter take the initiative in identifying their needs, affirming their strengths and acknowledging their challenges. It is through this consciousness (Freire, 1970) that African universities can claim ownership. As the literature puts it, there is increasing agreement that the fundamental flaw in development theory and practice is the logic which has initiatives of the development process emanating from government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) programmes being controlled by urban technical elites in alliance with international development agencies (White, 2004: 7). The analysis is informed by a people’s organisations development theory (PODT) (Mutalemwa, 2015).

### **Literature review**

The literature shows that academic diaspora engagement in Africa is rather “under-researched” (Foulds and Zeleza, 2014) and fairly new (Schmelz, 2009: 14) though improvements in the quality of education, research, technology and innovation as described by Juma (2016) are necessary. The revitalisation of African universities presupposes major reforms in the entire management of academic life at universities. This work appreciates the complexity of the concept diaspora as advanced by Zeleza (2004: 262) whereby the concept

denotes a process, a condition, a space and a discourse embodied in cultural, temporal and spatial considerations. Against the backdrop of this conceptual complexity, and for the sake of the present analysis, diaspora refers to former and current Germany-educated African scholars. Revitalisation is essentially a question of change or development which is sustainable in nature (Biekart and Fowler, 2012). That is why the current work borrows a theory from Development Studies and seeks to discuss the possibility of revamping African universities. Unless universities have a theory and vision for its future (Shivji, 2007), revitalisation may be impossible to achieve. Hence this paper attempts to provide this theory and vision and thus contribute to the extant literature because the role of the academic diaspora has been sidelined in the literature as pointed out above. This observation creates a research gap to fill

### **Data and methods**

There is a connection between the research question and the methods for answering the question. The research question is how the engagement of the academic diaspora can and do revitalise African universities in the context of internationalisation. The ‘how’-research question usually presupposes a qualitative approach in data collection and analysis. The literature shows that the qualitative approach is predominant in organisational contexts because so much of the research in this area is involved with gauging people’s perceptions. People’s views are subjected to investigator’s interpretation. Such interpretation is intrinsically qualitative as Babbie (2013) and Kayrooz and Trevitt (2006: 109) aptly demonstrate.

The researcher conducted interviews, both online and face-to-face, to 20 members of the academic diaspora and 20 university staff members in Africa and ten respondents from selected German institutions. Interview helps gauge ideas, opinions, feelings and views of the respondents (Babbie, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher reviewed documents dealing with the engagement between universities and members of the academic diaspora to assess the nature of the engagement, the history of the engagement, the available projects and memoranda of understanding. Only universities were included. Other higher learning institutions were purposely excluded due to time and financial management purposes.

A review of documents comprised sources from third parties which, provided information regarding the engagement of the academic diaspora in a particular

university. The third party was considered to be more independent and thus probably capable of providing a more plausible appraisal of the engagement than both the universities and the academic diaspora which may have interests to protect. Third party here refers to public and private organisations interested in supporting the diaspora and their countries of origin.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to study members of the African academic diaspora as well as universities engaging in collaborative research, teaching and public service. The research included responses from scholars from Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The choice of Germany was also purposive as Germany has been involved in supporting the diaspora and universities in Africa for a long time (Bonfiglio, McGregor and Siegel, 2015; Schlenzka, 2009). The researcher employed Alan Bryman's four steps in analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2012) and informed by GT in which theory emerges from data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

### **Findings and discussion**

The results showed a pattern in the areas of university-diaspora engagement across sampled universities, similarities in the process and nature of the engagement of the scholars in African universities. There was a need for an improved process of the university-diaspora engagement in research, teaching and public service based on theorisation and a grand vision, informed by local demands as well as dictates of culture and reason while seeking to promote internationalisation across Africa. Although international co-operation between African universities and Germany is increasing, little co-operation between and amongst African universities exists. Furthermore, although some individual members of the academic diaspora support their home universities, lack of a formal diaspora association in Germany makes it hard to quantify the engagement of the academic diaspora in the revitalisation of African universities. The studies pursued in Germany were relevant to African universities and internationalisation was considered important.

Mh, first of all I think I gained a lot by being recruited in Germany and of course also having had an experience from America, USA. I had also collaborations with my German colleagues in terms of research. ...I remember like in 2009 my supervisors, two other colleagues and I we launched, we had a programme, a research programme, field study in

Northern Malawi with students from five countries and I was one of their instructors. We had students from Germany, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi and I wish we could continue that. ...the essence was also to mentor young scholars and out of that there were some small bursaries that were disbursed for four projects for such beneficiaries. And I know one opportunity, one, two continued to a doctoral level and one finished. Yeah (Research participant from the University of Dar es Salaam, 2017).

