Chapter 2

Universities and economic development: Evidence of a pact?

For the purposes of this study, we use the definition of a pact provided by Gornitzka et al. (2007: 184):

A ‘pact’ is a fairly long-term cultural commitment to and from the university, as an institution with its own foundational rules of appropriate practices, causal and normative beliefs, and resources, yet validated by the political and social system in which the university is embedded. A pact, then, is different from a contract based on continuous strategic calculation of expected value by public authorities, organised external groups, university employees, and students – all regularly monitoring and assessing the university on the basis of its usefulness for their self-interest, and acting accordingly.

The key actors of the pact are national, institutional and external stakeholders. It is assumed that the stronger the pact between universities, university leadership, national authorities and society at large, the better the universities will be able to make a significant, sustainable contribution to development.

Our interest is in exploring the extent to which there is a pact around the role for higher education in society in general and in economic development in particular in each of the eight African countries. Key to the development of such a pact is agreement or consensus that there should be a role for higher education and then about what that role should entail. In order to investigate this aspect, we have sought to address the following questions:

1. Is there a role for knowledge production and for universities in the national development plan?
2. How do the relevant national authorities and institutional stakeholders talk about and conceptualise the role of universities, and is there consensus or disjuncture?

In order to investigate these various dimensions of the pact, we collected and analysed an array of both documentary and interview data. At the national level, we consulted national vision documents as well as policies, plans and/or strategies for development, higher education, and science and technology. Interviews were conducted with a range of national stakeholders, such as representatives of the ministries responsible for higher education, finance or economic affairs, and science and technology, as well as representatives from
tertiary/higher education councils/commissions. At the university level, we examined key institutional documents such as the current strategic plan and the research policy. We conducted interviews with university leaders, including the vice-chancellor and/or deputy vice-chancellors, heads of research and institutional planning, deans of faculties and directors of centres, and other senior academics.

2.1 The role of knowledge and universities in development

2.1.1 A role for knowledge and universities in national and institutional policies and plans

From the interviews and policy documents it is evident that none of the eight African countries included in the study has a clearly articulated development model or strategy. Some countries have national development plans (e.g. Uganda, Botswana and Mozambique), others have poverty reduction strategies (e.g. Ghana and Mozambique), and a number of countries have national visions – usually focused far away in time (e.g. Tanzania Development Vision 2025, Botswana Vision 2016, Ghana Vision 2020, Mozambique’s Agenda 2025, Kenya Vision 2030). However, these do not constitute development models and are often based on ‘best practice’ policy-borrowing from first world countries. Mauritius comes the closest to a fully-fledged development model with its generally agreed upon national vision and associated array of policies, but as yet without the requisite coordination, implementation and monitoring powers. The other countries are characterised by frequently changing national priority announcements, often around the budget speech, and a plethora of non-complementary policies in different centres of power.

In the absence of clear development models or strategies, we had to look at a range of policies from different departments, as well as medium- and long-term plans, in order to investigate whether the knowledge economy and a role for higher education in development featured. At the national level we looked at policies not only in the ministry responsible for higher education, but also in others such as economic development/planning and science and technology.

The role of knowledge and universities in national and institutional plans were operationalised into a series of indicators which are detailed in Table C1 of Appendix C. These indicators were then rated by three of the researchers for each country and university in the study. The aggregate results of these ratings are presented in the discussion of findings below.

As can be seen from Table 1, at the national level, Kenya and Mauritius exhibited the strongest awareness of the concept of the knowledge economy and a role for higher education in development, followed by Mozambique and Tanzania. However, with the exception of Mauritius, this awareness was not reflected across policies, but was predominantly found in the science and technology policy or in the long-term national vision. Most problematic, again with the exception of Mauritius, was that the concept of the
knowledge economy and a role for higher education in development was mostly absent from the policies of ministries responsible for higher education. (See Box 1 for a description of the policies in Kenya and Mauritius.)

At the institutional level, we looked at the universities’ strategic plans and research policies to see whether the concept of knowledge economy, and a role for the university in development, was articulated. The knowledge economy was explicitly articulated in the policies or plans of the universities of Botswana, Mauritius and Makerere (Box 1), and was absent at the University of Ghana. None of the universities had specific policies regarding the institution’s role in economic development. However, this role was embedded in the strategic plan and/or research policy of the universities of Botswana, Nairobi, Mauritius and Makerere. This role was not articulated in any of the institutional documents consulted for Eduardo Mondlane, Dar es Salaam or Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).

