

African Renewal through Higher Education with a Public Mission

by

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Your Excellencies: President Olusegun Obasanjo, President John Kofi Kufuor, President Alpha Oumar Konaré, President Sam Nujoma, President Antonio Ramalho Eanes, Ambassador Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, Dr. Konrad Osterwalder Rector of the United Nations University,

Honorable members of the Japanese Government and the Diplomatic Corp, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my greatest honor to have been invited by the Director-General and the Rector to participate in this meeting of prominent personalities of the political, academic, business, and wider global community, filling this room with the wisdom of experience and a sense of duty to pursue the struggle against the multitude of challenges that our beloved African continent and our people face. I would also like to specifically acknowledge the young men and women, just like the ones I interact with in my daily environments who bring their passion, idealism, individual experiences, and energetic resolve to play their role in creating a better world by contributing to making Africa reach a place of well deserved dignified consideration and positive progress.

Allow me to start with the usual Baoulé clause of “Kafle” to implore for forgiveness in advance, before this illustrious audience in case, while expressing my ideas, I unintentionally offend anyone.

We are all here motivated by our common commitment, sharing our thoughts and practical proposals toward **“Charting the Future of Africa by Putting Vision into Practice.”**

From the first few in the 1950s to the bulk of the 1960s and through the 1990s, African countries that acquired their independence invariably declared formal education a priority and a means for achieving their respective national projects of socio-economic and human development, thereby collectively uplifting Africa and her people. African governments and people have consistently considered higher education central in achieving these goals, even during the episode of ill-advised policies of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that claimed legitimacy in supporting solely basic education

and downplaying the importance of higher education. In the current context of increasing globalization, Africa faces the daunting task of struggling out of poverty and setting the stage for sustainable development. In part, learning from the ongoing financial and economic crises and the public solutions adopted by the most advanced economies, Africans are challenged to revitalize the credible and caring state and mobilize national resources, while seeking external contributions, for invigorated higher education with a public mission towards social progress.

My presentation is organized under four sections. In the first section, I recall the public mission of higher education and need to renew public support. The second section focuses on the creation of the **Global Higher Education Trust Resource for Africa's Advancement (GHETRAA)**. The third section covers the financial flows and asset building for investment in education. The fourth section concerns the circulation of human capabilities and resources as a primary asset.

1. Public Mission of Higher Education

The thrust of the argument is that, regardless of the type, legal status and mode of delivery, higher education in the contemporary world embodies an intrinsically public mission. If this mission is critically and clearly articulated and harnessed African higher education systems can be renewed and re-focused. There are different types of higher education institutions that ought to be taken into consideration as important complementary parts of the whole system.

In Africa, there are sub-regional specificities, cross-national differences, intra-national variations, and distinctive characteristics of the education systems and higher learning institutions. However, it is a fact that by and large, in terms of enrollment, the context for teaching, research, learning, and living, the performance in academic output and social outcome, African higher education in general and the universities in particular, exhibit a considerable gap between the current state and the potential.

Universities have historically played, and will continue to play, the largest and most central role in higher education covering the scope of higher learning, research, and

production and dissemination of knowledge. In the African context of prolonged crisis since the 1980s, Trevor Coombs rightly emphasized that:

The universities have shown resilience. Despite the brains that have drained out of them over the years, and the compromises they have been compelled to make with their own standards, the universities remain great national storehouses of trained, informed, inquiring and critical intellects, and the indispensable means of replenishing national talent. They have considerable reserves of leadership and commitment on which to draw. Impoverished, frustrated, dilapidated and overcrowded as they may be, they have no substitutes.¹

There is a wide range of current and potential higher education institutions that ought to be considered important, and even indispensable components of the system, that can provide quality education for cutting edge research and relevant knowledge production, excellence in teaching and the production of highly qualified and competent labor force, and provision of needed service to the wider community.