It was a common phenomenon that African universities send students abroad depending on the availability of funds, which left students and management little room to plan ahead. Besides, the initiative for inter-university collaboration often originated from outside Africa. A participant from the State University of Zanzibar indicated that “once the Zanzibar government passed and endorsed the bill to establish the university (SUZA) in 1999, many Tanzanians, Zanzibaris in particular who live and work overseas started the initiatives to link SUZA with other higher learning institutions from the nations they live in or others...we started engaging with the African academic diaspora since the university started its operations in 2002” (Respondent from the State University of Zanzibar 2016). Lastly, weak governments in Africa accounted for brain drain, thus stunting development in Africa and stifling university revitalisation. However, the revitalisation of African universities could not succeed without being informed by research and theory as argued by Shivji (2007) as well as strategy and funding.

With regard to your question on the involvement of diaspora at institutional level in German universities, it’s quite difficult to find a university which has a strategy to engage diaspora in their activities. Many universities and research centres employ African scientists but from my knowledge not in an institutionalised frame. These scientists are more or less involved in projects related to Africa but you will hardly find an institutional strategy behind (Research participant from the University of Yaoundé, 2016).

Funding, yeah, funding. For we local experts, I don’t know how you feel on your part, but for us and now we are long-timers, I think we deserve a lot more to get funding so that we can attract much more youngsters but of course we are on the verge of leaving active service, Mhm, though we

are still energetic (Research participant from the University of Dar es Salaam, 2017).

As African universities engage in the internationalisation process with various international academic and professional institutions, African scholars including the African diaspora should form a kernel of the process because they know better both the western, particularly German culture and the African cultures. A Ghanaian respondent, suggests that such scholars and African diaspora in particular should visit Africa to exchange their knowledge, skills and competences: “Brain Movement can be one way to revitalise higher education in Africa, in that African Diaspora academics can arrange to share part of their academic time also in Africa in order to transfer and share acquired knowledge with Africans”. As the diaspora play a major role, experts who studied in Germany for example the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) alumni working in African universities are instrumental for the sustainability of the engagement as the respondent suggests: “The sustainability stems from the presence of other alumni in these universities who previously studied in Germany... because African Universities are capable of transforming the continent by providing practice-oriented entrepreneurship education. As such they need to be capacitated to be able to execute this task” (Research participant from the University of Ghana, 2016).

### **University revitalisation theory**

This section builds on the previous sections to highlight the insights gained from the discussion of the engagement of the African scholars with an experience of studying in Germany particularly those who pursued higher degrees or are still involved in this pursuit. One of the insights gained was a lack of a coordinated programme to engage the African academic diaspora in revitalising African universities. At the heart of this lacuna was the need for theorising and developing a vision on the process of university revitalisation and transformation, from localisation to internationalisation. This need is well articulated in the literature on African civil society (Shivji, 2007 and Hyden, 1995; White, 2008). One may argue, as this paper does, that the academia is part of the civil society (Commission for Africa, 2005) whose mandate is knowledge generation and sharing as a public good.

Consistent with the conceptualisation of the academia as part of the civil society, this work builds on PODT to explain the revitalisation of African universities. In addition and in relation to the conceptualisation of the academia is the objective of universities whose knowledge creation and dissemination eventually lead to the improvement of societal conditions (White, 2008), which is another way of conceptualising development. This improvement entails change and even transformation of individuals, institutions and societies socially, economically, culturally, politically and technologically.

This change denotes development. That is the reason why a theory of development is adopted to explain the revitalisation of higher education in Africa. Universities are actors in development: They take part in bringing about development. They are also indicators of development. PODT postulates that confronted with development challenges, individuals organise themselves in order to bring about change whose effectiveness depends on networking. It is a four-step process, which may be adopted to discuss the process of revitalising African universities. The following section illustrates the process of university transformation which has four interrelated main components. They consist of needs assessment, process institutionalisation, internationalisation and change or transformation. Transformation is both a process and goal of university revitalisation. The process is methodical and proceeds from micro, meso to macro levels and continues in a spiral. The following sections illustrate the methodological framework of the URT.

### **Step one: Needs assessment**

Needs assessment is the starting point of the process. This process is crucial because it seeks to answer numerous questions underlying internationalisation. These questions include: what are university's needs for internationalisation? Which areas of internationalisation are essential for a particular university? What are the strengths of the university which can be used to attract and sustain international co-operation and under what circumstances? What are the weaknesses that can be mitigated or overcome through internationalisation? Which international institutions are actually or would potentially be willing and able to collaborate with a particular university? What are the vision and mission of the university? Does the university have a strategic plan? What are the goals and objectives of the university? To what extent can the university manage its affairs independently? Which external intervention is necessary? Is

internationalisation streamlined in academic programmes? These and similar other questions may be raised by individual staff members or individual units of the university. Findings show that such questions are not adequately dealt with at the university level.

