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Research and Knowledge Production in Private Universities and Programmes in Kenya

Introduction

The quality of research is one facet of university institutions used to assess their efficiency and effectiveness. The other facets are teaching and public service. The mission of universities is to generate and expand knowledge through research and teaching. This implies that universities should do as much research as teaching and be able to generate financial resources from research grants much as they do from teaching through tuition fees. It has been noted elsewhere in this study that because of their long history with higher education and strong economies, developed countries have differentiated institutions. Some of these institutions focus on research alone, others on teaching while others combine these functions. This option is not tenable in Africa given the small number of institutions, the lack of a vibrant indigenous capital to finance private research universities, and the economic problems facing most of these countries. The university institutions that exist therefore have to combine these services. As argued in Section Three, the quality of universities is an important component of achieving equity. In this chapter, issues on how privatisation and private higher education have affected the mission of the university in terms of research, knowledge production and dissemination in Kenya are discussed.

The research, knowledge production and dissemination mission of universities

From their establishment in the medieval period, universities were bestowed with three interrelated functions; that is research, teaching and public service. During the medieval era, universities were celebrated as sites of intellectual discovery and excitement, places for adventure and discovery of new ideas and theories (Ross 1976). The university communities (students and professors) were united by and devoted to knowledge and learning. The will to seek without limitation, and allow reason to blossom and establish truths that were disseminated to succeeding generations

through various mechanisms, such as publications and seminars were central to the functioning of universities.

The idea of the university, at least in a classical sense, incorporated the tenets of the need to pursue research. University research was distinguished by three traditions from other forms of research. The first tradition was that such research had to be based on cumulative scholarship. This form of research differed from inspirational or intuitive research which in the words of Nisbet:

...does not disparage reason, intuition or common sense. Like the first, it aims at wisdom, truth, enlightenment ... But differs from the first in the monumental emphasis that is placed on cumulative knowledge, corporate knowledge that is gained by man working in terms of the works of others; the kind of knowledge that declares the indispensability of profound learning regarding what others have said about these texts, sources and words (Nisbet 1971:31).

The above view stressed the traditional role of the university in seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake, and an emphasis on basic as opposed to applied or contract research. The aim was to build systematic knowledge required for insight and understanding. The second tradition that guided classical university research was that it had to be carried out without regard to utilitarian application or potential social gain. In other words, the search for truth was not to be influenced or directed by social needs or anticipation of material gains. A researcher's work was directed solely by his/her inner curiosity and desire to know. The last tradition was that research time and interests were to be balanced by the professors' obligation to teaching.

This classical understanding of the research mission of universities still obtains to some degree. However, certain modifications, in terms of understandings, expectations and obligations have occurred. The impetus for such changes include, but are not limited to, post-war developments at the international level, paradigm changes in the social sciences that have been occasioned by the post-Cold War ideological realignments and economic austerity in developing countries. These issues continue to determine the degree and speed of the growth of private higher education in most of Africa and their capacity to engage in research.

Post-war developments and research in universities

A discussion of post-war development in terms of the research mission of universities is important here. In developing countries, including Kenya, universities are not indigenous institutions. They were transplanted to these countries by the colonial powers at the end of formal colonialism. The university models found in former colonised countries reflect the structure of universities of the colonial powers at the time. Second, certain post-war developments influenced the re-conceptualisation of the research mission of the universities, which perceptions were also transplanted to the colonies. Among the developments were the reconstruction needs of post-war societies that required new applications of knowledge and technology, the need for

new systems of social engineering to avoid the possibility of another war, and the worldwide demand for the expansion of the higher education system.

Due to the above imperatives, arguments were made regarding the fact that the classical medieval university was isolated from society in its research function. It was also argued that research for knowledge, as an end in itself, should be amalgamated with a redefined mission of a university as a problem solving research institution. Henceforth, a university had to be evaluated as a producer, wholesaler and retailer of knowledge (Ross 1976).