Filling the aforementioned gap and fulfilling the demands of the 21st Century require renovating existing infrastructures—laboratories, classrooms, auditoriums, residence halls, broad campus outlook— and constructing new universities and other types of higher education institutions necessary for the provision and acquisition of quality education. Renewed and strengthened higher education can help kindle the innovative impulse across generations. This requires a comprehensive approach to higher education conceptualization and organization focusing on the public mission.

During the episode of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, before the 2000 UNESCO/World Bank Task Force report entitled “*Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril or Promise?*” from the perspectives, expectations and prescriptions of the lending international financial institutions, determined that African governments whose decisions were guided by economic and financial rationality would not contemplate, let alone carry out decisions, to build new higher education institutions, ignoring the obvious and legitimate needs in Africa.

¹ Coombe, T., 1991. *A Consultation on Higher Education in Africa: A Report to the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation*, New York: The Ford Foundation, p. 1

In the literature, misused notions such as “massification” have given the impression that college-aged Africans have registered en masse in huge numbers of higher learning institutions. In reality, the phenomenon referred to as “massification” is the overcrowding of classrooms and auditoriums, which is commonly observed in numerous institutions in different African countries. Clearly, there was lack of new infrastructures to accommodate even only a slightly increased number of students. As a matter of fact:

Enrollment rates in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world. Although the gross enrollment ratio (GER) has increased in the past 40 years - it was just 1 per cent in 1965 - it still stands at only 5 per cent. [Statistical evidence] shows that the absolute gap by which it lags behind other regions has increased rapidly. The region’s present enrollment ratio is in the same range as that of other developing regions 40 years ago. Moreover, gender disparities have traditionally been wide and remain so.²

At a United Nations meeting in Havana (Cuba) in 2002³, the Egyptian scholar Saad Nagi argued that, while individuals and families legitimately aim for employment at the end of the formal educational process, the supply of education should not be dictated by availability of jobs. He articulated that promoting development education should be made to a large number, even in a time of job scarcity, and that basic and secondary education should not be considered terminal. Indeed, he contended, highly educated people who do not have jobs will ask the right questions and contribute to finding solutions.

Certainly, in the African real world, one cannot ignore the knowledge and creativity of the people. The ingenious capacity of those who have not gone through the process of European-inherited systems of formal education should be appropriately valued. The indigenous knowledge systems constitute a critical and unavoidable component of a more

² D. Bloom, D. Canning, and K. Chan, 2006. “Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa,” Research Commissioned by the World Bank(AFTHD), http://www.worldbank.org/afr/teia/Higher_Education_Economic_Growth_in_Africa.pdf

³ Expert group meeting on “Sharing of Experiences and Practices in Social Development” organized by the United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Havana (Cuba).

realistic and comprehensive system of education.

My argument is that higher education can precisely constitute a powerful catalyst guiding the process towards the necessary fusion of the various education types and formats in the African social reality of this century. To return to Professor Nagi's arguments in making the case for expanding higher education, highly educated people, especially in the perspective of transforming thinking, are more likely to be active participants in the decision-making process in the context of a knowledge-based society, with increased search for ownership.

At the 2008 General Assembly of the World Academy of Art and Science on the theme of "The Anthropocene Crisis: Perils and Promises of the 21st Century" that was held in Hyderabad, India, I presented a paper in the Panel on "Ethics and Policies for Sustainable Futures," entitled "Higher Knowledge and Global Good: Reconceptualizing and Envisioning Higher Education in Africa for Shared and Enhanced Humanity," I define higher knowledge as the sum of collective wisdom acquired throughout history and enriched with new information and which serves as societal compass. The idea of higher knowledge reflects the development of capabilities for the advancement of human development and social progress within socio-historical and socio-spatial contexts that include the social community and its global ecology as a whole.

The idea of expanded higher education that I am suggesting requires going beyond new buildings, be they brick-and-mortar, virtual or just an increase in enrollment. Rather, it refers to expanding of our thinking and approach to knowledge. It is not just higher education in terms of technical competence.