In the engagement of the Germany-educated academic diaspora in revitalising African universities, the identification of needs, challenges, problems and issues confronting African universities is of paramount importance and it forms the starting point for each university in any collaboration with international institutions and indeed in university management as a whole. One of the questions universities need to keep on reflecting upon is the question of the existence of a university or the reason behind its existence. In answering such questions, a needs assessment is crucial in the management of a university. Decisions that are demand-driven are more likely to produce better results than supply-driven ones because the former ones are based on the needs on the ground rather than needs as defined by foreigners. Here the fundamental question is how African universities can effectively and sustainably tap into the brains of the African academics with an international background to revitalise African universities. This question presupposes an existence of *a priori* African epistemology that can inform international exchange discussions.

The literature shows that African institutions should be the driving forces in identifying needs and opportunities for engagement in internationalisation programmes as well as in providing to diaspora scholars and African institutions space to build and expand their scholarly alliances. The Carnegie Diaspora Fellowship Programme has introduced a model, which have African institutions as drivers of the structure of exchanges and engage the desire of diaspora academics to contribute to higher education across Africa, starting with Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania (Foulds and Zeleza, 2014).

Some of the major challenges that universities in Africa generally face is the creation and management of quality education, massification of students and unpredictable enrolments vis-a-vis space and facilities, state intervention, internationalisation, extra qualification and unsustainable financial flow. In this theory, universities are expected to identify and address these and other challenges. The African academic diaspora may well be disposed to help mitigate some of these issues given their African background. Universities may and should benefit from collaborations but first their needs and priorities should be identified and articulated. Staff and students can and indeed should be able to identify and articulate the needs of the university at this micro level.



### **Step two: Process institutionalisation**

A university is an academic organisation. At this stage, universities through relevant fora, focus on how to address the issues raised by individuals both staff and students. University units, departments, faculties and management boards are eminently suited to address these issues. In university management, process institutionalisation consists in setting up concrete plans, devising effective strategies and appointing competent manpower to start, develop, maintain, improve and assess collaboration with members of the academic diaspora or scholars living in Germany or in other countries with the view to revitalising African universities. This constitutes the meso level whereby individuals' ideas give rise to university conversation, reflection and action.

It is in this step the need for collaboration assumes an institutional character. For example, process institutionalisation may lead to establishing an international office to specifically accommodate the diaspora and conduct a thorough needs assessment regularly and systematically. Several universities in Africa do not have such offices in place. This may curtail the process of internationalisation because of the absence of such fora. Universities can and should take the initiative rather than having initiatives originate from outside Africa.

The university as a whole gets involved at this level. It is at this level that relevant university organs turn individuals' questions into institutional agenda. To operationalise the agenda, a university develops a strategic plan for internationalisation. It puts in place structures to manage the process. It identifies potential partners and creates a team to manage internal collaborations. At this stage, setting up an international office would be an added advantage. If internationalisation is an important element in the university management, then universities should invest in its support by appointing qualified and interested personnel to man the office and furnish it with the necessary equipment and facilities. At this stage internationalisation is discussed from the point of view of the university concerned. It is the first concrete step to reach out to international partners.

In attempting to reach out to international partners, the engagement with the diaspora should be amongst the top priorities particularly by African universities. The concern that African universities do not have a programme or office dealing with the diaspora may be real and quite revealing. I concur with the argument that without a strategy to engage the diaspora and other African

academics abroad, little will be accomplished by the diaspora in relation to the revitalisation of African universities.

### **Step three: Internationalisation**

The third component is internationalisation. This is the central focus in this theoretical framework. At this stage a university reaches out to other institutions across national boundaries. It is at this macro level, local and international institutions begin the conversation for co-operation and express interests for the same purpose. This often involves familiarisation visits and if all goes according to plan, involved parties sign a memorandum of understanding, detailing the terms of reference, limits, rights, obligations and, duration of the partnership. The content of the partnership would depend on the needs of the university and will be informed by the very needs, capacity and interests of the other partner institution or institutions. Involved institutions create monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess and see whether the process is going according to plan or whether the process could be improved upon. The vital questions to ask at this juncture are what is the purpose of internationalisation? How can one conclude or ascertain that internationalisation works and is relevant or otherwise? What are the internationalisation criteria or measures of success, effectiveness or efficiency?

The main argument in this analysis and the motif that binds the analysis together is that international engagement exists towards the revitalisation of African universities where revitalisation signifies change and transformation. This is the purpose of internationalisation and as such we come to the fourth and last component of this theoretical analysis. Change and transformation may be hard to measure especially in qualitative terms. However, change and transformation can be observed and measured, particularly in quantitative terms. In other words one can measure and quantify the output or product of internationalisation. For example, in terms of quality of education one can evaluate the assessment criteria, quality of programmes, lecturers' qualifications, quality and quantity of publications, conference participation, public service and curriculum development. As far as financial support is concerned, one can point to the amount of funding provided and the technical equipment supplied. Financial support presupposes regularity, stability, predictability and sustainability of funds and funding opportunities to a considerably great extent.

