



UDS meeting the developmental needs of people through research

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Abstract

This research was focused on investigating and demonstrating that university (UDS) research in science and technology, grounded in social and development discourses can contribute meaningfully to meeting the developmental needs of people. The research works of Senior Members of the university who were available were considered. Data was gathered through questionnaire, library search and a focused workshop discussion. The research revealed that a large proportion of research in the university (67%) is intended to address development needs. Local people are the major beneficiaries (57%) of university research. Research intended entirely for the university's own benefit (development) is rather extremely low (2%). Research findings are principally communicated through community for a or directly to specific beneficiaries. Although not the principal, some researchers have not been communicated at all. Some researchers are tailored to meet the demands of donors although there is an opportunity for these to be people-centred.

Keywords: Developmental needs; People-centered; Rural people; University research; Indigenous knowledge

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1. Background

1.1. Global scenarios linking research and development

The gap between knowledge generators and the marketplace, described as the “innovation chasm” and involving products and services based on innovative technology and development research remains a global challenge (OECD, 2004, Sijgers et al., 2006). In the developing world, for example in Africa the complex origins, problems and livelihoods of the local population are such that ‘research and development’ itself is in turn complicated (Ramphela, 2004; Sawyerr, 2004). The implication thereof is that there is very limited knowledge from research in the developing world not only because there is less capital but the driving forces are complex. There is yet no known African country that spends up to 1% of its GDP on development research compared to other developing countries in the north (e.g. China) let alone the OECD countries. South Africa has been able to go beyond the 0.5% mark and Tanzania recently in 2011 announced 1% GDP quota for development research. In more recent times, it has been widely acknowledged that high technology exports are products with high research and development intensity that mostly involves universities (Banerjee and Duflo, 2003; Sutz, 2006). It has also been shown that higher education has a strong impact on economic growth in some rich countries (e.g. France, Japan, Sweden, and United Kingdom) and that higher education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for economic growth (De Meulemeester and Rochat 1995, Hipp; Grupp 2005). Research further suggests that most of the gap in per capita income between rich and poor countries today is due to differences in institutions especially at the tertiary levels (Bloom, *et al.*, 2006; World Bank, 2004). The World Bank now attempts to reach out to tertiary education in poor countries (World Bank, 2002; Bloom et al., 2006). The worry is why now, when the same Bank pressurized African governments in the 1980s and 1990s to embark on basic education? Their only reason being that it yielded better return on investment (World Bank and UNESCO, 2000), when higher per capita income associated with the rich countries was mainly the result of university science and technology research (Figure 1).

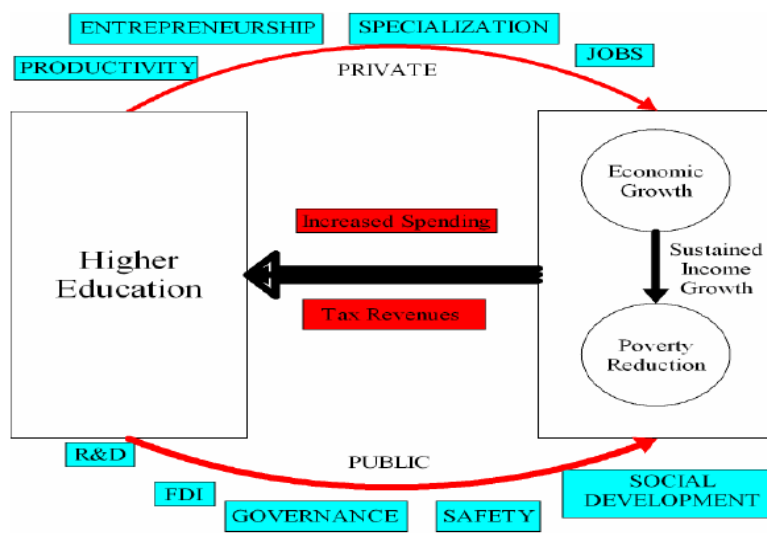


Figure. 1. The Conceptual Links from Higher Education to Economic Growth (Source: Bloom et al., 2006).