Furthermore, in very practical ways, higher education ought to be dynamically linked to the other levels—starting from early childhood to secondary education—and include the various types—from the classical universities to technical institutions with a lifelong perspective—instead of being articulated as the highest and terminal level of an essentially hierarchical system. My proposal calls for simultaneously transforming an expanding system. How do we fund this massive renewal of African higher education institutions?

My focus is the African Diaspora working/living in the industrial countries that constitute current or potential agents for the flow of financial resources and the circulation of human capabilities.

2. Global Higher Education Trust Resource for Africa's Advancement (GHETRAA)

Since the colonial era, the economy and formal education have constituted powerful triggers of migration further away from home. Indeed, The colonial economy that became increasingly monetized was also characterized by the phenomenon of massive and forced or indirectly induced movement of populations from their living space to newly created locations. Besides the economy and the relocation of workers within and/or across the borders of the newly created states, given the nature of formal education introduced by the Europeans, it constituted the single most powerful trigger of migration. In essence, European formal education socialized the Africans to move further and further away from the communities. For instance, in the French education system, figuratively and literally, school children migrate, figuratively and literally, on a daily basis between two sociological realities, and eventually would move from the village schools to the regional schools, then on to the urban school in their respective countries and for the few highest achievers, onward to the federal schools in West Africa or Central Africa. From the time of decolonization to date, going to further to pursue higher education in the metropolis conferred the badge of success with the highest honor.

In one episode of his acclaimed television series with companion book entitled "The Africans," Ali Mazrui stated:

The African family is the most authentic social institution in the post-colonial era. In a continent steeped in artificiality, the African family is more real than many of our countries which were colonially made; more real than tribalism, manipulated by opportunistic politicians; more real than our economies most of which are mere shadows. ... You see, the family in Africa is vibrant in its emotions, compelling in its loyalties. It is alive and well, living right across the continent.⁴

⁴ Ali A. Mazrui, (1986). *The Africans, a triple heritage*. Program 2, A legacy of lifestyles [videorecording] / a co-production of WETA-TV and BBC-TV; produced by David

He further remarked that the connections of the African family have turned every village into a place of pilgrimage for the sons and daughters scattered in many places within countries. This same sentiment of powerful connection has change transformed every African country a village for the sons and daughters across the globe.

Numerous factors have led to increased numbers of Africans abroad. Whether they left their respective African countries to study and decided to stay abroad, or were recruited while they had not initially thought of living, or fled literally for their physical security and stayed, the Africans in industrial countries, especially in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and emerging destinations, have kept strong connections with their nuclear and extended families back in the continent.

In search for paradigms for social progress, the family provides a framework for development rooted in African most positive and emulating cultural heritage. The family links from near and far away locations have nurtured human resources that have not been tapped in for Africa's advancement.

The term African Diaspora has historically referred almost exclusively to the Africans who were forced out of Africa in the context of the transatlantic enslavement. In fact, African Diaspora includes populations that went out of Africa before the Transatlantic Enslavement. For instance, Africans from the Senegambian area all the way to part of current Mali had undertaken voyages across the Atlantic at least a hundred year before Columbus⁵. Besides the historical composition, the African Diaspora now includes also those who left the continent recently.

In this paper the Diaspora refers to the Africans who live outside the continent and who have current or potential functional ties with the African continent in terms of transfer of monetary funds, business enterprises, professional visits and personal journeys. Among the Diaspora of historical and contemporary origins, they have the most immediate

Harrison; a commentary written and presented by Ali A. Mazrui. Santa Barbara, CA: Distributor, Intellimation.

responsibility⁶ to contribute to the efforts of promoting social progress in Africa, although the others may partake.

Indeed, they make systematic efforts to maintain family ties, meet their social obligations back home, and return home periodically to replenish their own energies. Although their financial transfers constitute real assets for the national economies, as even recognized by the World Bank, these contributions rarely constitute inputs in the planning and accounting for national factors of development. Even if these practices are common and consistent, they are nevertheless dispersed, individualized, or existing only within small communities, not at the level of states.

