

The Pathways Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals: Universities as the Hub for Debates for National Development Strategies in Tanzania

Theobald Frank Theodory
PhD Student
Institute of Geography
University of Bonn
Rosental 9
D 53111 Bonn
Germany
Mobile number: +4915214463985
Email: theodory2008@gmail.com

Abstract

Universities' role in national development is the subject of much discussion. Interests and attention in the pivotal role of the universities in national development has increased because of continuing concern that universities address problems caused by the technological changes that have affected the social-economic and political order in the global community. In spite of the universities' efforts to take on a larger and more deliberate role in the advancement of national development; analysis of the contribution of higher education (HE) in attaining the present Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) revealed numerous pitfalls associated with such endeavors. The establishment of MDGs overlooked the crucial contributions that could be generated from HE. As a result universities botched to cope effectively with ongoing eclectic changes within the community through undertaking vibrant debates. This article strongly argues that, the post-2015 MDGs should go beyond just primary education, and include HE in its revised plans.

Keywords: *Millennium Development Goals, Higher Education, Universities, Development Strategies*

“A University is a place ... whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge; ...a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse ...it is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward ... discoveries verified and perfected, and ... error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. ... Mutual education, in a large sense of the word, is one of the great and incessant occupations of human society. ...One generation forms another. ... We must consult the living man and listen to his living voice ... by familiar intercourse... to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes” (Boulton and Lucas, 2008: 3).

1. Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) advocated by the United Nations (UN) in 2000 explicitly focus on addressing some of the globe's most pressing development challenges. In 2000, eight specific development goals established, around which the world's governments, NGOs, major development bodies, and civil societies could all coordinate. The idea was that, when working together as the global community, we could easily make important headway towards improving the livelihoods of people and possibly even eradicate some conditions of underdevelopment altogether by a target date of 2015. The MDGs was a new approach for development policy, aiming to focus the efforts and attention of the global community on an unequivocal set of shared goals. Eight goals with their respective board targets were developed for eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global partnership (ACU, 2014). Currently, countries (cf. Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda) are revising 2000 MDGs to be replaced with newly agreed developmental agenda.

Now, as the world is discussing what should replace the 2015 MDGs, it has been realized that some vital areas were overlooked within present MDGs goals. One overlooked of the areas is higher education as the ongoing MDGs focused on improving the universal primary education, this was a worthy target, but unlikely to be met. The focus on enrolment in primary education was a necessary for urban and rural transformation, but not sufficient step towards more educated and less poor societies (Beall, 2013). In support of that Msolla (2007) has the opinion that many declarations and agreements made by the global and regional bodies such as the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) and its eight Millennium Development Goals and the New Partnership for African's Development report (2005); but HE and its potential contribution to national development are not amenably declared, what is prioritized is primary and secondary education. As Biamba (2013) add that in recent year there has been a growing body of literature on the interconnectedness of MDGs and the need to maximize opportunities for education and their linkages. Elsewhere, the African action Plan (2005) and the Report of the Commission for Africa start to look HE more specifically, for instance while underlining the vitality of quality primary and secondary education, they acknowledge the pivotal role the HE sector can play in enhancing socio-economic development in Africa (ibid). However, the same priority with the same verve should be invested in HE and expressed direct to newly revised MDGs rather than concentrating much effort on basic education only. By not being given high consideration HE sector the focal point could be the extent to which HE appears to impact the various MDGs outcomes.

HE was never explicitly mentioned in the MDGs as either a potential agent to address other development goals or as development goal in its own. It is the latter, though, where we do find evidence of universities and research institutions playing a huge role in sustainable development terms. Universities play a crucial role in generating new ideas, and transmitting accumulated knowledge, yet seems to remain at the peripheral in regard to development concerns. Although, HE no longer the only generators of knowledge needed for development, through their teaching and research they help to produce the educated workforces needed to run businesses, engineering and agriculture, public services; and also, by building partnerships with local communities through initiating outreach programmes, they also make a major contribution to sustainable development on a local and regional level (Ajai-Ajable and Roberts, 2013).

However, universities are playing crucial role in promoting understanding between social groups and building a sense of unity in different societies has long appealed to educators and policymakers alike. In addition to that applying advanced knowledge and technical skills, universities have been involved in building an intellectual basis to promote pluralistic cultures, support broad based

national development as well as amplify state-society linkage (Heyneman et al, 2007). The traditions of informed debates, empirical analysis, and independent reasoning that are emblematic of the universities are increasingly understood as central to the development of a rational and self-critical society in which a shared sense of citizenship can bridge divisions based upon race, religion, ethnicity and other factors (Putnam, 1996).