Within the western colonial countries, the success of universities started to be measured in terms of providing advanced education, fostering research and scientific development and assisting their societies in the task of development (Altbach 1992). The use of higher education research findings was encouraged. Furthermore, universities became the citadels of knowledge networks that included research institutions and the means of knowledge dissemination such as journals and publishing houses. This was the idea of the university and its research function that was transferred to African countries at independence.

In terms of methodology and research protocols, most research in African universities was influenced by and depended on received western methodological and theoretical orientations, produced in western universities through programmes that claimed to build 'capacity' and 'indigenous knowledge' systems. Western countries continued to have a hold on the direction of research in African countries. Up to the 1980s, Western governments through organisations such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations gave scholarships to African students to train in Western universities. The claims of the programmes were to build local research capacity that would be instrumental in addressing African developmental problems. The training, ideas and research methods were largely western. This became the genesis of the internationalisation of social science methodologies. In a sense, this created an international knowledge system that helped to circulate ideas and maintain the research hegemony of the western university culture in African universities and scholarship (Altbach 1992).

The knowledge and institutional problems that were transferred have largely marginalised relevant research in African countries. By the 1990s, therefore, the claim of African universities to be engaging in relevant research, and disseminating the same, was suspect. Perhaps this is why there has been a continuous contention that African universities have contributed little in terms of research relevant to the development of their countries. The question that therefore continues to occupy African governments and policy makers, is 'how can higher education and its research contribute to play a more active role in the elimination of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, over-production of quality graduates?' (Ajayi et al., 1996). The other issue is to examine how the commercial logic of private higher education fits into this logic. Universities in Africa, whether private or public, face two challenges in this regard. The first is to focus their mission on solving the problems of the societies where they are located. The second is to remain relevant to the global forces that

drive higher education as an international institution. The logic of private higher education both in terms of its structures and in terms of functions fits more into the international frame than into the needs arising from specific country conditions. In any event, the growth of private higher education in Africa has been triggered more by global forces than any national planning. This reality may affect the extent to which private higher education invests in research that addresses local problems or engages in any research at all.

Ideological and paradigmatic changes in the social sciences

The central logic upon which research is carried out and solutions implemented has shifted. What is identified as a problem for research and the methodologies used to study it are subject to the dictates of certain ideological orientations. Such orientations are fashioned by the realities of power that lie with those who control the knowledge protocols and wider political economy structures that influence financial allocations. University research in Africa has for long been based on social science methodologies that were influenced by the enlightenment project of modernity. Three characteristics marked this modernity project. First was that the theories and methodologies were Euro-centric, though African researchers heavily relied on them. Second, the enlightenment project, as propounded by classical theorists, was based on a claim to a neutral value free and objective social science. Third, most of the theories that were used to research third world development issues were based on this modernity project. However, the fact that decades of the application of these theories did not help bring about development in the Third World, as in western Europe, cast doubt on their scientific objectivity. In particular, neo-liberalism has argued that the modernity research project that emphasised reason, science, progress and universal knowledge was obsolete. The neo-liberals represent an ideological sift in research protocols. The research focus of the neo-liberal paradigm is on different and culturally specific theories and categories as the new basis upon which research has to be based.

In brief, neo-liberalism by discarding the liberal enlightenment project has shifted the basis of research from purely positivist protocols to various forms of relativism, but claim to be objective by giving space to individual voices, and paying attention to local realities. Of course, there is still the contested assumption that the local, the individual voice, is not influenced by an external force. It is important to note here that private higher education focuses on the interests of individual students as clients, not as members of a large collectivity. What is critical here, and as far as this study is concerned, is to examine how a private university sector is interrogating these perspectives to produce relevant research and engage in knowledge dissemination.