There are two major categories of considerable assets that the Diaspora can generate even greater values that can be transformed into factors of development in significantly contributing to build Africa in general or by focusing on such targeted sectors as higher education. The financial and human resources are the two complementary components these assets.

My suggestion is to create **Global Higher Education Trust Resource for Africa's Advancement (GHETRAA)**. This proposal is to explore utilizing, to a full extent, the hitherto untapped African resources outside Africa toward the renewal and expansion of Africa's higher education. This consists of organizing and maximizing the actual and potential assets at the global level, specifically between African governments and those of industrial countries where Africans reside and are the agent of financial transfer and human capability circulation.

3. Financial Flows and Asset Building for Investment in Education

In the current decades, there has been an increase, albeit still modest, interest studying,

⁵ Ivan van Sertima, 1976, *They Came Before Columbus*, New York: Random House.

⁶ There are outstanding issues such as Africa's legitimate claim for overdue reparations from Western powers that reduced Africans to commodities that they plundered human along with material resources for centuries and robbed them off their humanity. However, my proposal here is to focus on areas where immediate actions can be taken by the Africans in collaboration with external the international partners.

quantifying and analyzing the cross-border financial flows that result from migrants' connections to different parts of the world. Data show that remittances have been higher than the total ODA to Africa. In a document rightly entitled "Remittances to Africa Overtakes Foreign Direct Investment," it is stated that: "Remittances from Africans working abroad in the period 2000-2003 averaged about US\$17 billion per annum virtually overtaking Foreign Direct Investment flows which averaged about \$15 billion per annum during the same period."⁷ If, in addition, the amounts transferred through informal channels were counted, remittances would be several times the net ODA.

The main financial asset consists of the income transfer in the form of remittance. Whether they are regular or ad hoc, and regardless of their volume, these transfers generally incur at least three charges that diminish the actual amount of money that the sender transfers and the recipient acquires:

1. Income tax: The money transferred to Africa is taxed in the countries where the senders reside, earn their money, and send the remittance from;

2. Transfer fee: To make the transfer, the sender must pay a fee to the bank or any other channel and the informal ones;

3. Withdrawal fee: At the final destination, to withdraw the money the recipient in Africa must pay a fee, which is usually withheld from the amount received.

These three amounts consecutively withheld are legitimate parts of the modern economic organization and legal requirements for all members of any contemporary nation-state. However, they reveal several problems involved in the transfer and which limit the actual positive impact on Africa:

1. Income tax policies vary considerably in countries for residence of the Diasporic Africans. Whatever the amount of income retained in the form of tax, it constitutes a considerable proportion;

2. The reduction in the actual amount received;

3. The money received by the families and/or invested in business contributes to

⁷<http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/press/Promoting%20International%20support%20for%20peace%20and%20development%20%85.pdf>

the economies, but the redistributive capacity at the community and national levels is limited.

Taking into account the countries of residence in the global African Diaspora, there are variations in the mechanisms and means through which remittances are transferred, even if the recent spread of the global financial services such as Western Unions, MoneyGram and others have tended to create some commonalities. There are global mobile banking systems and some local innovative initiatives such as Safaricom in Kenya, Cellpay in several countries, Glomoney in Nigeria that can cut the cost of transfer and withdrawal fees. However, these systems are not yet widely available on a large scale. Even if they were widely used, the issue taxing the money transferred remains an important one. Furthermore, the individualized actions that are imbedded in the current modalities of remittance flows do not offer possibilities to address issues at national levels. This proposal focuses on gathering a public fund to contribute to renewing the caring state with a specific goal of helping fund higher education with a public mission.

The cost of educating the majority of the Africans in the Diapsora, including those who send money to their families or for their own business, was borne by public fund. Yet, practically, they have no public obligation in their countries of origin (through taxation, for instance) since their income is earned outside an African country. Therefore, while the private return to education is guaranteed, even if they contribute to the economy, social return to the African countries is not systematically organized.