Internationalisation refers to the process of reaching out to international institutions, including the African academics abroad to address the issues and priorities identified at the meso level, namely the institutional level while aiming to meet international standards. That is where the academic diaspora and indeed other African academics living abroad are identified and contacted. Depending on the response of the diaspora and other potential partners, negotiations and agreements may be made to start and maintain co-operation. Indeed as internationalisation gains ground in university management, focus should not only be between universities in the North and in the South but also between African universities and members of the academic diaspora largely with roots in the South. This collaboration would help mitigate the effects of the dependency theories and lead to more self-reliance and probably usher in the revival of Pan-Africanism.

It is at this internationalisation stage that the South-South and North-South relations become formalised. The major agent of internationalisation is networking. Through networking with the African academic diaspora, the advantages of educating and training Africans abroad can be felt in African universities and by extension African societies in general. In this way the relevance of the education and training received could be assessed vis-à-vis the needs of the African universities pointed out in stage one, namely needs assessment and articulated in stage two, that is, process institutionalisation. Thus internationalisation logically follows the previous two stages and is dependent upon them.

Networking and internationalisation may commence and develop between two individuals each affiliated to an academic institution. This kind of arrangement makes sense as a starting point. However, in order to ensure sustainability at an institutional level this kind of networking needs to be streamlined into university management procedures. This is to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is adhered to. For example, rather than an academic scholar paying allegiance to his or her inviting counterpart, the scholar should seek to be part of the university answerable to a unit, department or faculty. This would also help give collaboration a formal and international character.

With several academics in Africa making an effort to reach out to the African academic diaspora a good number of the diaspora will be able to contribute towards revitalising higher education in Africa. More importantly though would be for university initiatives to seek collaboration with the African academic diaspora and nurture it through help of concrete plans to do so. For example the

State University of Zanzibar “has introduced the Advisory Board which consists of many Tanzanians living or who had lived overseas among its members. These meet once a year sometime in December” (Respondent from the State University of Zanzibar, 2016). This is an important strategy to engage scholars abroad for internal development. It is indeed a strategy for sustainability. “As I explained earlier, through the Advisory Board meeting, areas of engagement are made sustainable and when they cease from here they become activated” (ibid). Furthermore, academic networks and collaboration have multiplier effects. People who get such opportunities to engage in international academic programmes in Germany or in other parts of the world serve to create new networks. As a result institutions become stronger and students expand their knowledge, skills, competences and values.

Moreover, networking cannot be limited to academic scholars as individuals alone. It should extend to international academic associations, foreign universities, governments as well as international civil society organisations (CSOs). The potential for networking is almost unlimited. One may reasonably argue that the stronger the networks get, the greater the chances for change, continuity and development accrue to them, all factors remaining constant. As earlier pointed out, there are a good number of organisations in Germany working to promote and support collaboration with universities in Africa. Therefore, it is time Africa ceased the opportunity to build and sustain networks for the revitalisation of tertiary education.

There are various services that the African academic diaspora can render to African universities. The literature points out some of these as the provision of “short-term or summer teaching and research visitations; organising seminars, workshops and conferences; partnerships and collaborations on research projects both virtually and in-person; resource sharing -- providing access to funding, data, research and technology; serving as mentors and advisors; co-creating and reviewing teaching curricula and PhD training materials and investing in institutional advancement initiatives” (Ferede, 2013: 5). As a way of building up networks, the literature proposes regional collaboration as a useful strategy: “We should focus primarily on developing regional collaboration between African higher education institutions. Exchanges within (International Deans’ Course) IDC demonstrate the importance of knowledge of developments in neighbouring countries and the potential that exchanges offer in the area of teaching and research” (Mayer, 2016: 1).