The history depict that most African nations struggled to establish at least one national university immediately after their political liberation. The leading purpose for establishing universities in these countries among other was, and still is, for the institutions to play a pioneering role in addressing community problems including poverty, social disorganization, unemployment, low production, hunger, diseases, and illiteracy (Nyerere, 1970); that is the problems of underdevelopment, which appeared to be common in the African continent. Although, it was assumed that universities could bring multiplier impacts in national development (Kiondo and Matekere, 2010). Insurmountable political, social-economic, ethnic, demographic and technological problems have continued to threaten the very existence of most new African nations and their people (Moshia, 1986). Elsewhere, in recent years we have observed the United Republic of Tanzania government investing heavily in HE whose direct contribution in solving these problems has not been objectively established (Machumu and Kisanga, 2014). Probably, this is happening due to unrecognition of the contribution of HE in the attainment of the MDGs.

The purpose of this article is to unearth the contribution of universities in fostering national development strategies and how these universities should be hubs for debates regarding national development strategies. Clearly, the article posits and explores ways of how HE can be aligned with post-2015 MDGs. However, this article will synthesize the body of literature on the subject through injecting some critical analysis of position taken by previous writers in order to pave the way for a more informed conceptualization of what the role of universities on national development ought to be.

2. Conceptual Underpinnings

2.1 Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, after the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 189 United Nations member states at the time (there are 193 currently) and at least 23 international organizations committed to help achieve the MDGs as mentioned in the preceding section by 2015. MDGs have become a cornerstone of development policies worldwide since their adoption remains a main framework for core development activities of all stakeholders. The ground realities in developing countries such as Tanzania, where national development priorities are aligned to achieve MDGs, are a testament to that claim (UNDP, 2013).

2.2 Development Strategies

Development strategies are means to manage the national economy, to pursue alternatives capable of steering it competitively towards development. National development strategies vary broadly across time and space; one state to other and from one region to another. They must not be confused with national project or even with economic planning, unless elastic, broad concepts of planning and project are used. In most cases of fruitful national development strategies there was some kind of planning, mostly in the early stages, for the formation of the heavy industry. Later on, the market, despite its limitations, became a requirement and general planning may be indicative at most (Carlos, 2006). However, to achieve developmental goals, developmental strategies should be in fore front aligned with priority to diverse sectors.

2.3 The Concept of the University

Different scholars have elucidated the term university in various forms. In Doha 2012, at the Qatar Foundation's WISE Education Leadership Program, Allan Goodman informs that "...Universities have a duty to save knowledge when it is threatened..." and that universities have played a role in preserving knowledge to the community. In addition to that the American Philosophical Society¹, confine that "*universities are concerned to create and transmit "useful knowledge"*". Inexorably, the definition of useful knowledge is relative: it is somewhat what is practically useful; it is partly what serves the widest purpose of rendering the human condition and the world we live in coherent to us; and it is also partly the preparation of what we do not yet know to be useful knowledge. Goodman (2012) posits "...the role of the university in world society may not be measured by rankings and it may not depend completely even on the comprehensiveness of curriculum..." Something more fundamental may be a willingness to embrace taking a global perspective for faculty as well as students. There is no doubt that universities have been remarkably successful in this, as is shown by the degree to which modern governments and societies pay them so much attention (Bulton and Lucas *op cit.*). Nyerere (1970: 193) elaborated university as "*an institution of higher learning, a place where people's minds are trained for clear thinking, for independence thinking, for analysis and for problem solving at highest level*"². This broad definition posited by Nyerere provides a general connotation of University anywhere in the world. Masha (1986: 2) detailed that Nyerere found it sensible to elaborate on the definition by maintaining that a university has three major functions which are:

1. To transmit advanced knowledge from one generation to next so that it can serve either as a basis of action, or as a springboard to further research,
2. To provide through its teaching for higher level manpower needs of society, and
3. To provide a center for the attempt to advance the frontier of knowledge by concentrating in one place some of the most intellectually able people who are not preoccupied by day to day administrative or professional responsibilities, and making available to them good library and laboratory facilities which are necessary to support learning.