Despite the shift in research paradigms, universities remain key institutions to steer the socioeconomic development of their countries through research. As Teferra & Altbach (2003) note, universities remain the most important institutions in the production and consumption of knowledge. In the increasingly global world that is being shaped by knowledge and information, establishing a strong research

infrastructure has more than ever before become a *sine qua non* (Teferra & Altbach 2003:9). They serve as knowledge brokers and training grounds for policy makers and national leaders. They create and provide a portal for the dissemination of new technologies, often acting as lead agents for the economy to absorb computer and telecommunication innovations (ASPEN 1999). For individual universities, the challenge is not to remain stuck in the old research protocols, but to be innovative in their teaching, research and public service functions. They should also be instrumental in building the human resources and stimulating social and economic development in their communities (ASPEN 1999). For the private higher education sector, especially in Africa, investing in research as much as in teaching will reflect a commitment to the development agenda of the continent. In any case, part of the justification for private higher education has been to increase access and provide the knowledge that supposedly the continent lacked in the twentieth century.

The other issue that has had a bearing on research in universities is that of globalisation. Much has been written on the political and economic implications of globalisation. Both privatisation and liberalisation of the public service sectors have been local expressions of the extent to which countries have embraced the tenets of globalisation. The idea of choice and the market in private higher education is closely tied to these processes. This implies the commercialisation of ideas, including research ideas, theoretical postulates and epistemological grounding of research knowledge. Despite these developments, the world is still characterised by inequities, unevenness, social exclusion and polarisation (Griffin & Khan 1992). In the midst of all this change, new economic, social political, cultural and linguistic problems have come up, problems that underlie the prevalence of extreme poverty, unequal gender relations, crime and deviance (Aina 1997). These problems require new rethinking, new ideological orientations, new research methodologies and techniques. Private higher education or higher education in general has to take up these problems in its research.

Universities as research institutions can be counted on to come up with new ideas to confront these crises. Universities in the developing world that do not exploit the use of electronic libraries, publication of out of print and current books on-line, and free software may stifle the research creativity of their scholars. In a globalising world where the standard and quality of life depend upon the power of knowledge, and socioeconomic development is becoming more and more knowledge-intensive, the role of higher education becomes crucial, especially in research (UNESCO 1993). However, some general observations have been made that African universities do not seem to have a comprehensive plan regarding how they can contribute to the development of their communities through research and consultancy (Ajayi et al., 1996). Many of these deficiencies are not due to a lack of scholarly capacity, but to inadequate research funding. In a privatised environment, it is imperative to document how far this situation has deteriorated, or improved.

The world conference on higher education convened by UNESCO (1998), defined a renewed vision on the mission of higher education. The vision reiterated the role

of higher education to advance, create, and disseminate knowledge. This would be achieved through research and provision of service to the community, to assist societies in cultural, social and economic development, promotion and development of scientific and technological research, as well as research in the social sciences, the humanities and creative arts (Article 1(c) 1998). This vision would be achieved through

- (a) The advancement of knowledge through research. This can be achieved by higher education systems that promote postgraduate studies. A balance should be established between basic and applied (target, oriented), research.
- (b) Higher education institutions should ensure that all members of the academic community engaged in research are provided with appropriate training, resources and support. The intellectual and cultural rights for the results of the research should be used to the benefit of humanity and should not be abused.
- (c) Research should be enhanced in all disciplines, including the social and human sciences, education, engineering, natural sciences, mathematics, information technology and the arts, within a framework of national, regional and international research and development policies. Of importance is the enhancement of research capacities in higher education, research institutions, as mutual enhancement of quality takes place when higher education and research are conducted at a high level within the same institution. The financial and material support required should be sourced from both public and private sources.
- (d) Relevance in higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. This requires ethical standards, political impartiality, critical capacities, and at the same time, a better articulation with the problems of society and the world of work based on long-term orientations on societal aims and needs. (Summarised from Articles 51 b, c and Article 61 of UNESCO 1998).