How can we make the contributions go beyond families and provide systematically direct development support for public services that represent public good such as education?

The proposal is to initiate global negotiation to grant Africans tax exemptions on the portion of their income that will be sent to contribute to the global fund geared toward designated projects. The same way private foundations in industrial counties benefit from tax exemption when they send money for development assistance, global agreements could be reached to allow Africans to send money that would be tax and fee exempt all the way.

A secure trust fund will receive the money. The fund collected will serve solely for

renovating and expanding old higher education facilities and creating new ones that would carefully be mapped to serve equitably communities in each country. It will be secured and strictly monitored to ensure management with integrity. This is essential to motivate the Diaspora to participate in the fund.

The loss of revenues industrial countries would experience due to the tax exemption for Africans in the Diaspora would not be considerable, but on the African side the money gathered could have significant impact. The tax exemption would be supplemental to, but not a substitute of, ODA from the industrial countries. The ODA and this contribution are not mutually exclusive. Also, the African Diaspora will be free to continue to send private fund to families without tax exemption.

4. Tapping in Human Capabilities and Resources

African labor and genius constitute a major part in building the first world economic power. In the contemporary world, Africans who migrate further away from the continent are highly educated and acquire additional competences. Those who have less formal education but manage to travel far and make it have special skills too that are sharpened through their experiences. Thus, all the Africans gain knowledge and skills that can constitute direct input for Africa's project for social progress.

The direct loss for Africa through migration is also, and often more acute in human resources. Taking into account the considerable fluidity of the Africans and their continued strong ties to families, what steps can be taken to channel their knowledge as a regular source of in-kind contribution for sustainable development in Africa?

Brain drain suggests one final direct path, away from Africa. It is in part this sense of finality that has linked migration to the idea drainage. Aspects of the drainage are real: when medical doctors leave; when the departure of one professor leads to sudden increase in the teacher/student ratios, overwhelming responsibility on the remaining professors translating into fewer examinations to avoid intensive grading time, hence declining quality. However, migration does not mean cutting the ties.

Human resource circulation is real and factual. This is not to encourage migration as a solution to Africa's predicaments. On the contrary, the financial and human resources toward the new, improved and expanded higher education is to improve the learning conditions.

The current Diasporic population that constitutes the focus of my reflection has grown very complex in recent decades. For instance, in the 1960s most African women who went abroad were spouses of diplomats and did not have professional careers. Now, many women abroad are highly educated and work in their own rights.

More generally, older generations of migrants include those who arrived from Africa with partial or complete formal education to the highest levels, and even as professionals. Some have retired or are approaching retirement. There is another category composed of those who are mature but likely to work for longer times ahead. They constitute a real powerhouse in all the educational and professional fields. By and large, they have worked hard, achieved excellence, and are recognized authorities in their respective fields.

The younger generations include those who were born of recent African migrant parents and were even born in Africa and migrated with one or both parents when they were children. Some have citizenship of the countries where they were born and/or live outside Africa. They are also represented in the entire disciplinary spectrum in their academic and technical studies, including the new areas of sciences and technologies. They are bright, capable, daring, full of energy and passion, resolved to play their roles in ensuring that Africa's performance and image improve.

As adviser to many individual students and student organizations⁸, in the case of Cornell University where I have been teaching for almost 20 years, I see them every day poised

⁸ Global and umbrella organizations such as Black Students United (BSU) and Coalition of Pan-African Scholars (COAS), and more specific ones such as Black Innovators, Nigerian Student Association, Scholars to Leaders with a focus on Kenya, Cornellians for the Congo, and many more such as Ghanaians at Cornell, and other student organizations that are more focused on single topics such as fighting malaria.

to return to Africa as interns, volunteers in various capacities including to help set up computer systems, or work for pay. Sometimes, they surprise their own parents by their determination to return to Africa and play their part, ironically while so many young people of their age in Africa dream of leaving to study abroad because of the deteriorating conditions that are depriving them of quality education.