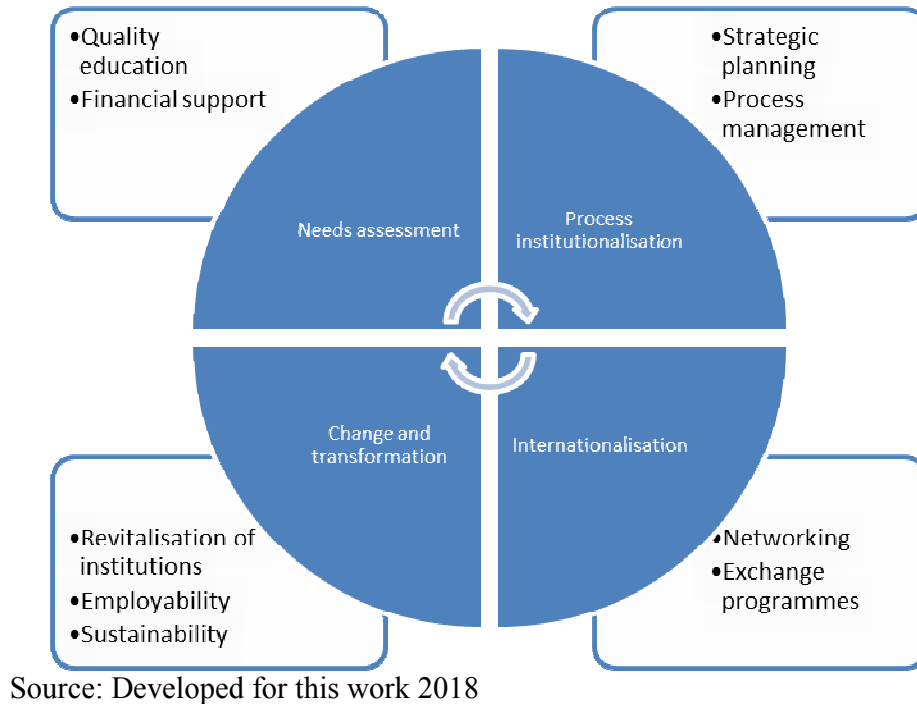
The development of African universities entails a number of indicators. These indicators include but are not limited to capacity building for staff and students, academic performance, improved curricular, employability, modern and accessible infrastructure, equipment and facilities, research, publications, community service, quality management, internationality, financial stability, planning and demonstrated knowledge, skills and competences. Any assessment of change, transformation, development and indeed revitalisation should consider at least one of these indicators. It is here that African scholars and diaspora can and should play a significant role to change the status quo.

#### **Step four: Change and transformation**

The single most important goal of engaging the African academic diaspora in revitalising higher education in Africa is probably change or transformation. Transformation involves the previous three levels, namely micro, meso and macro. The questions to ask are why change and what kind of change. The answers to these questions can be found at stages one and two, namely needs assessment and process institutionalisation where individuals and universities realise that they cannot meet the challenges they face singlehandedly. They need external contacts and resources and they know where and how to engage or harness them. Suffice it to say that the academic diaspora and returning experts cannot be expected to solve all the problems confronting the African universities. However, the diaspora have the potential to bring about change in collaboration with host universities in Africa if there is a vision for implementation and a strategic plan to make the collaboration practical and sustainable.

Change and transformation may be evaluated against the backdrop of improved quality of research, learning, teaching, management, communication and community service; production of graduates who deliver in their places of work as well as development of sustainable programmes at university. The single and most important aspect of change in academic is probably attitudinal. Attitudinal change encapsulates a fresh mind-set and the willingness to recognise, appreciate and embrace new ideas. Change is at the heart of learning and learning is the transformative role of education. The following figure summarises the process of university revitalisation.

Figure 1: University Revitalisation Theoretical Framework



### Relationships amongst concepts and theory construction

In order to construct a theory, there is a need to link the four main concepts described in the figure above and tease out their relationships. To begin with, needs assessment at the micro level gives rise to the need for process institutionalisation at the macro level because it is through the institutionalisation that problems may be articulated to acquire a formal character. This character originates from institutionalisation which gives it the qualification, mandate as well as opportunity to engage with other institutions locally and internationally. Such qualification is the *conditio sine qua non* for internationalisation at the macro level because networks in African universities are essentially formal in character.

Networking is essential in internationalisation. Without networking, internationalisation can hardly be developed and sustained. Internationalisation

cannot be done for its own sake; it has its own ontological and teleological existence. At least two nations should collaborate in a common or mutually agreed venture. This common venture is not without purpose. The purpose is usually co-shared by the involved parties at regional and international levels as the literature indicates:

Regional and international partnerships among various institutions are critical to support and develop joint programmes. ...This could also serve as a vehicle for leveraging the expertise of Africans in the diaspora. Governments and private enterprises can help strengthen these partnerships by facilitating access to broadband infrastructure (Juma, 2016: 27-28).

Over and above having the development agenda and priorities exclusively determined by external development partners or governments, such agenda and priorities emanate from local universities which are then discussed within the context of collaboration. In this process, the needs, goals and vision of the universities become the guiding principles of collaboration. This is the essence of the theory which stands for development from below and from within. Conversely, development from above has decisions, agenda and priorities often emerging from western countries representing western values and yardsticks. At times such decisions come from governments and as such are often politicised. In this way, institutions in developing countries such as those in Africa become mere recipients and implementers of blueprints with little or no say or objection.

