POLITICS OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING IN CAMPUS GOVERNANCE:

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INTRODUCTION

Governance of higher education involves the authority to make decisions about fundamental policies and practices in several critical areas concerning colleges and universities. These areas stretch from their number and location, their mission, their enrolment size, access of students to their instructional programmes and access of the public to other auxiliary services on offer. Other issues of concern include degree requirements, standards expected in student performance, the quality of research and public service activities, the freedom available to individual faculty members in their instructional and research efforts, the appointment of staff, internal organizational structure, the allocation of available resources to operating and support programmes. The dilemma is therefore the location of authority to resolve, manage and control these issues/contentions. As the original study, this essay is all about academic governance or democratic management of campus affairs. It focuses on managerial decision-making, causes of varsity crises, organizational life, higher leadership and stakeholder participation in management of higher education in Kenya.

The study of politics of participatory decision making in campus administration was done with support from the Association of African Universities. It covered three public universities in Kenya: the University of Nairobi, Egerton and Kenyatta Universities. Using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, the study concentrated on six main thematic areas; managerial decision making – procedures and processes, causes of varsity problems, organizational life, stakeholder participation in policy formation, leadership in

higher education and finally higher education management in the ongoing democratic transition.

The major focus however, was the nature and extent of student and staff involvement in making decisions and formulating policies, which govern higher education in Kenya. Other core areas included information processing, communication and exchange as well as motivations behind managerial and academic problems. The remarks that follow are reflections based on this study.

THE CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE

According to this study, decentralization of leadership accountability to faculty and associated departments or units has proved to be the greatest management challenge to campus administration in our times. As higher education expands, management of our universities continues to be characterized by:

- *Apparent mismatch between authority and responsibility of primary management units*

- *Limited authority at lower units*

- *Entrenched cultures giving rise to slow decision making processes and sluggish response to change.*

- *Over reliance on the committee system*

- *Diminishing institutional and group culture, among others.*

In decision-making and policy formation, the preferred choices should depend, on the contrary, on problems, available options, environment/context and persons/groups involved. The two processes must further take into account ingredients of participatory management {which coincidentally are not very common in our university structures} as:

- *Mechanisms for consultations*
- *Consensus building*
- *Policy options/alternatives*
- *Open discussions*
- *Delegation and spread of authority*
- *Concessions and implementation process.*

These ingredients are not always linked to factors which, influence stakeholder participation in college administration such as emergent policies of government, management structures, leadership styles and welfare needs. The political interference as manifested in government involvement in university affairs was found to be inimical to the development of university autonomy and academic freedom, hence compounding the problem of governance. This relationship has been commonly used as a pretext for intervention by the president (head of state) and/or his agents in university affairs. As a result of the overbearing presence of the presidency in management of universities, including key appointments, the experience of Kenyan public universities is that key policy matters are very much in the hands of the government while academics/students only have a limited say in the determination of academic and social-welfare policies.

Just as Sanyal {1995}[1]identified, part of the problems hindering decentralization and departmental management have to do with centralized bureaucracy, state interest in university governance, distrust of local level participation, lack of management know how and unwillingness to assume management responsibilities by stakeholders. For some changes to take effect in this respect, the administrative and academic wings of the university must work in a spirit of cooperation. Understanding and human touch must be present in the university campus, in the classrooms, co-curricular activities, and even purely administrative matters. Lines of communication between different sections of the university community must always remain alive, open and never allowed to get blocked. The structure of the university will have to avoid complexity in the decision-making processes, over centralization, lack of active and widespread participation by the academic staff, students, support team and inadequate channels of communication. Much of this lie outside the scope of legislation about governance of universities for it depends on the attitudes and habits of the people involved and on the interest groups present at each institution. As Kilemi earlier asserted, our study reconfirmed that conflicts (always) over living allowances, terms and conditions of service, limited representation in university governing bodies and perception of university authority as defender of state-

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[1] Sanyal C.B et al (1995) The Institutional Management of Higher Education in Western Africa.