Economic austerity and research in African universities

The economic crisis of most African countries has also had a bearing on the nature of research in African universities. As has been discussed, up to the 1980s African universities received funds for research and postgraduate training from western countries. Such funding was provided within the broad political economy of Cold War imperatives, and the modernity project of universalising the social science research ethos. The end of the Cold War and the advent of globalisation reduced funding from western countries to African universities for research and postgraduate training. These conditions accelerated Africa's economic crisis with little or no funding for higher education programmes, especially research. As African countries sunk more into debt and underdevelopment, the international development paradigm changed in favour of market economics and liberalisation. This in essence meant the selling out of public enterprises to private interests, most of which happen to be western multinationals. This had direct negative implications for African higher

education, research and development agenda. The forces of globalisation and market economies reduced the demand for a high-level work force in the public service and private sector. Due to the lack of research and investment in high capital academic programmes in the universities, critical unemployment of university graduates has been accompanied with severe shortage of a skilled work force in science and technology-based areas (Ajayi et al. 1996).

The pre-privatisation period saw, to some degree, indigenous public enterprises emerging and creating a demand for relevant research in public universities. Indeed, in the case of Kenya, this study established that before the economic crisis of the 1990s, universities responded well to this mission. However, the post-1990 marketisation saw this agenda taken over by private interests, those that were able to fund research agendas, and this led to the growth of the consultancy industry outside universities.

Further, and this observation was important to this study, the decrease in research funds has led to calls for universities to establish linkages with industry. The assumptions here have been that such linkages can create an altruistic working relationship between the universities and industry where industry will fund research and the universities will produce the knowledge to benefit the industry's commercial interests. However, what is most overlooked in this line of thinking is that Kenya does not have an indigenous industrial sector. Like most developing countries, what exists in Kenya are industrial extensions of multinational corporations, and more often, basic research that aids the operation of such industries is done in their countries of origin. Of course, they engage in on the job research and training for their staff to boost productivity, but this is often small scale, and limited to applied research and does not lead to discovery of any new knowledge relevant to the socioeconomic needs of the majority of Kenyans.

The neglect of basic scientific research in universities has been accentuated by the market fundamentalism principles within which private higher education operates. Such principles have influenced universities to look at 'good' knowledge as something that guarantees university graduates jobs, or perfects their skills in doing existing jobs, not something that leads to innovation and new scientific discoveries. While admitting that their university does not engage in much research, the Vice-Chancellor of USIU noted that seventy percent of graduates from the university obtained employment or settled into private business within six months of graduation (*East African Standard*, 30 November 2005). However, and as historical evidence shows, countries develop by investing in basic scientific research that gives people new options. The present trend in the privatisation and marketisation of higher education has skewed universities to engage in applied research that only meet the 'market' needs of western industry while ignoring the development needs of developing societies

As the World Bank's (1987) report sadly attests, research in African universities collapsed in the 1980s due to the financial crisis. Good quality postgraduate training also declined. This situation jeopardises Africa's long-run ability to take advantage of the worldwide advance in science and technology (World Bank 1987:73). African

countries need to increase their capacity to absorb and use new knowledge through the development of indigenous postgraduate teaching and research programmes. Indeed, it is only through this engagement that countries can participate in the global knowledge economy as equal partners.

Level of research and postgraduate training in private universities and in programmes of public universities

Has the privatisation and marketisation of university programmes encompassed a research agenda? Field data for the study from the private programmes of public universities and purely private universities showed a mixed and inconclusive picture. For public universities, there is no system of keeping track of the research assignments of faculty members. The number of faculty members engaged in research is difficult to establish, as universities do not have a centralised system where such information is reported. The repeated responses from both public and private universities was that 'very few' lecturers are engaged in any research. The regular schedule of most lecturers in public universities is divided into three: teaching regular students, teaching private students in public universities, and teaching part-time students in private universities. In this regard, it is important to point out that most private universities engage about 60 percent of their staff as part-time personnel from public universities. Besides, the rigours of writing and applying for research grants have made teaching a quicker option to make money.