Nyerere discerns the three functions as interwoven and he caution that any university which endeavors to prohibit any of them would mostly likely to die. Adding to Nyerere's view, Boulton and Lucas (2008) accented that universities should serve to make students think to resolve problems by argument buttressed by evidence, not to be dismayed by complexity but bold in unravelling it. The centrality of this article is synthesized on the arguments of Nyerere as well as Boulton and Lucas that the universities should take the lead on national development debates, pioneering new development strategies, engineering development and economic and social wellbeing of the society in general. To this end, any established development strategies should recognize to broad role of HE. The community outside universities would expect what the universities are standing for, and what are their true roles in society? University education must help in the development of the society in which all members share its resources fairly equally. University education must inculcate a sense of commitment to society. These views corroborate Nyerere's (1968: 274) philosophical views on education that apart from inculcate of social value, education must also:

"...prepare young people for the work they will be called upon to do in the society which exists in the Tanzania rural society where improvement will depend largely upon the efforts of the people in agriculture and in village development. Education provided

¹ The American Philosophical Society was set up in 1743 as the "American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for the promotion of useful knowledge"

² Julius Kambarage Nyerere's Speech during the inauguration of the University of Dar es Salaam, 1970

must therefore encourage the development in each citizen of three things: an enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, rejecting or adapting it to his own needs; and basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains”

Borrowing from Nyerere’s view, universities should prepare students who will be able to solve different persisting problems in the society. I reject the idea that the only social role of a university is to prepare the students for their future career, a university should be envisaged as the think tank and hub for debates regarding national development. Universities should prepare students who are able to think critically and interrogate the accountability of the government. Universities should be source of alternative development ideas and new ideas that will be used to contest policy makers to think critically in issues of national interests and policy formulation. Clearly, HE in Tanzania, states categorically that universities and other higher learning institutions should prepare people who are critical thinker and who are able to question the incumbent government on its day-to-day activities. In so doing students in higher learning institutions will be contributing towards policy reviews and thus enriching development strategies in one way or another (Kiondo and Matekere, 2010).

Additionally, according to Nyerere, universities are projected to be think tanks with hot debates aspiring to create national discussions on issues of national interest as endeavor to solve current political and socioeconomic challenges in the country. Insisting his philosophical ideas and hopes towards university students Nyerere has the following to say:

“There is in fact, only one reason why underdeveloped societies like ours establish and maintain universities. We do so as an investment in our future. We are spending large and disproportionate amounts of money on few individuals so that they should, in the future, make a disproportionate return to the society. We are investing in a man’s brain in just the same way as we invest in a tractor; and just as we expect the tractor to do many times as much work for us as a hand hoe. We are giving to the student while he is at the university, so that we may receive more from him afterwards. We have a right to expect things from university graduates and others who have had higher education of any kind; we do not just have a hope, but an expectation” (Nyerere, 1974: 5).

It is unfortunate these good philosophical ideas are inactive to many universities in Tanzania. In recent years, it is apparently, most of university professors, senior lectures and lecturers have turned into politics instead of continuing imparting knowledge to students as Nyerere thought. In support of that Kiondo and Matekere (2010) argues every professor want to be a politician and the truth therefore is that they cannot criticize malpractices in the government, because in most cases professors and public officials have forged partnership, which enable them to enjoy consultancies from government offices, which are well paying. Universities have lost track of their core roles and they are no longer centers of fruitful criticism, they can no longer criticize governments or international financial institutions because they are partners.

It is astonishingly that while the communities surrounding universities are worried with government’s failure to provide promising livelihoods including better education and eradication of abject poverty, universities on the other side have series of problems regarding working condition of workers and budgetary constraints. This is because most funding of public universities and other higher learning institutions largely depends on government subsidy which in most cases is inadequate. Communities were expecting universities to hold hot debates and come out with resolutions concerning several issues in the country such as poverty.

Elsewhere, Kiondo and Matekere (*op cit.*) detailed that university students have ceased to debate issues of national interest such as political, economic and social crisis. What the society is presently experiencing from university student is series of boycotts towards their stipend allowances. Students

have turned to be mere slaves of their own stomachs. The era of cost sharing policy have turned university students to have a narrow focus on issues of national interest. They are no longer fighting for the interest of the masses of rural poor, the social class where they also belong.

Education they receive has detached them from their peers in rural areas who do not have hope of tomorrow due to the demise of rural development strategies as it was used to be in the 1970s. Students are no longer holding hot debates on how best their peers can be assisted in the informal sector for example petty traders (*Wamachinga*), Communities would expect for example to see students with Bsc. entrepreneurship from universities of Dar es salaam, Mzumbe, and Dodoma to join hands with petty traders and pay visits to discuss some issues with them on how they can improve their business.