interests as opposed to the interests of the university, compounds the crisis of governance (Kilemi, 1992)[2]

THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATION

Facilitation of greater involvement of stakeholders in college affairs came out as a serious administrative and leadership problem. The general absence of culture of regular dialogue and joint forums in our universities is manifested in rising cases of unrest. University problems have been on the increase, as mutual communication fails between the administration and students. The recurrent student unrest and staff disenchantment, are often reflections of demands for their involvement in campus governance. Rejectionist tendencies of students and their negative reactions to policy statements from the university authorities and/or decisions by their own leaders indicate ordinary students are not adequately involved in processing of decisions. The other main problem has been that of interaction and engagement between stakeholders. Due to lack of proper and established structures/mechanisms for consultation, the study revealed that, university authorities are not accessible at all, they only make appearances to consult during times of crises. This further compounds the problem of decision making as most decisions are often made under duress in crisis situations. As a result these decisions end up not being well informed because of lack of adequate/ample time/for consultation and hence the managers by and large remain reactionary.

In various ways, existing mechanisms of campus governance contribute to de-stabilizing internal and external tensions and constrain university responsiveness to the needs of local and stakeholders, as well as society in general (Saint, 1995)[3]. The other important aspect is participation in these structures. Asked to state whether they attended meetings where major decisions are made 39.05% said that they attended while 60.95% stated that they did not. The table below gives a breakdown of the level of participation in various policy organs.

Kind of meeting attended

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[2] Kilemi, M (1992) University Governance: Problems and Prospects in Anglophone Africa

Kind of Meetings	F	%
College Academic Board	6	14.63
College Management Board	3	7.32
Council Meetings	3	7.32
Faculty Board	19	46.34
Senate Meetings	5	12.20
Departmental Committees	36	87.81

It should be noted democratization of decision making is important not only because many conflicts emanate from unequal power relationships but also because universities, as advocates of democratic institutions, need to practice what they preach. Democratization of university governance could be strengthened through widening the representation of students and staff in governing bodies, increasing the voice/role of academics and students in the selection of top varsity officials and through the strengthening of staff and student associations.

The implication here is that even student leaders hardly consult with their colleagues before and after meetings of policy organs. The major problem therefore is that mechanisms for proper consultation between/among students themselves and between students on one hand the college authorities on the other, are limited, if not at all non-existent. However, as Okello (1998)[4] observes, if students and staff are involved in making decisions about salient issues concerning their lives, they are likely to identify with outcomes of such processes and colleges with institutionalized participation experience less staff/student-related administrative problems. If team approach to administration is used, then students/staff will feel more positive towards college goals and objectives. The fundamental task of campus administration is therefore to discern broad patterns of legitimate power and try to root authority in the dominant locations of interest groups.

Among the actors who must be involved in the transformation of Kenyan universities, students and junior staff are the most vulnerable and least empowered groups. Yet they

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[3] Saint, W.S (1995) Universities in Africa: Strategies for Stabilization and Revitalization, Washington D.C
[4] Okello D.O (1998) Crisis in Higher Education

possess the potential to materially advance the renewal process. Student associations[6] represent an important untapped resource in university efforts to confront the current crises. However, staff and student associations, which should serve as important avenues through which staff and student interests are articulated to the university administration and at times to the government, are not vibrant in our public universities. And lack of viable associations present a problem of communication between the various groups and the need for strong organizations is particularly important in view of the increased numbers of students and staff (Kilemi, 1996). It is worth noting that organized staff and student associations have the capacity to diffuse potential conflicts. This they can do through holding regular meetings with their members and the administration, designing mechanisms for regular communication, voicing members' grievances, restraining students from unnecessary violence, further acting as links between staff and students, government/administration and the public/wider society on social, economic and political fronts. Other than the officially established channels for internal resolution of disagreements, formal and informal meetings that promote frequent and frank discussions and invoke a sense of collective responsibility between the various interest groups and stakeholders can go a long way in resolving internal conflicts (Saint, 1995).