Universities also encouraged the above trends by pegging the amount of money paid out for teaching private students to the number of hours and students taught. The effect of this proviso has been that most lecturers have been unable to qualify for promotion due to a lack of research experience and publications. Most of the teaching staff stagnates at the lecturer rank for a long time. Statistics compiled by this study from records held by CHE indicated that as of 2003, some 3.7 percent of the teaching staff in public and private universities was at the rank of professor, 7.2 percent as associate professors, 21 percent as senior lecturers, 51 percent as lecturers, and 18 percent as assistant lecturers. Comparisons between public and private universities are of course more revealing. The University of Nairobi had 4.2 percent of its staff as full professors against 52 percent of lecturers. At Moi University, the figure was 2.6 percent against 66 percent. Kenyatta University had 4.4 percent against 44 percent, while Jomo Kenyatta had one percent professorial staff compared to 53 percent as lecturers. At the private universities, UEAB had 4.5 percent full professors and 54 percent lecturers. CUEA had one percent full professors against 27 percent lecturers and 49 percent assistant lecturers. Daystar had 46 percent lecturers against 3.6 percent associate professors. USIU had a different distribution, with 13 percent full professors, 40 percent senior lecturers, and 21 percent lecturers. It should however be pointed out, but not to a point of generalisation, that most professors in private universities migrated from public universities after failing to meet research and publication conditions for promotion.

The encouragement of teaching and more teaching has distracted lecturers from balancing their obligations for teaching, research and community service. To the universities, this may be seen as a short-term financial saving. Having most staff at lecturer level translates into less financial allocation for salaries, as lecturers are not highly paid. These are tentative indicators that privatisation has been a bane for research and knowledge production both in public and private universities. The involvement of lecturers from public and private universities in research that is not reflected in the academic activities of the universities reinforces Mkandawire's (1998) observations. The privatisation era has been accompanied by the growth of the consultancy industry that does not reflect the movement towards a more knowledge-intensive development strategy by national governments but a growing incapacitation, and even marginalisation of the African states, and the preponderance of donor interests.

An analysis of the volume of budgets that universities vote for and actually expend for research can provide an indication of institutional commitment to this course. Even during the pre-privatisation days, budgets for research in public universities had been substantially reduced. One of the arguments for privatisation was that private sector participation could provide the much-needed money for research. However, the market logic of private higher education lays a focus on short-term intensive training while most research at least in its basic orientation is a long-term process. Relevant training, especially on the job, in the form of executive undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is now the norm in most private education institutions. Such programmes do not give an adequate academic grounding for a research oriented scholarly community. Comparing budgets for research, the forms of research and the participants of such can unravel the direction of research under a privatised higher education system.

Among the private universities, CUEA provides the most elaborate research agenda complete with a research committee and funds voted for the purpose. The university has a Department of Research that coordinates the evaluation of research proposals from faculty, awards research funds and peer reviews research reports for publication. The mission statement of the department is stated as 'the undertaking of independent and collaborative research work across departments of the university in order to inform social and economic policy and monitor implementation of programmes'. The extent to which the university's research work links to policy is however not stated. There was evidence also that research agendas largely reflect the religious orientation of the university. The mandate of the research committee entailed the following:

- The promotion and coordination of relevant scientific research in the faculties and departments of the university;
- The promotion of collaboration between CUEA and Catholic institutions involved in higher education;
- The organisation and coordination of inter-faculty staff seminars;

- The promotion of research collaboration with other universities and higher education institutions;
- Collaboration between faculty and the faculty research committee of the university in matters of research;
- Assessment and approval of research proposals submitted for funding;
- Maintenance of a register of approved research proposals.

The university operates and allocates research grants into different categories.

- (a) Faculty research grants, which are meant to help faculty conduct research on a topic of interest. Five research grants are offered each year on a competitive basis. The amount for each grant does not exceed Ksh 150,000 (US\$ 2,000).
- (b) Faculty research grants for graduate study include five awards each year for faculty members who are doctoral degree students. The amount of this grant does not exceed Ksh 150,000 (US\$ 2,000) per year.
- (c) A Departmental research project fund is targeted at support for departmental projects. The amount voted for each department per year does not exceed Ksh 100,000 (US\$ 1,333).
- (d) A research capacity building fund is earmarked to be used by CUEA staff to organise short courses on research. The amount available under the vote did is limited to Ksh 100,000 (US\$ 1,333) per year.
- (e) Project and activities grants are awarded each year for innovative projects addressing the situation of the underprivileged. The amount of the grant is limited to Ksh 200,000 (US\$ 2,666) per year.

