

LJUBLJANA CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

Keynote Abstract

# **Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Past, the Present and the Future**

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The higher education belt in any country is the most powerful level in the education system. It is the central producer of “official” and “legitimate” knowledge. It provides leadership to the other two lower belts in terms of training teachers and the middle level lecturers for colleges. It is also the apex of the ancestral pyramid that has deluded the reform efforts of so many countries, as well as the harbinger of the national elite, with all the baggage that goes with the idea of “elite”.

Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, in the form and shape we recognize today, is a young and nascent phenomenon. Since its inception, through the incarnation of the educational systems of colonial powers, higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has made significant strides, but also faced major challenges. Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has emerged from virtual nonexistence some four decades ago to an enterprise that enrolls several million students and recruits hundreds and thousands of faculty and staff (Teferra 2006).

This, in turn, invites the question: what are the major features of universities in Sub-Saharan Africa at the current time, and what are the major historical developments that have contributed to this situation?

Taking the short-sighted vision of higher education in Africa, and taking but a brief peep at history, the shortfall emerges right from the first conceptualisation of the African university. Universities were conceived of as institutions for producing manpower to indigenise the civil service following independence. To say today that this framework involved a complete misunderstanding of the tasks that lay ahead is an understatement (Mkandawire, 2000:1).

This paper argues that we should go from the First Level Indigenization (FLI) which looked at the regulatory rules, to the Second Level Indigenization (SLI) which looks at the constitutive rules and question the plots and paradigms of practice in higher education in Africa.