1.2. African universities, research and development

Although the tripartite mission of African universities is teaching, research and contributions to community service, the latter has received little attention and this is blamed on the little recognition given to it by the university community. Whilst it is the research component that distinguishes the university from other educational institutions (World Bank, 2000; Acemoglu et al., 2002; Benneh, 2002; Sijgers et al., 2006), its impact can hardly be felt if it does not complete a community service (e.g. solving a development problem). This is because research leads to finding solutions to societal problems whilst enriching teaching, service and capacity building (Benneh, 2002; Sawyerr, 2004; Arocena and Sutz, 2005; Bloom et al., 2006). Yet, university research is losing its value in recent times in most of Africa because it is often considered as not having realistic value (mostly by policymakers). Yet there are several evidences that research results are still shelved in African universities and hardly oriented to solve developmental challenges hence inadequate innovation and transformation.

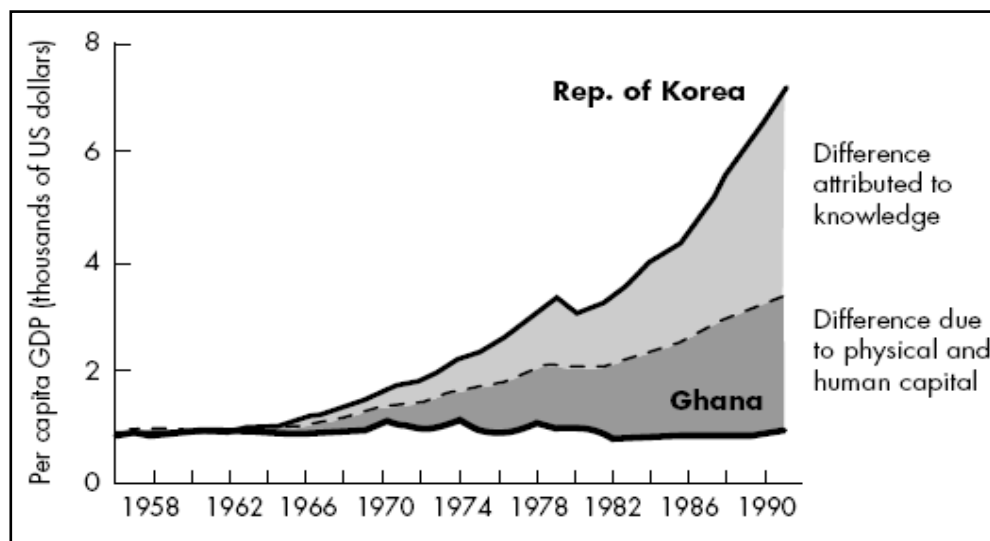


Figure. 2. Knowledge as a factor in Income differences between Ghana and the Republic of Korea, 1956–90 (source: World Bank, 1999).

University research can only be relevant to development if it operates within sound national research policy framework, driven by government (Benneh, 2002; SCOPE, 2004; The Royal Society, 2006). In one of his speeches, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argued:

“The University must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars” (Annan, 2000).

African country governments therefore need to do more to ensure that higher education and research are prioritized. The difference in economic growth between Ghana and Korea is a telling example (Figure 2). The differences in the content of higher education including university research and contributions to non-formal education and other educational systems based on sound growth and development frameworks, are the reasons for Ghana's failing performance.

To explore the challenges of these gaps therefore, the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) sponsored a research in the three public Universities in Ghana on "people-centred developmental needs". The focus of the research was:

- To understand and suggest strategies, which accentuate development-oriented research towards societal needs within the internal university environment.
- To develop problem-driven frameworks for interfacing university research agenda and externalized people-centred development goals.

2. Introduction

Universities as institutions of higher learning and research are well placed to provide not just specialized human resources but also the policy and programming technologies, leadership and frameworks for driving national and international development.