At USIU, the largest secular private university, there was no evidence of allocation of funds for research and development. The university had no allocation for research or public functions for the academic years 1999–2000 to 2004–2005.

At the other private universities, claims of accomplished or ongoing research could not be confirmed. It is possible that some of these were individual consultancies by the few members of staff who were on permanent employment. The view of research at the institutions was linked to their missions as Christian institutions. The mission statements of the institutions show a commitment to revealed knowledge. All the universities stress the belief that knowledge comes from God, and should be used for purposes of building faithful Christian communities. At Daystar University, for example, the purpose of their research programme is stated as to ‘understand the various people and groups in Africa in order to develop effective means of communicating the gospel’. Examples that were given of the university’s research programme were studies on

- The un-reached peoples in Kenya;
- The Nairobi church survey;
- The Kenya Youth survey.

The university’s research programme is offered at the level of a two-year diploma in ‘Research and consultation’. The university also has an institute of Christian ministries

and training (ICMT), which provides short-term training on 'Research and Consultancy'.

Generally, the four private universities have not taken up research as a core component of their programmes. The other private universities that are not covered in this study, but which were reviewed briefly in Section Two, are still establishing themselves. The only larger secular university, USIU, indicated after establishing as a teaching university, integrating research into their programmes was the next agenda. Private higher education in Kenya has therefore had much more focus on teaching than research.

The issue of research and knowledge production in private higher education institutions that are being established in many developing countries is critical. Elsewhere in this study the point has been made that given the demand and the size of the university sector in Kenya, institutions have to combine the teaching function, the development of new knowledge function, and the provision of services to society function. There are always claims that private higher education should focus on absorbing demand and teaching only those skills that the economy demands, as these have been the imperatives driving the growth of the sector. Investing in research would however deepen the relevance of private higher education institutions. Progress in the era of globalisation and privatisation depends on the knowledge economy, and universities are critical as generators and disseminators of new knowledge. Focussing on research will therefore enhance the relevance of private higher education to the 'marketisation' process and the development needs of societies where they are located. The globalisation era that has spurred the growth of private universities sees research not as an option but an important imperative of higher education institutions.

The public universities present diverse situations. The opening up of public universities to private students was meant to generate extra income for the universities to utilise in shoring up their defences against deteriorating standards. Part of this revenue, it was thought, would be voted for research. More of the funds generated however have ended up being utilised in other areas not related to the universities' core mission. At the University of Nairobi for example only one percent of the funds generated from the private programmes from during the period from 1997 to 2002 was allocated to research (Kiamba 2003:11). This sum can be compared to the 41 percent, 10 percent and 9 percent that was allocated to salaries, capital development and utilities respectively. The other universities have developed a system where 5 percent of the income generated is voted for research. This does not however translate into much money given the size of the universities and the fact that some academic areas, especially medicine and the sciences, require large capital outlays. For example at Kenyatta University, about Ksh 3 million (US\$ 40,000) was voted for research in the 2003–2004 academic years. Once distributed each of the six schools of the university received an average of Ksh 500,000 (US\$ 6,666) to distribute among faculty members for research. This money would not accomplish much.

Public universities however receive money from the government and donors for research. In the 2004–2005 period, the government allocated Ksh 700 million (US\$ 933,333) to be distributed to the universities for research by the National Council of Science and Technology. Public universities also access donor funds for research through collaborative arrangements. The University of Nairobi's medical school was for example involved in a collaborative research project on a vaccine for AIDS with John Hopkins medical school. The research spearheaded by the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) and the Kenya AIDS Vaccine Initiative (KAVI), however got entangled in problems of rights to patents that accompanied the funding. At Kenyatta University, lecturers from the School of Environmental Sciences were involved in research related to the organic growing of maize. The collaborating agency was the International Centre for Research on Agriculture and Forestry (ICRAF). There are also regional bodies that award research funds on a competitive basis. Some of these institutions are the inter-university Council of East Africa (IUCEA), located in Uganda and the Institute for Capacity Building and Development (AICAD) located in Kenya and housed in the compound of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology. Pan-African institutions such as OSSREA and CODESRIA have also always provided research grants to budding scholars.