The above steps stem from the analysis of empirical data as informed by GTM as well as theoretical data with regard to the need of theorising (Shivji, 2007 and Hyden, 1995; White, 2008). The steps are concepts which are further systematically interrelated through what the literature describes as statements of relationship which denote a theory as illustrated by Strauss and Corbin (1988). In other words, once concepts are related through statements of relationship into an explanatory theoretical framework, a theory emerges. In this way, the research findings move beyond conceptual ordering to theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1988: 22). Similarly, the literature maintains that to explain and predict, a theoretical statement is critical, that is, a connection between two or more concepts (Hage, 1972: 34). Besides, a theory helps users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action. The current analysis envisages the employment of the African universities revitalisation theory to explain the engagement of African scholars with a view to improving academic quality in

African universities and reconstructing the kind of internationalisation which respects local needs.

Universities in Africa must try to deal objectively with the problems they investigate; they should analyse and describe them in a scientific manner; and from their accumulated knowledge they must suggest methods of dealing with them. But objectivity does not mean working in a vacuum. The university whether it likes it or not, is part of society. Both in the selection of the problems to be examined, and in the manner of dealing with them, this fact must be taken into account. It is part of that essential truth which a university has to promote (Lema, Omari and Rajani, 2006: 64).

The engagement of African scholars and the diaspora in revitalising African universities is analysed vis-a-vis the four steps which also form the criteria for the same analysis, namely pre-conditions for the engagement, strategies used in the engagement and the outcome of the engagement. The preconditions include a needs assessment on the side of the parties involved, commitment to the partnership and the sustainability of the envisaged north-south and south-south collaboration. The strategies include constant and regular communication between the parties in question, exchange programmes and regular assessment of the strengths and challenges of the engagement. Lastly, one has to evaluate the outcome of the engagement. This is best done against the objectives of the engagement.

The content, process and effect of engaging African scholars in revitalising African universities inform the analysis of the present work. In this context, content refers to the goals, issues, needs and programmes that form the kernel of the collaboration between scholars abroad and universities at home. The process involves the strategies, communication and exchange programmes while the effect is the outcome of the process. Furthermore in this process the people involved in the collaboration occupy the centre stage in initiating and driving the process to its logical conclusion. Thus content, process and effect are crucial in analysing the engagement of African scholars abroad in the internationalisation process. The three variables are the building blocks of theory and as such may help in understanding and assessing the revitalisation of African universities.

The more active the subjects involved, the greater the expected effect. Thus one may conclude that the greater the effect, the broader the network, and the broader the network, the greater the benefits to the subject and to the entire



organisation or network. The literature propounds the need for a synergy between individuals and their organisations in attaining their goals (Grusky and Miller, 1981: 4). The emphasis of active members in spearheading the goals of an organisation provides an essential criterion in determining the success of the international collaboration towards the revitalisation of African universities. The failure in realising the collaboration objectives of university revitalisation can *ipso facto* be assessed on the same criterion. This means that the revitalisation process is likely to fall through if the people involved do not take an active role. This failure would be imminent even if the content or the process is scientifically and professionally grounded. In short, the role of active people in the collaboration is essential. An organisation or a university cannot function well without dedicated or committed personnel.

Internationalisation in particular can hardly succeed unless there are devoted people to drive its goals to maturity and fruition involving all parties in the collaboration. Myriad programmes for internationalisation, large sums of money and visits cannot bring about successful internationalisation unless individuals join hands to make collaboration work. The bottom line is that programmes and funding can neither replace people nor succeed them. In the revitalisation of African universities, members from both parts of the collaboration should possess the quality of active subjectivity (Mutalemwa, 2015).

If one part is active and the other part is not, collaboration will be negatively affected. Indeed, if both parts are inactive, then internationalisation will hit a nadir. Hence, officials entrusted with the responsibility of managing international co-operation are expected to possess the qualities, aptitude, work ethic and competences to actively create, maintain, sustain, improve and promote international partnerships. Eventually it is a network of active players which will have a lasting impact on the revitalisation of African universities demonstrated by knowledge production, dissemination as well as improved societal conditions, using various actors. The argument for involving various actors in development is also advanced in Hyden and Bratton (1992) and Juma (2016).

It is pertinent to emphasise that networking, as a process of strengthening African universities, is of paramount importance. In this theory, the more the networks get; the better. In fact, the stronger the networks built; the better and the more impactful the collaboration becomes. It is equally important to stress that collaboration partners should be transparent about the networks in which they are engaged, including the programmes and projects involved in the

collaboration. Such transparency would help other partners to identify areas which still need attention as well as areas which are not addressed at all. The aim is to optimise resources. This study builds on the literature, which sums up the goal and content of transformation as holistic development.