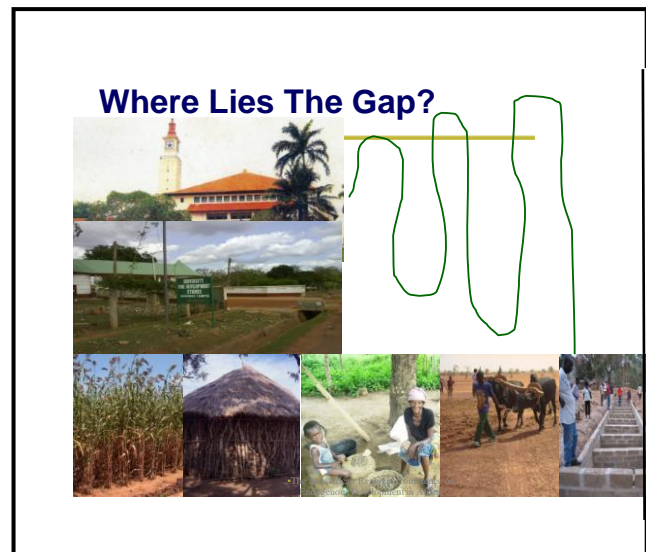
The changing roles of higher education institutions in the growth and development of nations are being debated at various for a globally. In Ghana, the emerging awareness has raised concerns about the extent of public universities' contributions to resolve the needs of society through scientific and technological research for development.

There is therefore an eminent challenge facing academic planners because society is looking for new ways to interact with public universities in ways that would solve societal problems and meet the developmental needs of the people.

Although the strategic role of university research in development is recognized by central governments, there is little open dialogue or tangible interaction between most governments and universities on advancing university research for development interventions. Therefore outcomes of university research and development remain largely unfamiliar in the public domain.

Recently, Ghanaians debated and challenged Ghana's public universities to produce development-oriented skill, products and services to support development strategies (e.g. Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, Vision 2020, Millennium Development Goals). Development problem-driven university research will in no doubt play major roles if there are favourable structures (e.g. management procedures, intellectual property, benefit-sharing, appropriate stakeholder involvement, etc.; Mullin Consulting Ltd, 2005; Arocena and Sutz, 2005). Traditional research roles of Ghana's public universities might have been less oriented to the non-formal community service because of obsolete policies linking academic practice and societal development and capacity.

The Association of African Universities held a workshop in Accra in 1973. This workshop was focused on creating “the African University”. Participants lamented the fact “that the African universities had not so far identified themselves with the realities of the predominantly rural society” (Effah, 2002). This feeling was given further credence in Ghana in the 1980s with the emergence of open public criticism of the universities for being out of touch with the development realities of the country. Universities were perceived to be elitist and/or neocolonialist centres of privilege, far removed from the national effort to find solutions to the problems of development.



Guided by this convection and after decades of debate a national consensus was finally arrived at on the desirability of establishing a University in the northern part of the country. The Government of Ghana, therefore seized the opportunity and establish the University for Development Studies based on the ideals of “the African University” (Kaburise, 2004).

The legislative instrument establishing the University for Development Studies expressly enjoined it, in Section 2:

“..... to blend the academic world with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of northern Ghana in particular and the country as a whole”.

The University for Development Studies was established by the Government of Ghana in May 1992 by PNDC Law 249 and started academic work in September 1993. The institution prepares individuals to establish careers in their chosen areas of specialization through its problem-based teaching, community-orientation and emphasis on extension services.

In her effort to ensure that less endowed, poor, rural-based students (mainly from northern Ghana) had access to tertiary education, UDS developed a special admissions policy designed to enhance access of students from less endowed secondary schools across Ghana. According to this policy, all candidates who meet the basic entry requirements for admission into UDS were ranked according to their position in their schools of origin. By this system, students from similar schools competed in their cluster, and the best (top 5%, 10%, or as the case may be) in each cluster of schools was admitted.

The university’s principal objective is to address and find solutions to the socio-economic deprivations and environmental problems which characterize northern Ghana in particular and which are found in pockets and in varying degrees in rural areas throughout the rest of the country. To what extent was this being done and the role of research in achieving same was the focus of this research.

This research was focused on investigating and demonstrating that the University (UDS) research in science and technology, grounded in social and development discourses can contribute meaningfully to meeting the developmental needs of people based mostly on what the people can identify with through innovation.