4. Tanzania and Millennium Development Goals

Tanzania's development framework is guided by Development Vision 2020 for Zanzibar and Tanzania Development Vision 2025 for Mainland Tanzania. Both aspire for a middle income country status and eradication of abject poverty. Important policy frameworks particularly National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) and Tanzania Five Year Development Plan (TFYDP) for the Mainland; and MKUZA for Zanzibar, mainstreamed MDGs for improving performance and monitoring of progress. Tanzania is party to the Millennium Declaration and has consistently shown great commitment to achieving the MDGs, manifested in being the first country in the world to produce MDG Country report in 2001 (URT, 2013).

In response to global call to achieve the MDGs by 2015, many countries are making remarkable progress, as for example, Tanzania has much to celebrate on the achievement of some MDGs but at the same time it recognizes the challenges ahead in achieving some of the key goals. Tanzania has embraced the MDGs within its national Poverty Monitoring System since 2001 and has made considerable progress in achieving them. Targets in primary school net enrolment, equity in primary education, access to safe water and reduction in child mortality have already been met or are now on track to be met by 2015. Despite important progress, efforts need to be accelerated to reduce maternal mortality, to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, to achieve greater gender equality and to cut extreme poverty by half and hunger (UNDP, *op cit.*). The government has made great progress in education achieving a 99.6% enrollment in primary education, eliminating school fees and building schools in every village and is continuing putting these measures in place to ensure universal primary education (ibid).

5. Tanzania Post-2015 MDGs Development Agenda: What Universities should envisage?

The designing process of current MDGs was undertaken without broader consultation of their main stakeholders, especially at the national level and their generality, consequently it loses its integration within national policy (URT, 2013). This caused most of the important cadres to be overlooked as I have clarified in the preceding sections. In recent years, the United Republic of Tanzania has realized this and taken a keen interest in the national consultations on the Post 2015 global development agenda by providing opportunity to voice concerns of people. This is in particular for the marginalized, the poor and the vulnerable groups on a global development agenda that could define their future (ibid). While the government of Tanzania takes a lead in the national consultation on what should be involved in post-2015 MDGs, the contribution of HE in national development should be featured within national development agenda. HE through universities should provide the lead in promoting national developments as a think tank of the nation. Universities have been undertaking eclectic researches, providing consultancy services and undertaking outreach activities hence inclusion of this cadre in the post-2015 MDGs is inescapable.

In the post-2015 MDGs, Universities and other higher learning institutions should continue to be key players in indigenising knowledge and diffusing it into the national economy, thus will foster national development. As Msolla (2007) noted that frontiers of knowledge and technology rapidly advance and rivalry between nations and industrial firms become fierce, industries have tended to turn to universities and other higher learning institutions for assistance to keep abreast with the frontiers of knowledge. Universities and HLIs should lead in research and development debates specifically on strategies, more research should focus on short run therapies and innovations of critical problems engulfing the communities. It is therefore, recommended by this article that research and related activities should have a separate budget line given high priority of equivalent to 5 to 10 per cent of the total budget allocated to the institutions as proposed by National Consultation Team of Post-2015 MDGs. University students should be imparted with relevant skills such as problem solving so as to be critical thinker that will address development pitfalls in their communities. This will be achieved only if university students will retrieve their traditional culture of having hot debates embedded in their minds to provide solutions to different development challenges facing the community. These perspectives reflect Nyerere's philosophical views on the role of universities (1973: 197) who once encouraged:

“Thus, our university, like all other worth of the name, must provide the facilities and the opportunities for the highest intellectual enquiry. It must encourage and challenge its students to develop their powers of constructive thinking. It must encourage its academic staff to do original research and to play a full part in promoting intelligent discussions of issues of human concern. It must do all these things because they are part of being a university; they are part of its reason for existence”.

6. Conclusion

With these few snapshots on the role of universities as hub for debates for national development, I would like to conclude by asserting that, universities are dynamos in attaining national development strategies and solving various social-economic challenges facing the community. It was a great mistake to overlook the pivotal role of HE in the current 2015 MDGs. As next year it will be the end of 2015 MDGs, I strongly propose more attention to be given on how we can promote and equip our universities and other higher education institutions in the competitive arena of sustainable development. We have to consider that, universities enterprise is important, and it is the only place where that totality of ourselves and our world is brought together, and which makes it the strongest provider of the rational explanation and meaning that societies need. As we are brainstorming and interrogating what a university should envisage in the post-2015, it will be worthwhile if universities revisit their traditional culture of 1970s as a platform for discussing and debating critical issues evolving within the community.

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