

Reflections on Curriculum and Institutional Reform at the University of Dar es Salaam

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Introduction

The University of Dar es Salaam began as a constituent college of the University of East Africa in 1961. It became an independent national university in 1970. Like other post-independence institutions of higher learning in Africa, the University of Dar es Salaam was established in order to give maximum service to the people of Tanzania and their objectives and aspirations. In this context, the University had three inter-related goals:

- ▲ to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next as a basis for action or research;
- ▲ to maximise the possibility to advance frontiers of knowledge by concentrating brainpower in one place;
- ▲ to serve the high-level manpower needs of society.

The teaching-learning process was conducted within clusters called faculties. The Dar es Salaam University College began with only one faculty, namely law. As time passed, new faculties were added in the following order: arts and social sciences, science, agriculture (later transformed into Sokoine University of Agriculture), medicine (later transformed into the Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences), engineering, commerce and management, and education. Also added were six institutes: Institute of Kiswahili Research, Institute of Development Studies, Institute of Resource Assessment, Institute of Marine Sciences and Institute of Production Innovation.

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Curriculum and Needs Fulfilment

In deciding which faculty, institute or department to establish, the most important consideration was its practical relevance to the needs and aspirations of the people of Tanzania. Similarly, when scrutinising proposals for curriculum change, particular attention was paid to their ability to equip candidates with sound knowledge and skills relevant to the country's needs and aspirations. One may rightly ask here: how were the country's needs and aspirations articulated and by whom? Tanzania, as you might know already, opted for a development strategy which stressed, among others, three things: egalitarianism; rural development; and the eradication of ignorance, poverty and disease. Academics were therefore called upon to use their expertise to help the

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In the days of the University of East Africa, there was a common course called 'East African Society and Environment'. After establishing the University of Dar es Salaam, the course was renamed 'Development Studies'. The Institute of Development Studies was charged with the responsibility of teaching it as a two-unit course for all first and second year students.

**Introduction of
a compulsory
common course**

The general aims of this common course were:

- ▲ to expose students to the theories and problems of social development in the Third World in general, and in Africa and Tanzania in particular;
- ▲ to guide students to an understanding of alternative development strategies at both national and international levels;
- ▲ to enable students to develop appropriate tools for analysing and resolving development issues as they related to their

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Because of financial constraints, the field attachments have now been considerably reduced except in the professional courses.

One of the most radical attempts at reforming the curriculum was made by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the mid-1970s. The proposed reform called for the abolition of discipline-based departments in favour of outcomes-based

increasing the range of optional courses or splitting up unit courses. Some have adopted the modular system. Senate has consistently approved proposals for curriculum change so long as the supporting arguments are sound and valid. In most cases, the arguments range from the need to incorporate new knowledge, to responding to new market needs. Each case is decided on its own merit.

Between 1970 and 1990 the University experienced a number of crises. Studies were made on these crises and reports were written. The reports tended to blame the crises on the management. At first it was thought that the solution lay in a change of management style. However, between 1989 and 1991 a comprehensive review of the reports and a situational analysis of the organisation was carried out by a team of internal senior staff. Their findings were the subject of discussion at several workshops. The findings and subsequent discussions revealed that the University was plagued by a much deeper malaise than had been suspected. The University had accumulated numerous internal weaknesses at a time when its mission, objectives and functions were being challenged by other institutions in the country and in the region. Moreover, as a result of rapid changes in the national and global economy, the resource flow from the government to the University was drastically reduced over the years. These developments effectively reduced the privileged status of the University. Here was the real genesis of most of the tensions and crises that were being experienced by the University. It was therefore decided to embark upon a systematic overhaul of the whole organisation in order to adapt it to the identified threats and challenges. Its overall objective was to carry out a strategic, long-term transformation that would enable the University to overcome its weaknesses and to equip it to enable it to meet its challenges and fulfil its role in the 21st century. The Programme was divided into long-term, medium-term and short-term strategies and objectives. The overall time-frame was 15 years (i.e. 1993-2008).

Curriculum Reform and Institutional Transformation

Content of the Programme

The philosophy and concepts guiding the transformation exercise have been described in technical terms in various documents (see references below). Here I will highlight four areas around which most changes are targeted.

State-university relationships

There are two issues here that the programme is set to address: governance and funding relationships. The 1970 Act establishing the University of Dar es Salaam has been judged to be rigid and restrictive because it denies the University the kind of flexibility and adaptability that is badly needed in order to adapt to a fast-changing world. A dialogue has already started between the University and the government with the aim of either repealing and replacing the Act or amending it radically so as to give the University more autonomy and to remove outdated restrictions. The Civil Service Reform and multiparty politics have admittedly made the dialogue easier to conduct.

On the issue of funding relationships the programme envisages a move away from a budget based on the government's annual grant, to a budget based on a 'unit cost' system. Grants are never based on actual running costs but a 'unit cost' budget is based on the cost of educating a student in a given programme for an academic year or semester. This means the government will be required to cut its coat according to its cloth. Places not filled by government-sponsored students will be taken up by privately sponsored students paying the full economic fee. The University has already computed the unit cost for each faculty and the budget for the next financial year has been prepared on a unit cost basis.

Academic programmes

Here the programme is set to make four major interventions: expand student enrolment; carry out an academic audit combined with a market needs analysis; reorganise the academic units so as to integrate closely teaching, research and consultancy; and assess the quality of inputs with a view to improving them. The expansion of student intake has a double purpose: first, to improve the staff:student ratio so as to fully utilise the currently available resources of space and human capital.