The research grants from regional and pan-African institutions are not restricted to the public universities. The number of faculty from private universities who enter these competitions successfully is however small. Even in public universities, research grants revolve around a few lecturers who regularly enter the competitions. As earlier mentioned, the choice is between teaching and leaning towards research. Public universities, because of their long history and large faculty, have lecturers who desire to concentrate on research and others who want to teach. In the private universities, given their relatively short history, a research tradition has not taken root. Besides, private universities initially attracted lecturers who wanted to make more money through part-time teaching. These lecturers still account for a higher percentage of the faculty in these universities. A research focus and tradition has therefore yet to emerge in the private university institutions.

Public universities however have another advantage in terms of accessing research funds. Most donor funds for research target strengthening the capacity of public sector institutions where the universities fall. Besides having the human resources for research therefore, this latter factor gives them an edge over private universities.

Besides the availability of funds, the research culture of universities is nurtured through relevant postgraduate teaching and research. The study sought to establish what implications the privatising of public universities and the development of private higher education had had on this aspect. Postgraduate training is important in terms of building a future cohort of researchers who will take over from old and retiring faculty members. The number of postgraduate students who enrol and graduate, especially at PhD level, on research-based courses, is therefore an important indicator of institutional commitment to research.

A noticeable trend in private higher education institutions is the enrolment of postgraduate students in a few specific programmes that have been defined as 'marketable' and offered through course work. This means that courses that enable students to get job placements as soon as possible are emphasised. Topping the list of these courses are Bachelor of Commerce and Masters of Business Administration (MBA) options. At USIU, these options generate the bulky of the university's operating revenues as they enrol about 85 percent of the total student population. At CUEA, most students enrol for business studies, accounting, business administration, marketing and management of resources and finance. According to the university registrar, the demand for these courses is so high that students who did not meet the requirements were willing to enrol for bridging courses. The registrar noted that 'high school leavers walk into my office and say they want to study B.Com. When I ask what they want to specialise in, they are lost for words' (Registrar, CUEA, quoted in the *East African Standard*, 8 April 2004:7).

A high concentration of postgraduate training in both the private and public universities is at the masters level. A majority of these students are driven by the desire for career mobility with an added masters degree, and do not aim at pursuing an academic career. This is not to imply that systems of postgraduate training should be tailored to produce career academicians. Any system should have the capacity to rejuvenate itself in a sustainable manner. Academicians deal with knowledge production through research and institutions should factor training in such areas as core to their functioning. Besides, the whole idea of providing diversity should be viewed from both a structural and functional perspective. Structurally in terms of curricula that cater for diverse interests and functionally in terms of producing graduates who fit varied societal expectations. Postgraduate training, even in a privatised higher education system, should strike a balance between the immediate concern of individual students and the market and long-term training needs of the academic community.

The craze to register for masters degree courses for the purpose of career mobility affects the disciplines of business education, commerce, law, and education. At Kenyatta University, in the School of Education for example, about 90 percent of privately sponsored postgraduate students (masters level) are registered in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning. Most of the students are serving teachers who view an added degree in Educational Administration as a gateway from the classroom to central administration in the hierarchy of the Ministry of Education (personal communication, with M. Ed. students). However, fewer and fewer of these students reapply to come back for higher academic degrees. The story is the same at the University of Nairobi. During the 2004–2005 academic year, there were only 43 students enrolled for the Bachelor of Science, mathematics, course compared to about 300 in psychology. The faculty of law was most popular with 1,000 undergraduate students, but this popularity was not matched at postgraduate level where only 33 students had registered for masters degrees. The reason given for this was that 'lawyers still make money even without higher degrees' (personal communication with law degree students). This perception affects most of the

competitive degree course offered by the university such as commerce, medicine and all engineering courses. This means that the privatisation and liberalisation of higher education has made universities lose their role as custodians of knowledge, except where that knowledge is related to some economic gain.