RIGIDITY IN MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

The administrative model in Kenyan universities has been largely hierarchical and tends to be inflexible in the face of changing circumstances. As a result they are generally unresponsive to student and staff concerns. University senates, faculty/management boards and committee structures, if properly constituted should offer real opportunities for staff and student participation in academic governance, although in most cases, the committee process contributes to management inefficiency by slowing/delaying decision making. Nonetheless as Kenyan universities expand in enrolment and organizational

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[6] Student Organization of Nairobi University (SONU) was proscribed last year for the fourth time in a decade and its leaders either expelled or suspended. Kenyatta University Students Association (KUSA) has been intimidated to submission through reprisals, while Egerton University Students Organization has been co-opted to become an appendage of the administration. Since the Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU) was outlawed in 1993/94, its leaders sacked from the universities, academic staff in our local universities have no representative body.

complexity, some decentralization of responsibility to the level of faculty deans, departmental heads and other sectoral units may be worth considering. Ensuring student representation in the various organs of university governance, briefing students at critical junctures and regularly disseminating vital information through the media to the public in general will help reduce tensions and enhance understanding (Saint, 1995).

In this kind of dispensation public universities are expected to under-guard national interests and inspire development efforts by contributing new understanding and fresh perspectives to support social, economic and technological advancement. For universities to fulfil this role, they will have to create learning environments that encourage creativity, constructive dialogue, and constant adaptation to rapidly changing scientific and societal circumstances. This requires the transformation of prevailing patterns of paternalistic governance into structures of participation and accountable leadership, which involve staff and students as equal and responsible partners. The path to this goal lies in transparency and information flow, representative participation, incentives and rewards for positive initiative and sufficient delegation of responsibility with appropriate accountability to enable follow up on their ideas.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Public universities, despite the vital role they play in providing research, expertise, and training, human resource development and in the formation of future leaders, have not been adequately targeted in the on-going democratic transition in Kenya. Although universities teach about democracy and are quite vocal about the need for popular participation in decision making, universities administrative structures and key policy making bodies are most undemocratic. For higher education to remain relevant in this era and for universities to be responsive to socio-political changes of our times, there must be a rethinking and eventual overhaul of internal governing structures, a thorough review of university Acts and statutes to create more democratic decision making processes. In the envisaged reform process it should be apparent to all staff and students that if they are not

to lose out in the competitive allocation of resources, they have to participate in overall institutional and departmental management.

As I argue for greater democratization of governance in institutions of higher learning and a more serious soul searching on the issues of governance in Kenya's public universities, I can not hesitate to rekindle the pertinent questions raised by Ochwada in 1998[7];

♦ *What makes modern higher education viable, productive and capable of progress?*
♦ *Is it compelling that power be divided, variety supported and ambiguity minimized in decision making?*
♦

opinion and responsibility within campus. This has been the most common source of friction between students and the administration, and the presence of a stable student government has been a difficult dream to attain. It concluded that a relatively stable political environment favors improvement in management, strong leadership and democratic policy making backed by control and accountability measures, accompanied by some degree of decentralization of responsibility and availability of sufficient funds to implement change. It decried the deliberate relegation by university authorities of student bodies to 'welfare units'. It recommended that the concept and practice representation should not give little authority to students as to seem no better than tokenism or co-optation into a governing process run by others, as is currently evident in Kenyan public universities.

In response to factors as financial stringency, demands for improved efficiency, need to widen participation and to changing needs of the labor market, higher education institutions will have to be necessitated to change mechanisms, structures and styles of academic leadership and institutional management. The rationale for effective participation is that students will find it easier to accept decisions whose making their representatives have had a chance in, as intimate and-controlling participants. They are more likely to understand the motives for an otherwise objectionable policy and to appreciate that the motives were not malicious even if mistaken. Institutional self-assessment and social audit will give the Universities an opportunity to use objective means in appraising their work, in evaluating their management organs and in planning their future. A framework will have to be worked out to assess their performance and effectiveness on the basis of:

