

# Title: Constructing and Strengthening Africa's Knowledge, Research, University Training and Higher Education Area

By Mammo Muchie<sup>1</sup>

## Inspiration

"It is better that we face the problems of Africa as Africa. For our history of being pushed around is an African history, and our strength to stop this is an African strength."<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Higher education, universities, research, knowledge and training in Africa suffer largely from lack of internal support from the Governments (with a few exceptions) and an external indifference and neglect particularly since the 1980s. Universities in Africa have not come out of the woods yet! In 2003 we wrote a book entitled: **Putting Africa First: the Making of African Innovation Systems**, arguing that for Africans to learn to engage with each other rather than continuing the habit of engaging through external actors constructing an African higher education, knowledge and research area is critical and necessary.

## The Conceptual Framing of the African Research and Training Area

For Africa to integrate better with the global research and knowledge area an essential prerequisite is to create an African Knowledge, Research and Higher Education Global Observatory, along with networks that are inter-African first before they are global and to become also better connected to the global. The key is to enhance Quality, Productivity, Capability and Utility (Q<->P<->C<->U) of knowledge and trained human capital in Africa to create the African area first that fosters quality knowledge and the venturesome graduates that are capable of creating relevance for a venturesome society, economy, community and individuals in Africa.

The Diaspora can be pivotal in helping translate this Q - P- C-U interactions. The Diaspora can create knowledge, research and higher education bonds and links by broadening the African network well beyond Africa to the global community as part of the construction of the African research and training area. The Diaspora can be Africa's 'near abroad'.

For example, for Ethiopia we are launching a knowledge bond venture that encourages free and open communication between those at home and abroad

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<sup>2</sup> Julius Nyerere, Speech on August 21 , 1972 in Julia Stewart in *Stewart's Quotable Africa*, Penguin Books, 2004, pp.301-302

through a sort of 'knowledge remittance' or exchange that creates viable and sustainable networks. The virtual space is also like an information library or kiosk where scientific materials on subjects offered in the universities in Ethiopia are uploaded periodically. The website was launched on Ethiopia's New Year on September 11, 2009 and can be accessed by going to: [www.nesglobal.org](http://www.nesglobal.org)

Similar efforts can be used to link the home and abroad in different parts of Africa. All it takes is to take the initiative and make it happen. What is incontrovertibly evident is the need to engage the broadest possible mobilisation of all involved in higher education, research and knowledge from both inside and outside Africa to contribute to training and research capacity building. In addition, the link between the quality of higher education, research and knowledge, the productivity of the researchers, and the trainees and knowledge producers must be improved. This should enable African academics to continuously enhance their capabilities and ensure that their outputs serve real and tangible needs people have at the community level in a systematic and consequential manner. Rural communities should benefit from knowledge intensive diffusion by active engagement from universities, the public and the private sector.

One way to achieve this engagement can be enhanced by organising quality and capability-enhancing academies and virtual information and knowledge bonding learned and research networks. Such global knowledge networks and support systems can stimulate and inspire cooperation and purposeful engagement by mobilising talents, skills, knowledge and goodwill, and communicating effectively with the issues, problems, needs and aspirations of ordinary people and communities. Such a network will go a long way in contributing to changing society, mind sets and attitudes in Africa. It could create real organic connections and meaningful, hopeful and productive interactions between the Diaspora and the people, communities and societies in Africa for generations to come.

It is proposed that such a network is established in the form of an African Global Higher Education, Research and Knowledge Observatory. With the following objectives: Firstly, the creation of a knowledge and virtual training centre, and the dissemination of knowledge to empower African learners and assist in transforming individuals, communities, society, and institutions by facilitating networks that interlink Africa, including the Diaspora. Secondly, the sustained democratisation of African society by means of the use of knowledge and its effective dissemination to bring about sustainable, irreversible and democratic transition, democratic governance, rule of law, protection of the basic freedoms, and separation of powers. This is how productive power is embedded in the creation of wealth that changes raw material rather than circulate existing natural resources on the basis of the valuation of exchange. Thirdly, to help the structural transformation of African society, economy, politics, ecology by bringing together into a network the best available knowledge and knowledge workers through research, training, capacity building and creative forms of dissemination of knowledge