**TABLE 1 Role for knowledge and universities in development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Max. score</th>
<th>Botswana</th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Kenya</th>
<th>Mauritius</th>
<th>Moz.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
<th>Uganda</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL LEVEL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>The concept of a knowledge economy features in the national development plan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A role for higher education in development in national policies and plans</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of a knowledge economy features in institutional policies and plans</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional policies with regard to the university’s role in economic development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
BOX 1

The knowledge economy and role of higher education in national and institutional policies and plans

National policies and plans

In Mauritius, there is a very explicit role for higher education in development, as articulated in national policy documents such as the Draft Education and Human Resources Strategy and, importantly, the policies formulated in the document Developing Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and Centre of Learning. As a result of the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment (MFEE), the country has made significant moves forward in translating the policy documents into implementation of the first steps to move the country towards a fully-fledged knowledge economy. In addition, the MFEE is playing an important role in the funding of a major science, technology and innovation project in the country.

In Kenya, the major education policy document, Kenya Education Sector Support Programme, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology’s plan for 2008–2012, are the key policy documents setting out the government’s vision on the role of higher education and the commitment to the knowledge economy. The development planning document, Vision 2030, is helping to translate this vision into policy implementation, albeit at a somewhat slow pace.

University strategic plans and research policies

The University of Mauritius strategic plan (2006–2015) and the Strategic Research and Innovation Framework (2009–2015) place the institution in a central role in contributing to the nation’s economic development and consistently reflect the narrative of the knowledge economy. They emphasise research and innovation, instilling an entrepreneurial flair amongst staff and students, and linking science and technology to industry. They also align themselves to national policies in this regard, such as the move towards developing Mauritius into a ‘knowledge hub’.

The notion of the knowledge economy and the contribution of higher education in general, and of the university in particular, to the country’s national development framework are strongly foregrounded and operationalised in the University of Botswana’s strategic plan. Mention is made of both the production of high-level skills, and research and innovation. The plan also takes into account the changes in the economy articulated in the government’s Draft Macroeconomic Outline and Policy Framework which highlights the need to move away from a reliance on public sector stimulus to economic growth, and from the strong dependence on the diamond mining industry, to a stronger service sector economy, stimulated increasingly by the private sector.

Makerere University’s current strategic plan (2008/2009-2018/2019) ties itself closely to the institution’s role in development. The formulation of the plan was guided by the question: How can Makerere University reposition itself to meet emerging development challenges in Uganda? The development of the plan took into account a range of socio-economic, political and environmental concerns. This included an overview of shifts in the Ugandan economy with specific reference to the move towards a knowledge economy and the role that Makerere can play in this regard. The plan aligns itself with a number of national policies including the National Strategic Plan for Higher Education and the Uganda Poverty Eradication Action Plan.
The most striking finding is the lack of clarity and agreement about a development model (except for Mauritius) and the role of higher education in development, at both national and institutional levels.

None of the eight countries has a development model per se, although Mauritius is moving in that direction.

Mauritius is also the only country that states upfront that knowledge drives economic growth. For the other countries, knowledge is not yet considered to be key to economic development.

There is an emerging awareness about the importance of the knowledge economy approach in all the countries and institutions. Except for Botswana and Uganda, this articulation is generally stronger at the national than at the institutional level. In addition, with the exception of Mauritius, it is seldom reflected in more than one ministry’s policy, or in national vision statements.

2.1.2 Notions about the role of knowledge and universities

How do national and institutional stakeholders conceptualise the role of higher education and the university in development? And to what extent is there consensus or disjuncture between the national and institutional levels? Our analytical framework for addressing these questions comprises four notions of the relationship between higher education (especially universities) and national development. These four notions,9 which are elaborated upon below, emerge in the interaction between the following two sets of scenarios:

- Whether or not a role is foreseen for new knowledge in the national development strategy.
- Whether or not universities, as knowledge institutions, have a role in the national development strategy.

These two sets of scenarios, and the concomitant four notions of the role of universities, are depicted in Figure 1.

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9 These four notions are based on ideas developed by Maassen and Cloete (2006) and Maassen and Olsen (2007).
The four notions are elaborated as follows:

- **The university as ancillary**: In this notion, there is a strong focus on political/ideological starting-points for development. Consequently, it is assumed that there is no need for a strong (scientific) knowledge basis for development strategies and policies. Neither is it necessary for the university to play a direct role in development since the emphasis is on investments in basic healthcare, agricultural production and primary education. The role of universities is to produce educated civil servants and professionals (with teaching based on transmitting established knowledge rather than on research), as well as different forms of community service.

- **The university as self-governing institution**: Knowledge produced at the university is considered important for national development – especially for the improvement of healthcare and the strengthening of agricultural production. However, this notion assumes that the most relevant knowledge is produced when academics from the North and the South cooperate in externally-funded projects, rather than being steered by the state. This notion portrays the university as playing an important role in developing the national identity, and in producing high-level bureaucrats and scientific knowledge – but not directly related to national development; the university is committed to serving society as a whole rather than specific stakeholders. This notion assumes that the university is most effective when it is left to itself, and can determine its own priorities according to universal criteria, independent of the particularities of a specific geographical, national, cultural or religious context. It also assumes there is no need to invest additional public funds to increase the relevance of the university.
The university as instrument for development agendas: In this notion, the university has an important role to play in national development – not through the production of new scientific knowledge, but through expertise exchange and capacity building. The focus of the university’s development efforts should be on contributing to reducing poverty and disease, to improving agricultural production, and to supporting small business development – primarily through consultancy activities (especially for government agencies and development aid) and through direct involvement in local communities.