- *Stability*
- *Predictability*
- *Productivity*
- *Student \ staff satisfaction*
- *Returns on invested capital*
- *Rate \ degree of growth*
- *Balancing range of conflicting demands of various coalitions and*
- *Ability to recognize and address most strategic priorities.*

All these indicators should be mirrored against the decision-making process, organs and procedures and the resultant relationship established. The overriding concern of the universities should be efficiency and productivity in the process of governance. In order to effect democratization of higher education management in Kenya, existing organizational structures, their composition, operational rules and procedures will have to be modified to be consistent with the demand for all inclusive approach to academic administration. Some of the concepts to be considered for debate in the proposed modification may include:

- *Power distribution/devolution*
- *Institutional autonomy*
- *Accountability*
- *Common goals and priorities*
- *Information sharing*
- *Democratization*
- *Flexibility and openness.*
- *Shared values and team spirit*

And in so doing the following questions will have to be addressed.

- *How best can students participate in decision making in their universities?*
- *To what extent can we democratize university decision-making structures to give stakeholders adequate representation and say?*
- *How can effective liaison between students' associations/staff unions be established to provide them with self-government and the university decision making structures as well as policy regulation offices?*
- *How can the energy of students/staff be harnessed to effect change in the institutions that they find unsatisfactory?*
- *What programs, organs and services would universities have to*

- *Organizing meetings where the administration is able to interact with the students and staff*
- *Sending important signals to the administration regarding disagreement and conflict situation that can lead to strikes.*
- *Restraining students from unnecessary violence or from making unrealistic demands.*
- *Explaining to their members the role they could play in strengthening university administration*
- *Acting as a link between staff, students and the administration, government and the wider society on social, economic, and political fronts.*

In view of the foregoing, I wish to strongly recommend that students and staff should also come up with their own evaluation, monitoring, and feed back systems to help them assess implementation of set priorities. They should have rational procedures of making decisions on appropriate action, as this will help build trust between them and the administration. However, this calls for the authorities to recognize that the university is made up of creative, questioning, and choice making individuals who want to be consulted and involved in the issues that affects their lives. Academic leaders should also appreciate that the university – as any other organization – is made up of a collection of competing groups and individuals that only corporate when it suits their private or sectional purposes. All stakeholders have their own private interests and goals to pursue or defend, and as a result, need to be given effective structures and an enabling environment to follow such pursuits without hindrance. To treat students as self-seeking individuals is to fail to see the consensual co-operative interdependence vital to any effective social system. Student unions and associations must be allowed to operate freely and independently. College administrations must show sufficient interest in students/staff and their affairs, because unless this is done, effective patterns of communication and strong feelings of social cohesion cannot be fostered.

As administrators and students encourage consultations between students and themselves, they should recognize some basic elements/imperatives for adequate consultation:

- *Consultation and consensus building should occur early in and through out the decision making process.*
- *Procedures for consultations should be uniform and fair to all parties.*
- *Adequate time should be given for responding to request for consultations.*
- *Information relevant to decision making process should be readily available.*
- *Suggestions must be adequately considered and feedback given.*

- *Decisions and their implications should promptly be communicated to all consulting groups and stakeholders.*
- *Information exchange and accommodation of conflicting needs/interests*
- *Flexibility and power distribution*
- *Institutionalization of group processes*

THE TRILEMMA OF LEADERSHIP AND CHOICE OF LEADERS

In this area of investigation we chose to discuss with respondents issues of appointment, course placement, promotions, consultation processes and access of top management officers to students and staff, discipline, due process, justice & fairness, and growth opportunities. The majority {58%} of them felt that on appointments, placement and promotions, both for students and staff, the universities have been grossly unfair. Particularly on course placement, the students have not been given affair chance to elect courses to enrol for. However 5% disagreed with this assertion arguing rather that the universities have been very fair to their students and staff. The universities have always been guided by merit when it comes to these issues/indicators. On consultation and consultative processes, a huge 70% contended that for along time, top managers of our universities have not been consistently accessible for dialogue/discussions around issues and problems which affect them within the campuses.

