

The Role of Higher Education in Poverty Eradication in Uganda: The Experience of Makerere University Through Innovations at Makerere Committee¹

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Introduction

Established in 1922 as a technical school, Makerere became a college of higher education in 1937, a first University College for the whole East Africa in 1949 and an independent public university for Uganda in 1970. Makerere is, therefore, the oldest and premier institution of higher learning in Uganda that has largely been responsible for producing and supplying the public and private sectors with trained human resources.

Additionally, Makerere University has been, and still is, the leading institution providing research services, both for academic and social economic development in the country. The policies of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation, which have been adopted by the current government, created a favourable environment for investment in higher education by private sector.

The increasing demand for higher education in Uganda further provided another opportunity for investment in higher education. As a result, the number of universities has increased from one in 1950 to 18 as at September 2005. Enrollment in higher education has increased from 252 in 1950 to just over 108,000 in 2004 enrolled in over 155 institutions of higher education. The increased demand for higher education, the policies of decentralisation and privatisation permitted the university to introduce private fee paying students. At the same time, as these policies were being adopted, the social economic demands of society in Uganda also changed very fast calling for an urgent review of academic programmes offered by Makerere with a view to meeting the new demands of society.

The beginning of transformation

Following the above positive changes in the higher education sub sector, Makerere University realised it needed to revisit its vision and mission and make its curriculum more oriented to servicing community needs better, besides the normal academic teaching and research.

Even then, it was realised that it is important to re-orient university curriculum and research to address community needs, including improvements in service delivery.

A five-year strategic plan 2000/1- 2004/5 was developed. The plan explicitly recognised the need to relate higher education to new demands of society. Makerere, therefore, set out to revise its curriculum to produce 'employable' graduates. The university initiated a series of graduate tracer studies for a number of disciplines. It also conducted an extensive human resource demand assessment from the perspective of the district in respect of decentralised service delivery with the help of the Rockefeller als exten2 Ro2.437

higher education institutions and local governments to develop sustainable and replicable capacity aimed at improving service delivery to the population.

- Institutional Development Programme supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The programme is building capacities in specific units at Makerere University to provide fast responses to changing needs of society.
- The African Capacity Building Fund (ACBF), which helped to introduce an Economic Policy Management (EPM) Programme to provide mid-level skills which are badly needed in key economic development ministries throughout Eastern and Southern Africa. The EPM has strengthened the institutional and human capacity of Makerere University to offer graduate level economic policy management and to train a critical mass of Ugandans and Eastern and Southern African professional policy advisers and managers with the required skills and attitudes.
- SIDA/SAREC built capacity among university staff to conduct research aimed at meeting needs of society.

The Role of Makerere University in poverty eradication

The basic role of universities is to teach and conduct research aimed at enhancing individual's upward social mobility in society. The role of universities in poverty eradication will be analysed/presented from the perspective of this dual mandate of universities.

In late 1999, Makerere University, Rockefeller Foundation and the Government of Uganda recognised the fact that service delivery in Uganda had largely been devolved to the local governments under the decentralisation policy. It was, therefore, important that the university reorients its curriculum to meet the new needs of service delivery under a decentralised environment. Government and Makerere, therefore, set up a planning committee to identify areas in which Makerere could help provide the

relevant training. With the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, the joint planning committee commissioned a study to identify "Human Resource Demand from the Perspective of the District". The study helped to identify areas or gaps for which new skills were required to meet the service delivery gaps/challenges under decentralisation. This study together with guidance from the central government formed the basis for a "Capacity Building Programme for Decentralisation at Makerere", that is championing systemic institutional support to transformation at Makerere University. The planning committee worked with the findings of this study to draw up a proposal that would build capacity at Makerere University to train graduates that are immediately relevant to the needs of local governments and to conduct research aimed at improving services to the population.

The Rockefeller Foundation agreed to contribute to the proposal by providing a seed funding of US\$ 3M to kick-start the implementation of the capacity building proposal activities. At this point, the planning committee was dissolved and an Innovations at Makerere Committee, otherwise known as I@Mak.com, was constituted initially with the same representation as the planning committee.

The programme was initially open to all units (academic and non-academic) of Makerere University. Staff members from these units were free to develop proposals for reviewing existing and or/introducing new curricula aimed at training university graduates that are relevant to the needs of local governments. Additionally, the university staff would present proposals for short refresher or skills enhancement courses targeting staff already in employment in local governments. Staff were also invited to develop proposals to conduct research that would inform policy to improve service delivery.

When the World Bank came in to co-fund the programme, Makerere University and government agreed to focus the programme activities on the areas that were more relevant to poverty eradication. Thus the current phase

of the Capacity Building Programme at Makerere focuses on (i) basic health and medicine (ii) agricultural services (iii) education (iv) engineering (v) good governance (vi) financial management and training. The Capacity Building Programme for decentralisation has, therefore, been premised on poverty eradication since its inception.