The university as engine of development: This notion assumes that knowledge plays a central role in national development – in relation to improving healthcare and agricultural production, but also in relation to innovations in the private sector, especially in areas such as information and communication technology, biotechnology and engineering. Within this notion the university is seen as (one of) the core institutions in the national development model. The underlying assumption is that the university is the only institution in society that can provide an adequate foundation for the complexities of the emerging knowledge economy when it comes to producing the relevant skills and competencies of employees in all major sectors, as well as to the production of use-oriented knowledge.

Drawing on the information above, as well as data gathered via interviews with national and university stakeholders, we now turn to an analysis of the notions of the role of knowledge and universities in each of the eight African countries.

Table 2 captures the notions of the role of knowledge and universities of both government and university stakeholders, indicating whether the notion is strong, present, or absent for each of the categories. The table also enables us to compare government and university notions in order to assess the extent to which there is consensus or disjuncture between these two sets of actors in the pact. (See Box 2 for selected quotations reflecting the different notions of the role of higher education and the university.)

### Table 2: National and institutional notions of the role of the university in development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notions</th>
<th>Ancillary</th>
<th>Self-governing</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Engine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ghana</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Tanzania</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uganda</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- ■ Strong
- □ Present
- * Absent
At the national level there are three main observations. Firstly, the instrumental notion is the strongest, followed by engine of development and self-governing. Secondly, the engine of development notion is to be found mainly in science and technology policies and in national vision statements, but seldom in ministries of education – with the exceptions of Botswana and Mauritius. The references to knowledge economy, and its importance in vision statements, seem to draw considerably from 'policy-borrowing', particularly from World Bank and OECD sources and websites. Thirdly, in the case of the instrumental notion, most national government officials feel that the university is not doing enough, but there are no policies that spell out, or incentivise, this instrumental role.

Regarding the institutional notions the following observations could be made. Firstly, self-governance and the instrumental roles are the strongest positions, which reflect the traditional debates about autonomy and community engagement, respectively. This emphasis on the self-governing notion could be because the university leadership is more concerned with traditional university issues, while governments tend to be more focused on global trends. Secondly, only within the universities of Ghana and Dar es Salaam is there still a fairly traditional notion of the university producing personpower for the nation, and of the university ‘knowing best what is required’. Interestingly, the leadership of neither of these two institutions expressed a knowledge economy discourse. Thirdly, Mauritius is the only institution with the engine of development as the dominant discourse, and it corresponds with the view of government. At Makerere there is considerable agreement between government and the university, except that there is an increasing awareness at the university about the knowledge economy and the engine of development notion. Finally, at NMMU, which is an institution where a former ‘traditional’ university was merged with a technikon (polytechnic), all four notions are present and in contestation.
BOX 2

Selected narratives on the role of the university in development

I think really right from the beginning, this being the first national university, the focus had been to play a leading role in providing the necessary human capital for driving this nation. And you will see then from the Sixties, the government gave such a mandate to this university to train the critical manpower - not only to take over the positions that the foreigners were leaving, going back, but also to drive development. (University leader)

The discussion about the identity of the institution and the philosophy of education reveals a number of tensions: one body of opinion argues that the university should essentially focus on more practical, vocational training that will hopefully generate students that can find quicker employment and make a difference out there. There's another part coming from the old part of the university arguing that we should focus on more medium- and long-term development goals ... Those fault lines of debate are still very much present in the institution now. (University leader)

I think the fact that the new government separated higher education from science for me was the first sign that they really don't understand higher education. They don't understand the system. They know it's powerful, they know it's important, they know that they have to invest, but honestly I don't think they understand what higher education is all about. (Senior academic)

We firmly believe in Mauritius that knowledge drives economic growth and development. Higher education is the main source of that knowledge and of human capital. It is the knowledge promoter required for the social and economic development of any country. (National stakeholder)

FINDINGS

- In terms of notions of the role of the university in development, at both national and institutional levels, the most obvious unresolved tension is between the self-governance and instrumental roles. This reflects the well-known tension between institutional autonomy, on the one hand, and engagement or responsiveness, on the other.
- At the national level in most of the countries, the dominant expectation from higher education is an instrumental role, with a constant refrain that the university is not doing enough to contribute to development – but often referring to social problems, and not economic growth.
- The engine of development notion is stronger amongst government stakeholders than within the universities, but it could be that government sees knowledge as a narrow instrumental, rather than an engine of development notion. It is nevertheless surprising that amongst university leadership the support for a knowledge economy approach is so weak.