How can our work as intellectuals and activists assist in the transformation of society, to develop human potential for self-emancipation from all forms of bondage and restrictions – mental, racial, economic, gender, social and cultural? This is the essence of an understanding of transformation, a tremendous change in social organisation, modes of thinking, as well as cultural and gendered practices. In this sense, transformation involves far more than legal changes, such as political independence or the transition from one mode of production to the next. Transformation involves a thorough change in society from top to bottom (Campbell, 2013: 35).

Having attempted to systematically link the concepts in the figure above through establishing the relationships amongst them, the author constructs a university revitalisation theory, which states that informed by an assessment of university needs for change and transformation by individual academics; universities attain revitalisation through process institutionalisation and internationalisation in a methodical way.

### **Summary, conclusion, and recommendations**

The research question was how Germany-educated African academics engage in the revitalisation of the African universities. The data collected was adequate to answer the question. The main finding of the study was that the engagement of the African academic diaspora in revitalising African universities was very modest and individualised. There was a glaring lack of robust and concrete programmes for the revitalisation of African universities that could be counted on to bring about change in a sustainable way. Now, as a way of effecting change and as a contribution to the engagement for the revitalisation of African universities, URT was developed informed by GT. URT is essentially a result of the relationships of the concepts at the micro, meso and macro levels developed from the data. URT provides the academics with a theoretical framework through which the process of revitalising African universities can be analysed.

Various recommendations may help improve the engagement of the African scholars and the Germany-educated academic diaspora in revitalising African universities. These recommendations touch on four major categories of key partners in the internationalisation of higher education. These include students, universities, governments and other scholarship providers. To begin with, I make recommendations for students at both master's and PhD levels involved in study abroad programmes as well as those who aspire to study abroad, particularly in Germany have a special role to play and the way they play this role depends on them in the first place. In the second place, that role depends on other involved parties. Underlying the process of university transformation is the sustainability of the very process as well as the predictability of the output. This analysis builds on Shayo's (2014: 142) recommendation for carrying out comprehensive research which would inform policy on the establishment and sustainability of international academic programmes.

*For African students and universities*

African students studying abroad or planning to do so should have clear objectives of what they seek to accomplish and work persistently towards the achievement of the goals. Each student needs to have a high degree of independence. A student needs to ask oneself whether the kind of education one is pursuing has relevance to personal, national or international educational goals. Students studying abroad should be aware of and appreciate cultural differences between Africa and Germany. One of the cultural habits that promote education is time management and organisation. Lastly, Africans studying or working in Germany would do well to consider establishing a formal network of Africans which will give them a platform to discuss and assess the needs of the African continent. One of these should be the revitalisation of African universities.

African universities should include in their strategic plans detailing the number and qualifications of staff who are suitable to study abroad in the medium and long-term arrangements. They should constantly assess the relevance of study abroad programmes. The universities should endeavour to evaluate the applicability of the knowledge, skills and competences. Universities should encourage students to return to their home countries to render their services there. This entails creating an enabling environment which motivates returning experts to support their home countries and universities. In this connection, African universities may establish diaspora units or departments to

cater for returning experts as well as to develop networks with African scholars living abroad. Contrary to this, universities may be paying lip-service to internationalisation and supporting unnecessary migration and fuelling the flames of brain drain. It should be emphasised that the main reason for African scholars to return to Africa is demand-driven.

Although focusing on education and theoretical development is essential for revitalising universities, African universities should reconsider skills training at the tertiary level. African universities should take advantage of internships and vocational training available in Germany and elsewhere. Africa needs ideas but also needs technical know-how. African universities and students should study from time to time entry requirements and scholarship conditions. As Africans living in Germany deliberate over the idea of establishing a network of Africans there, Africans who live in Africa would as well consider establishing a professional network of Africans living in Africa. A dependency syndrome on foreign aid is seemingly an endemic threat to ward off. Such networks should work towards financial autonomy and the development of a saving culture. Universities should also consider introducing or strengthening distance learning and online courses. For example the application of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) where students in Africa can benefit from online lecture modules. Finally, African universities should establish international offices with the purpose of linking their universities with international universities worldwide, including the African academic diaspora. The staff working in these offices should, *inter alia*, be well-versed in international co-operation, with demonstrable intercultural competences and strong communication skills.

*German universities, government and scholarship providers*

German universities should include in their programmes, particularly at the PhD level, skills for teaching, research and managing higher education. Here the assumption is that most of the students pursuing doctoral studies gravitate towards working in the academia. German universities should be guided by the spirit of mutual respect and co-operation with African universities whose students study in Germany. In order to ensure that prospective students at German institutions of higher learning succeed in their studies, the institutions may consider introducing examinations as entry qualifications. In other parts of the world, for example in the United States, certain good universities require postgraduate students to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

The German government should co-operate with their African counterparts to ensure that conditions in Africa are conducive for returnees even if the responsibility of ensuring a conducive socio-economic and political climate rests primarily with Africa. Besides, Germany may use its technological advancement to introduce or revamp digital education amongst universities in Africa as part of development co-operation. Scholarship and fellowship providers should do thorough vetting to ensure that scholarship and fellowship beneficiaries are eligible to study abroad and should try and assess whether their generous support to African scholars pays dividends by producing positive results in revitalising higher education.