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The current average ratio is 1:6; the target is 1:10. Secondly, to provide access to university education to more people in a country where the population is growing at 3 per cent but higher education has stagnated. Tanzania is losing investors because of a lack of skilled and qualified manpower.

The purpose of carrying out an academic audit is to determine the quality of the programmes, together with their relevance, level of demand, and cost-effectiveness. Of late, organisations, industries and various businesses have sprung up. The type of skills they require do not always match the skills traditionally imparted by universities. There is a need to assess the nature of their needs and respond to them accordingly. Although the University's core functions are teaching, research and consultancy, these functions are often not programmed to enrich one another. This is partly due to the existing structures of academic units which tend to compartmentalise these functions

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A number of support units were established long ago in order to satisfy a particular need. But over time they became a financial burden to the institution. The programme is set to lease out such units to private dealers, or close them down completely, or sell them off, or transform them into private companies with the University having only a share in them.

The human resource capital of administrative staff is large in terms of numbers but thin in terms of skills and qualifications. The programme is set to prune and train or retrain. It also intends to put in place clear policies and regulations to guide action. Many welfare services have been directly provided by the University. The programme is set to contract out some of these to other operators so that the University can concentrate on its prime mission of teaching, research and consultancy.

Financial resources

On financial resources, the programme is set to do three things:

- ▲ to take specific measures to improve the flow of resources to the University;
- ▲ to put in place reliable and accurate control mechanisms that will ensure that the meagre resources available are properly and wisely used; and
- ▲ to make wise provisions against accidents and other contingencies.

Measures to improve the flow of resources include the cutting out of wastage caused by laxity or excesses, the commercial utilisation of material and human resources (including land and buildings), better co-ordination of and negotiation with donor agencies, admission of more fee paying students and establishing a pact with the government so as to have sponsees financed on a unit cost basis.

Reliable control mechanisms include clear financial policy manuals and regulations, timely and accurate financial reporting, good accounting and procurement systems and procedures. The systems have already been developed and the manuals have been prepared.

Provisions against contingencies include frequent reviews of insurance policies and other financial commitments to ensure that the institution does not lose out or does not miss opportunities to make financial gains.

Achievements and Prospects

Some of the achievements of the programme so far are:

- ▲ The University now has in place long-term, medium-term and short-term plans which make it easier to monitor and forecast the general development trends. These serve as a useful tool in negotiating with funding agencies and discussing link agreements.
- ▲ A comprehensive facts and figures booklet on University of Dar es Salaam has been available since 1995 and is annually updated. The data have assisted to increase awareness of the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- ▲ As a measure of improving resource flow to University of Dar es Salaam, an intensive market study of the undergraduate programmes will be done in order to target admissions of fee paying students to popular high demand programmes. Also an investment policy on University land has been drawn up. This together with a new University Master Plan is awaiting ratification by the University's governing Council. A workshop with potential investors has already been held.
- ▲ Plans are underway to introduce entrepreneurial education to most undergraduate students in 1996/97 in order to ensure that our graduates go out to society as 'job creators' and not mere 'job seekers'.
- ▲ Under the programme, the University of Dar es Salaam has set up various teams, task forces and special committees in various strategic areas under the co-ordination of the Programme Management Unit. These groups of experts are studying and advising University of Dar es Salaam on the necessary course of action to address any observed deficiencies.

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A new finance management system is being implemented This is expected to be computerised soon.

Each faculty and institute had been able to prepare its own five-year strategic plan and to synchronise it with the University's five-year plan.

Problems

Some of the problems have been:

Encountered

- ▲ The optimisation strategy employed by individuals under difficult economic conditions makes it difficult for some staff and students to appreciate the relevance and importance of a systematic overhaul of the organisation. By its attempt to rebuild a regular and coherently functioning corporate entity, the transformation programme potentially threatens the individual's survival strategy. Such individuals naturally resist change and may even engage in disinformation about the programme.
- ▲ Uncertainty about funding or delay in the release of funds makes it difficult to adhere rigidly to time schedules and targets.
- ▲ Communication breakdown or lack of timely and accurate information has sometimes given people room to speculate or spread rumours. The programme has therefore geared itself towards improving communication through a monthly newsletter on the programme, seminars and workshops or press releases by the public relations officer.

Conclusion

Within the transformational programme curriculum reform comes at a later cycle. It is to be preceded two important exercises, namely, the carrying out of an academic audit of all faculties and institutes and an intensive study of the market impact of our programmes.

The findings from these studies will provide inputs for the most desirable form of curriculum reform. At the second consultative meeting (1995) the question was asked as to what should inspire undergraduate curriculum design within the context of the transformation programme. A multiplicity of contending views were voiced. They included the following:

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- ▲ education for general knowledge (i.e. emphasising an open-ended curriculum);
- ▲ education for survival (i.e. emphasising agility of mind and adaptability of character);
- ▲ education for critical thinking (i.e. emphasis on sound scholarship and foresight); and
- ▲ education for production (i.e. emphasis on doing in the course of learning).

The participants seem to have settled for a 'mixed grill' solution.

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Biography

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Previous Positions: Served as External Examiner in Linguistics courses at Nairobi and Kenyatta Universities. Administrative posts held include Head of Department for nine years; Associate Dean for eight years; Chief Administrative Officer for six years.