

“Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative: What Role for Africa’s Academic Community”

A Brief Reflection

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Following the drift of the title of this workshop, let us take it for granted that the academic community remains the significant part of the African cultural intelligentsia with a mission to inform, educate and re-orientate the peoples of the continent. The second assumption invariably connected to this observation is that the ‘university’ is the social and intellectual factory where ideas are brewed in service of peoples, nations and communities. The material tool for information, mass mobilization and re-orientation, i.e. ICT, becomes the crucial and inevitable part of the envisioned cultural, economic and technological revolution on the continent. Therefore, the ICT is the practical apparatus for ensuring a productive and qualitative higher education system which would contribute to the human resource, skills, knowledge and research needs of African countries.

The 21st century African university must brace up to the challenges of the new digital age and the African scholar should be both actor and factor in the development of the society. In both artistic and scientific terms, the university must be seen to deploy the technological benefits of the ICT (especially in teaching and research) to improve the lots of the common African person; the typical African university must be involved in improving the managerial skills of the business personnel in typical African societies.

The African academic can become a relevant factor in the public sphere only when ‘leadership’ is constantly focused as a material of those who have the idea to push the continent forward more than as a birthright of the ‘political class’; the academic would become more significant when ‘governance’ is understood as service rather than as favour or opportunity to appropriate and plunder... In many nations, the African *real academic* is truly orphaned by the serious problem of under-funding with its myriad implications of under-development, insecurity, instability and absolute retrogression.

- There must be greater functional intimacies between African universities and African communities or publics: the town-and-gown metaphor is very apt for this suggestion of a functional relationship between the university as ‘citadel of ideas’ and the larger society as the open space of practice; between the university as ‘tower of dreams’ and the society as the field of real play; or between the university as the locus of creative idealism and the society as the very site of critical reality.
- A proper infrastructural facility of the African university must be assessed; and the ‘viability’ of the university should be considered along its readiness to be part of the ICT Revolution...

- The encouragement of multimedia dissemination of research findings, via the Internet, to provide information and opportunity to those who desired and needed it. Research findings are as a necessity should be published by peer-review journals; therefore, it is assumed that the p.r.j would also be electronic-based for easier reference and access.
- Intra/Inter University Connectivity that would open up gates for Online Dialogues and Discussions must be an important part of the new African university system. The unique point here is that the human infrastructure is available; what must be done is to harness, encourage and empower the human resources. Each African university should have and maintain its own gateway, its own ISP, by which it provides services to its own community. Every student and faculty should be connected to the university system and should be provided with email connectivity, at no cost. Each university should have faculty and departmental websites, and websites for university administration. Above all, an online Library facility should be made available to the university, and extended to the community around it. These initiatives would be the beginning of a constructive engagement with the real demands and dividend of the digital age.
- The ICT tool must be central to and through the various levels of university administration; the Internet and Technological facilities must be optimally employed for Discussions/Administration/Lectures/Tutorial/Mentorships/ & Supervisions...
- For every university, an ONT should be privileged as a Unit of Administration & Research. ONT is “Office for New Technology”.
- Above all, the ICT is useful in advancing and extending the frontiers of knowledge for the academic community and, by extension, the academic community itself thus functions as the provider of practical leadership, functional information. The African university of the future must begin in the present.

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