How we utilize these students and young professionals who are ready to serve? How to connect the youth from the Diaspora and those in the continent who have their own solid assets including their familiarity with the African social contexts and their experiences with coping mechanisms in difficult living and learning conditions?

Various programs, across the continent, are working to utilize the monetary and human resources associated with the Africans abroad. My proposal is to organize systematically and forge ways to use these human resources in all the countries to boost higher education, for instance, with professors providing regular courses in the African higher education institutions. The same way tax exemption can be worked out, agreements can be reached with institutions in industrial countries for, release time to devote to African institutions. African students can be training by participating in research projects. These are ideas that can help conceptualize further, design and implement the Global Higher Education Trust Resource for Africa's Advancement (GHETRAA) for long-term financial and immense human resources boost to African higher education.

There are various social sectors that can be the focus for such a boost (i.e. healthcare, agriculture). My focus is higher education because of the reasons I gave above as a catalyst for regenerating the lower levels of education, improved capacity of the higher education systems to form capable human resource, and enhancement of service to the community through pertinent research and other ground for community outreach.

There is a need for a global commitment starting with the Africans in the continent and the Diaspora. Higher education must be given increased and necessary roles. Through proposals such as this one, for instance the Millennium Development Goals could reconnect with the fundamental missing link: Higher Education as a central tool for permanent corrective mechanism for social progress. A full proposal can be made with

all the data, diagrams, and the technical and substantive articulation. The goal in this paper is to share the basic ideas.

In the context of globalization, migration is likely to continue. The speed of Africa's renewal can be accelerated through the convergences of contributions including that of Africans in the Diaspora. This renewal requires vibrant institutions of higher learning, opening of possibilities for the innovative impulse of the mature and young minds that can curve the drive to migrate in large numbers. With the proposed project as a permanent mechanism for support to Africa's educational institutions, those who leave will continue contributing to sustaining social progress in the continent.

Conclusion

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Participants:

There have been always many issues that have not systematically created consensus among Africans and between Africans and their partners, some of whom have complicated relations with Africa marked by the colonial experience and unequal global system. However, in the 1960s, there were shared euphoria, high hopes, expectations, and confidence in a brighter future for Africa that characterized the independence movements and the United Nations Development Decade. It has been a long time since there was such global convergence of enthusiasm accompanied by internal and external commitment to contribute to the means for Africa's advancement.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the welcome renewed and increased commitment of countries such as Japan and its institutions. It is worth noting examples such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), Japan Education Forum, and the Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Basic Education Development.

Nevertheless, in recent years, we have been exposed to the Afro-pessimists' message that aimed at putting doubt in the mind of the still perpetual and most unabashed optimists. There was the terrible period where the African-engineered Lagos Plan of Action was rejected and replaced arrogantly by the Structural Adjustment Programs. Even the recent

calls for global engagements, such as the Millennium Development Goals were articulated in the heavy atmosphere of “donor fatigue,” despite the fact that a few countries have stepped up their contribution to Africa’s advancement.

When the world economy and finance were threatened with collapse, the world capitalist system resorted to state to bail out the private sector. Thus, they proved right the African scholars, activists, and students who challenged the structural adjustment programs and the assumed essentially good nature of their liberal economic foundation which led to their policies geared toward weakening the African state, especially the caring state supporting social services such as education. In the education sector, these policies led to scandalous neglect of higher education.

As a world community, we ought to have become more humble and wiser as we realize our acute interdependence. The impact of climate change on the world irrespective of borders or those who have accelerated it, global health pandemics spreading at an astonishing speed, and the vulnerable links of the world economy, should lead us to increased sensibility and sensitivity in commitment to build a better world by addressing the needs of all the communities. This is why we are here. With good will and solid commitment of the global partners, the mobilization of Africa’s daughters and sons abroad and at home will step up the pace of a new positive convergence towards realizing of the beautiful project of social progress in Africa. This will be essentially good for Africa and the global community, given our shared humanity.

I thank you for your kind attention.