*African governments, academic diaspora and alumni associations*

African governments should encourage and support their citizens to study abroad and return to serve Africa by creating an enabling environment to do so. Government loans and bursaries should be reasonably adequate and predictable. New international measures to restrict the mobility of their nationals by repressive governments (Teferra, 2015, 2010) should be discouraged while encouraging good leadership Africa. Good governance will not only encourage their citizens to return and work in their countries, but also will invite other members of the diaspora, academics and other development partners to invest in education and other development sectors. Hand in hand with good governance are budgetary considerations, which ensure fair allocation of funds according to national priorities. Education, including tertiary education should have its fair share in national budgets.

Governments should also evaluate the quality, process and outcome of study abroad programmes. This evaluation calls for conducting research and tracer studies to gauge the study conditions, students' performance as well as employability of students in their home countries or if necessary go beyond their national borders. Besides, African governments should stay in constant communication with foreign governments to assess the study abroad programmes and find joint efforts and strategies to maintain, improve or strengthen the quality of higher learning. Embassies and High Commissions should be more involved in forging and strengthening links between African countries and foreign countries. Indeed, governments and international organisations including the European Union, for example, may consider introducing mobile information centres to raise or increase awareness of the

benefits of internationalisation as well as the available funding opportunities. When necessary, young scholars who have studied abroad should be invited to share their experiences with their fellow countrymen and women in the mobile information centres.

Governments in collaboration with the academic diaspora and African universities should evaluate the performance of universities vis-à-vis the broader national development goals. Specifically, governments should guard against the commercialisation of public universities as the subversion of public institutions for private purposes (Mamdani, 2007). Indeed, private institutions should equally abide by their founding principles, aiming at offering education as a public good, with no strings attached. This is because commercial gains would compromise quality education and academic excellence to which universities aspire.

The Africans academic diaspora should bring to Germany the best of their cultural heritage from their own national cultures and bring back to Africa the best from Germany. They should keep in mind their role as ‘ambassadors’ of their own countries or even of the entire African continent and act accordingly. Other recommendations should be drawn from the Draft Declaration and Action Plan of the 1<sup>st</sup> African Higher Education Summit on Revitalising Higher Education for Africa’s Future, held in Dakar, Senegal in October 2016.

The DAAD, Catholic Academic Exchange Service (KAAD) and other alumni associations and networks such as the African Good Governance Network (AGGN) should strive to make their presence felt by engaging their governments in Africa towards the revitalisation of higher education. They can and should reach out to local universities as agents of change and transformation. However, the responsibility for strengthening alumni associations depends above all on the members themselves. These associations need to demonstrate intellectual and managerial independence by taking initiatives to revitalise African universities.

In conclusion, the revitalisation of African universities can succeed if supported by a viable theory which takes cognisance of the local needs, local aspirations and international academic standards. Such theory should emerge from research and should inform the vision of the continent in its efforts towards internationalisation of African universities. The African academic vision presupposes that Africa can “act like one” borrowing the words from Chinua Achebe by taking the lead in developing conceptual, theoretical and practical arguments for the revitalisation of the African universities.

The whole idea of revitalisation of African universities is a development one. That is why a theory of change has informed the analysis in this work. It is essential that Africans living in Germany consider establishing an intellectual network to address African needs, especially in higher education. The advantage of a network lies in the powerful voice that often characterises associations and unions such as the CSOs. The academic diaspora and academics in Germany should pull together their resources and garner concerted efforts as an entity to deal with common matters pertaining to the development of the African continent. One of the main issues should be the revitalisation of African universities.

Informed by the same URT, the African continent, African thinkers and academics should harness local and international resources to spearhead intellectual development in Africa. They should use their expertise, knowledge and experience to influence the internationalisation of education. This does not suggest that African scholars can or should work in isolation. No, they need to work alongside other thinkers from around the world. However, unless African scholars and governments invest in research and higher education development, the continent risks remaining dependent, fragmented, isolated and economically poor. All in all, African scholars whether in Germany or elsewhere should tell and retell the African story until it is understood within and beyond its borders.

Building on the above analysis, further research is needed to explain the engagement of African scholars in the revitalisation of African universities using a large quantitative sample. It is through the analysis of such a sample can one generalise results about Africa, the second largest continent in the world. The presentation of the URT is an attempt to stimulate theorisation on how African intellectuals can make the most out of internationalisation for the development of the academia.

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