3. The process

The study sort to

- i) examine what characterize university research in a development framework within the university community in Ghana ii) examine specific cases of applied science and technology research in relation to developmental needs of society

To achieve the aforementioned goal and objectives, all senior members who were available on the three campuses of the university were contacted to provide information on their research activities. This information was obtained through some guided questionnaire. Additional information on the works of senior members who were not available but had their works in the library was also obtained. These pieces of information were, categorized, collated, analyzed and presented at a focused workshop discussion for validating, expanding and finalizing the findings.

3.1. What people-centred needs? what people-centred development?

From the work of CIKOD, civil society in rural Ghana may be categorized into two layers - the visible and the invisible layers:

“The visible layer is that part where one finds the formal groups such as local NGOs, community based organizations, Farmer based organizations, credit unions, faith groups, different types of co-operatives, etc. An important characteristic of the organizations in the visible layer is that they are run by a small group of volunteers/employees, often well-educated and respected members of the community. Such formal organizations are often created in response to an externally initiated development intervention (eg European Union projects, Community Based Rural Development projects, Projects funded by various NGOs) and are based on the neo-liberal assumptions of profit orientation as well as western democratic organizational models and planning processes. These may be classified as the visible CSOs and are the focus of development interventions by both government and NGOs.

The invisible layer is where one finds indigenous organizations and institutions that are embedded within the traditional or local structures.”

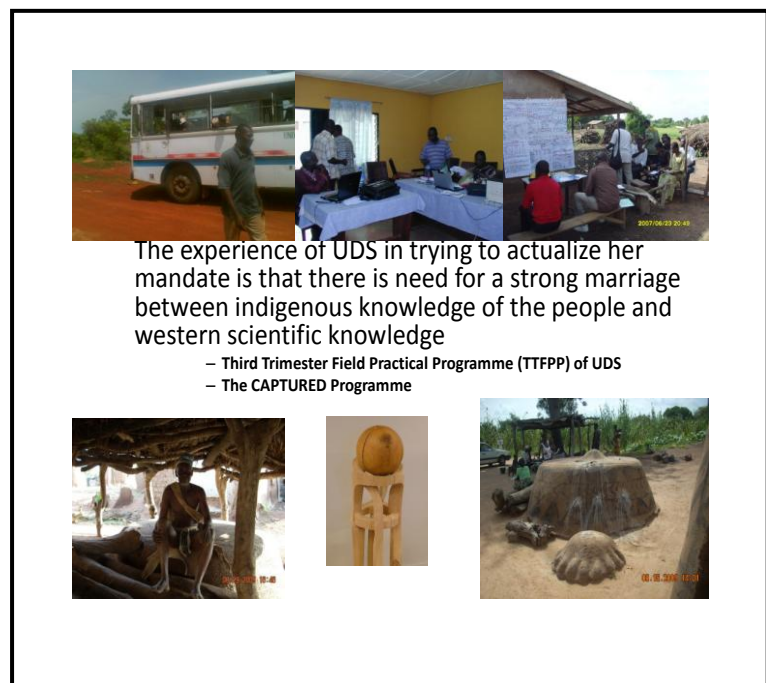
In the traditional rural Ghanaian settings, organization for community development has been going on independently of external interventions. This has been achieved through traditional institutions and systems

or practices. These serve as the rallying points for community organization and provide platforms through which the people are able to initiate self-help activities and make demands for resources for development at the local level. Organization at this level is guided by the traditions, norms and values of the community such as *the belief in consensus, dialogue, inclusion, reciprocity, fairness, trust and divine justice*. These virtues facilitate cooperation for local self-help initiatives. The institutions and practices are located within the worldviews of the local populations and go beyond human and material, to the spiritual dimensions of the local people. In the worldview of Ghanaians, spirituality and social status are considered equally as important for well being as economic or material gain (Hagan, 2002).

The bulk of the rural people of Ghana are organized within this purview or layer. The indigenous organizations within this layer are however not recognized by development agents because they do not conform to western democratic organizational criteria. This means that the bulk of the rural population who fall within this layer are not recognized as part of organized civil society and are therefore not sufficiently integrated into development initiatives. This is what has been rightly described as the *invisible layer* of civil society by CIKOD.