Along with this Observatory, it is proposed that there is a need to set up an African Doctoral Academy for research, quality and capability enhancement (AGARIC) that can be organised as a key component to enhance the higher education landscape in Africa. In addition doctoral awards can stimulate the production of PhDs to make up for the sharp decline in doctoral training since the 1980s in Africa. An example that can be replicated into other fields is the Lundvall African Doctoral award (LADA) that was launched on October 8, 2009 in Dakar, Senegal at the seventh Globelics conference. The Global Network on the Economics of Innovation, Competence Building and Innovation (GLOBELICS), and the Globelics Academy together aim to aid in reversing brain drain by encouraging top researchers from the North to interact with and help build research and knowledge capacity in the South (See [www.globelics.org](http://www.globelics.org) )

With respect to establishing an African doctoral academy, the following are also important considerations. The first is establishing academic research networking and training that connects inter-African research communities with each other and with the best international research networks globally. The second is to identify cognate fields from social and technical sciences with research programmes and research themes to create, acquire, build and use a body of knowledge for both the enhancement of research and quality training. The third is the organisation and strengthening of Africa's higher education landscape to provide immediate outlet in Africa which can develop within a few years to attain international ratings, and which can serve as a publishing node in addition to others to disseminate effectively analytic work, research results and newly acquired knowledge and also facilitate mechanisms for policy learning and knowledge-dialogue and interchange amongst all the relevant stakeholders. The establishment of journals like the African Journal on Science, Technology, Innovation and Development can open the knowledge world to African penetration challenging in part the knowledge monopoly by the dominant knowledge leaders now. ([www.ajstid.org](http://www.ajstid.org))

### **South Africa's Exemplary Role**

Since research in Africa appears to be concentrated mainly in South Africa, it can hold the torch of research and training that can shine across the rest of Africa... South Africa has a ten-year innovation plan<sup>3</sup> suggesting that national leadership has understood the importance of research, knowledge and PhD and post-doctoral training), and has five universities that are recognised in international rankings for doing some research. It also has created the South African Research Chairs initiative, one of which I currently hold.

Whilst South Africa has its problems, in relation to much of Africa it has built up a relatively functioning higher education, research, training and knowledge system that has been embedded in the country's institutions and commonsense. Arguably

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Science and Technology, South Africa, *South African Ten Year Innovation Plan*, Pretoria, South Africa, 2008

the South African system is also bifurcated. It has not reached the whole country as it should have been due to the legacies of the apartheid period. However, it is clearly an important knowledge and research resource. The challenge is how to create research and researcher mobility to link this energy from South Africa to benefit other African countries building efforts of both research and researchers. This requires a double transformation: South Africa emerging to promote a higher education, knowledge and research African area by opening its borders; and the rest of Africa welcoming South Africa to engage in research and knowledge activities beyond its own shores. Such a double change is critical to create a wider and deeper African higher education area.

### **Concluding Remark**

Finally, Africa has had a raw deal, and the effects of this have not yet been fully reversed. It was 125 years ago that Africa was scrambled over and split up by the powers of Europe. This legacy of division and fragmentation, including the negative European influence, has not yet left Africa. The place that has had the raw deal must get a fair deal, if not a new deal.

There can be thus no apologies in putting Africa first. All those who argue for 'one united humanity' acting in solidarity must recognise that the aspects of humanity that others 'othered', enslaved, degraded and rejected cannot remain in the state it has been since the humiliations of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. 'One united humanity' can only be achieved if those who rejected Africans learn to acknowledge and open the opportunities for to provide the fair deal that is owed to Africa. For 'united humanity' to be formed, Africa's dignified and non- humiliated inclusion is a necessary condition, if not sufficient. Only when the excluded is included, the disabled is enabled, the un-served is served in learning, higher education; research, knowledge and high quality training can a fair deal as a new deal can emerge in and for Africa.

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