In order to build more sustainable and replicable capacity for improved service delivery, it was agreed to involve selected partnering institutions to collaborate with Makerere in implementing the programme.

Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi (UMU), Uganda Christian University, Mukono (UCU), Islamic University in Uganda, Mbale (IUIU), Nkumba University and the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) were brought on board. Two non-academic institutions; the Uganda Local Authorities Association (ULAA), and the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) would also collaborate with Makerere University in the implementation of the programme.

The Government of Uganda adopted the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) in 1997 as its poverty reduction strategy. The PEAP has since been revised with an increased number of goals; economic management, enhancing

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short-term courses have been developed. Some of these courses, for example, entrepreneurship skills training, enhancing horticultural crop production in decentralised districts through training in propagation techniques and proper cultural practices directly target poverty eradication.

The project also encourages research aimed at improving service delivery in general and poverty reduction in particular. Some of the

research has been directly initiated by requests from both the central and local governments. Most of the research though has been proactively initiated by the partnering institutions, especially Makerere, based on their improved understanding of the requirements of decentralisation and the PEAR

The following specific research has been or is being carried out at the initiation of the indicated institutions.

Table 1: Research requests by both central and local governments

Institution :	Research areas
Jinja Municipal Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education • Quality of education • Education curriculum • Teacher recruitment policy
Ana District Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public-private partnership for improvement of service delivery • Survey of development in Arua • Survey and design of road network • Increasing demand for land • Participatory planning in an urban setting • Solid waste management • Impact of the urban poor on the environment • Strategies for enhancing renewal in the municipality
Ministry of Finance Planning & Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralised service delivery and poverty reduction • Labour market dynamics • Agricultural productivity and performance
Ministry of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local revenue management • Urban development and management
Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of long term residual concentrations of Dichlorodiphenyltrichloro-ethane (DDT) and its derivatives

Relevant units in Makerere or partnering institutions have been commissioned to carry out the appropriate research with a view to improving services in the above areas and therefore reducing poverty through improved service delivery.

New and future direction

The Government of Uganda recently revised the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), and came up with priority research themes to support this strategy. A "research guide supporting the eradication of poverty in Uganda, November 2004" has consequently been issued and these are the areas that we have been targeting and intend to continue with in our research programmes. The priority research

themes in the guide are pegged to the PEAP goals. Table 2 gives a summary of research themes that are believed to contribute to poverty eradication in Uganda, and as a university we are better poised to provide the appropriate and professional research. However, this is a national challenge and all higher education institutions in Uganda have to ensure that our expert knowledge is available to inform future government policy strategies on poverty eradication.

Table 2: Priority research themes for the research guide on poverty eradication in Uganda

PEAP goal	Priority research themes
1 Economic management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth • Public expenditure • Fiscal deficit • Labour market dynamics • Incomes inequality
2 Enhancing production, competitiveness and incomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural productivity • Agricultural advisory services • Small medium scale enterprises • Land tenure and utilisation • Strategic exports • Pastoralism
3 Security, conflict resolution and disaster management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causal factors underlying conflict • Cost of service delivery • Internal displacement
4 Good governance and policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional proliferation • Decentralisation • Taxation efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery • Transparency and accountability
5 Human development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant and maternal mortality • Service provisioning • Population
Broader thematic issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Vulnerability and social protection • Chronic poverty • HIV/AIDS

Source: Research Guide Supporting the Eradication of Poverty in Uganda, MoFPED, November 2004

As part of the innovations pursued by the programme, we have introduced communities

of practice through which any research results/ experiences of innovation solutions to service delivery are disseminated and/or shared. We have also introduced a regular radio programme, which runs every Saturday at 8:00 AM on Radio Uganda. We associate with other agencies/fora that participate in poverty eradication strategies to disseminate and share our research findings on poverty eradication strategies. The university hosts the poverty forum for the whole country and I@Mak.com is a key stakeholder.

Areas of possible support by the global philanthropy

Radio programme

The radio programme is becoming increasingly popular but it is only aired on one radio station. There is need to extend this programme to other radio stations and to broadcast it in more than one local language. There is, therefore, need to broadcast the programmes in many languages

to reach a wider population.

Communication strategy

There are a number of good results/lessons that have been learnt over time. There is need to communicate all these to the various stakeholders and counterparts both within and outside the country so as to market the experience and the lessons in contributing to the transformation of the university.

Translating research findings into policy

As appreciated and recognised by the research guide, it is a challenge to translate research findings into policy. As an academic institution, we need support to translate research in academic institutions into appropriate information that can be used by policy makers. Besides there is need to link the universities with appropriate policy institutions so that research findings can be put to meaningful and effective use.