As a Vice Chancellor of the University notes “The University for Development Studies (UDS) has a mandate to undertake university training, research and extension in an integrated and functional way with the main purpose of making tertiary education and research become directly relevant to communities, especially those in the rural areas. The experience of UDS in trying to actualize the mandate is that there is need for a strong marriage between indigenous knowledge of the people and conventional scientific knowledge in all areas. Indeed one feasible and sustainable way of tackling underdevelopment and poverty is to start from what the people know and understand, that is indigenous knowledge, and “rub-in” scientific knowledge. It is in doing so, that one recognizes the extent to which indigenous knowledge is scientific. If that concept can be institutionalized from the very onset in the training of young scientists and professionals, it is a sure way of ensuring changes in perceptions and attitudes with regards to development. That is what the Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP) of UDS aims to do.” (Kaburise, 2004).

The UDS has taken a further bold initiative at making university education more relevant to the indigenous people through its CAPTURED programme. This programme is implemented at the Post Graduate level. At the doctoral level the first batch of three candidates would soon be graduating. The students are undertaking various researches based on



using indigenous methodologies that are based on indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. The outputs of these researches would, thankfully be standard books instead of the traditional PhD thesis that are known in Ghana.

4. The realities

A large proportion (67%) of research carried out by Senior Members of UDS is intended to address development problems (Table 1). These development problems or needs (57%) are focused on the *invisible* rural people. The output of this type of research is for farmers, *pito* brewers, water users at the local level (Table 2). Some research (17%) carried out by Senior Members is actually people centred & development oriented; however the output is not people centred (Table 2). This is due to the fact that the output of this category is meant for governments, state organizations and multinationals through macro-level policy formulation and strategies. The worrying phenomena in this category is that, the research could actually have been directly used for the developmental needs of people through direct interaction with society; however due to restrictions imposed by governments and funding agencies, the researchers are not properly tailored and not used as such. Consequently 17% of research carried out is wasted, instead of directly addressing the developmental needs of people.

Table 1. Reason for carrying out research

Reason for Research	Respondent %
Academic advancement towards a degree	19
Both academic and development pursuits	38
Development pursuits beyond university env't	29
Blanks	14

Table 2. Beneficiary of research

end-users and sectors of the outcome	Respondent. %	Comment
Government, especially District authorities, Multinationals	17	1. Research people centred & development oriented. Output not people centred - Gov't centered.
Universities	2	Teaching Software
Local People	57	Farmers, Pito brewers, water users, etc
Blanks	24	Not focused on any target group

Research findings or outputs are communicated to end-users mainly through community fora or interactions with individual beneficiaries at the community level. This allows these findings to be integrated into the traditional structures and systems of livelihood practice. Publications and other media outlays, the use of government extension agents and telecommunication are other forms of communicating research findings; however these are used to a lesser extent. Although not many, it is important to stress that some research findings have not been communicated in any way to the end-users. This type of research is what ends up in shelves gathering dust. This must be discouraged as much as possible.

5. Conclusions

- A large proportion of research in the university (67%) is intended to address developmental needs.
- Local people are the intended beneficiaries (57%) of university research
- Research intended entirely for the university's own benefit (academic development) is rather extremely low (2%)
- Research findings are principally communicated through community fora or directly to specific beneficiaries.
- Although not the principal, some researchers have not been communicated at all.
- Some researchers are tailored to meet the demands of donors although there is an opportunity for these to be people-centred.

6. Recommendations

- The University should as a matter of principle establish clearly to development partners and funding agencies its mandate and focus on solving the problems of the poor in a manner that best fits into their (poor) milieu. Consequently partnerships should allow the university the flexibility to carry out this mandate.
- The University should develop own mechanism (apart from training) for establishing critical research and development goals, raise funds accordingly and provide the requisite infrastructure to support these goals. For example create a research foundation, and move away from the traditional single styled pro Vice Chancellery administration to a diversified approach of having additional same position for research and development as a specialty.
- A field centre approach to development research is important and compliments the time spent by students in communities hence the need to build and establish problem-based field research stations and grow research agenda from such stations.
- Centres of learning and research groups should serve as models of promoting development research by embracing people from across other divides and disciplines hence must be encouraged. In doing the latter, ICT now makes it such that it can be virtual in the face of lack of physical logistics.

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