Closely related to the dilemma of governance, is the tri-lemma of leadership. Like all other forms of government, no matter how well intentioned or finely designed, the success of consultative decision making depends on the integrity and dedication of those who participate. This brings into sharp focus, the quality, nature, and mode of appointments of representatives to positions of leadership and to policy organs. When decisions result from consultative processes, more than one person is involved in defining the problem, in weighing alternative courses of action, in determining the implications of proposed solutions and structuring responses {Sherman, 1993}[8] With sound management techniques, efficient leadership and effective human relations practices, both vertical and horizontal consultations are essential for appropriate initiation of task oriented activities.

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[8] Sherman A.B (1993) Building Consensus for Higher Education Reform in Africa, WB.

A balance of service between the university community, the wider public and government can be achieved if those appointed to head universities are acceptable to their respective constituencies. Probably, this can be achieved partly if appointments are made through nomination processes that take into account the views of staff and students. Senates and councils should make administrative appointments from academicians within the university after wider consultations with members of the university and key partners in the private and public sectors.

As Hoy and Miskel (1982)[9] notes, higher education requires charismatic leadership which results primarily from the leader's overwhelming personal appeal. Typically this results to a common value orientation within the group to produce an intense normative commitment to and identification with the person, culture or system. Relevant and more embracing leadership skills will allow the higher education leader to enter into a contract of performance to make a difference in managing a university (Ole Moi Yoi, 1998)[10] Technical leadership is always concerned with participatory management techniques, whose examples include the capacity to plan, organize, co-ordinate and schedule with all stakeholders on board, to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness in university teaching, learning, scholarship, research and consultancy. Human leadership involves the harnessing of available human resources in ways which include building and maintaining morale, encouraging growth and creativity, providing support for staff and encouraging participatory approaches to decision-making. On the other hand, conceptual leadership invokes the ability to integrate all the elements of a system. A combination of all these leadership styles is what we need to rejuvenate higher education development in Kenya.

CONCLUSION

In order to facilitate achievement of goals, colleges must keep their publics well informed through the establishment of various communities and/or groups providing opportunities for college members and other interested stakeholders to participate in decision making. They must also provide a good system of information sharing/exchange. Since colleges

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[9] This piece was quoted extensively in Olembo et al(2000) Development of Critical Leadership Skills for Higher Education Institutions in Kenya.

belong to their publics, students, teachers, staff, and other parties should be engaged in the tasks of setting goals, performance standards, reviewing adequacy of teaching and learning programmes and feedback mechanisms. Democratization of organizational structures will allow meaningful participation of students and staff in the management of their own affairs. Since democracy is a matter of culture and social practice, and not theory, students will learn to be democratic by practicing it in their own committees, unions, classrooms and management styles. Institutionalization of consultation and democratization of policy formation processes will lead to considerable tranquillity.

A radical shift is required from the current situation where students/junior staff are passive consumers of policy decisions to one in which they are active participants in both the learning and administrative processes. As advocates of behavioral foundations of open decision models contend, premises for group decisions are powerful means of influencing individuals toward organizational goals. People's participation in tailoring decisions, which affect their lives (through negotiating committees, representation in college boards, suggestion schemes, autonomous problem-solving groups and joint consultation), is essential to effective management. Involvement of students/staff in management decisions, improves the quality of life, increases efficiency in service delivery, enhances motivation, reduces strife and develops social cohesion. If and when managerial and administrative responsibilities are shared with more stakeholders, university heads will find themselves in an environment where one of their primary functions is to serve as mediators among various interest groups {Republic of Kenya 1981}[11] If members of the university community are involved in decision making, their individual, group and institutional needs and those of broader ranges of constituencies are likely to be met by outcomes.

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[10] Quoted again in Olembo et al (ibid)

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[11] Cited in the Republic of Kenya (1998) Master Plan on Education and Training 1997 – 2000.