Postgraduate education at most of the private universities is limited to the level of masters degrees. CUEA however has a few students registered for PhD degrees. Both USIU and CUEA also indicated they had given scholarships to some faculty members to go overseas for PhD training. The number of lecturers could however not be ascertained. The slow development of PhD level training for staff development in private universities is perhaps a cost-saving measure fuelled by reliance on part-time lecturers from public universities. Their capacity for mounting academic and policy research is therefore low. The overriding motivation for launching new academic programmes in the private institutions and programmes were:

- (a) The capacity of the programme to generate more money for the institutions;
- (b) The capacity of the programme to be self-sustaining such that the institutions would not be obliged to subsidise its operations;
- (c) The capacity of the programme to attract the highest number of students, sometimes irrespective of entry qualifications; and
- (d) The positive evaluation of the programme by the 'market' in terms of how soon graduates could secure employment and attendant remuneration.

Such rigid considerations do not only limit the number of postgraduate students, but also accord less space for any purely academic research to generate knowledge for knowledge's sake. Table 4.0 summarises the number of degrees granted by USIU from 2000–2004. This summary illustrates the absence of PhD-level training. This illustration is important in relaying the situation of the other private universities, since USIU is the largest secular private university.

Table 4.0: Degrees granted by USIU by level, 2000–2004

Years	Total number of degrees	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Others
2000	435	387 (88.97%)	48 (11.03%)	0	0
2001	587	517 (88.07%)	70 (11.93%)	0	0
2002	502	416 (82.87%)	86 (17.13%)	0	0
2003	702	597 (85.04%)	105 (14.96%)	0	0
2004	483	386 (79.92%)	97 (20.08%)	0	0

Source: USIU Data Element Report, 2005

The conclusion that can be deduced from this discussion is that private universities and programmes attract many more undergraduate than postgraduate students. Postgraduate programmes are concentrated at the level of masters degrees, and in a few areas that in the perception of students enhance their chances for employability and job mobility.

Lastly we can refer to courses in research methodology. From the outset, it should be pointed out that there is growing public opinion in Kenya to the effect that privatisation has distorted and subverted the research mission of higher education (see the *East African Standard*, Blackboard section, 18 February and 30 November 2005 issues). Views are expressed that private higher education has lowered the standards of education and that a good research agenda and the relevance of academic programmes are still hostages of inadequate funding, that universities are generally resistant to reforms, and their mission has been compromised by too much teaching and no research. This mission entails the search for truth and generation of new knowledge without undue influence by the need for commercial application or external justification. It also includes the preservation and transmission of this knowledge. In contrast, the norms of private business practices negate the established traditions of the academic profession that require professional autonomy in matters of research, and a less materialist culture.

An analysis of the teaching programmes of the four private universities revealed a lack of specific programmes for teaching research methods, issues, paradigms and protocols. This means that students at the institutions do not enjoy any critical exposure on how to conduct field studies in the social or physical sciences. Postgraduate programmes at the institutions are also not well developed in terms of course contents and student numbers. The most developed postgraduate degree in the private universities is the 'executive' Master of Business Administration (MBA). The research component of the programme utilises applied research protocols limited to library desk reviews, and therefore inadequate to generate critical basic knowledge.

In the private programmes of public universities, courses on research methodology are offered in the relevant disciplines. However, there is a persistent strong feeling among students that the courses are not given adequate depth to enable students to conduct independent fieldwork research. Whereas in the pre-privatisation days, postgraduate degrees at masters level were offered through course work, examinations and thesis, this has changed to course work, examination and 'project' in most departments that have high student enrolments. The thesis component of the masters degree gave the students a chance to try their hand at independent fieldwork research, of course under the guidance of a senior scholar. The masters by 'project' degree option does not expose a student to any fieldwork experience at all. The implication here is that universities are now registering students for PhD studies who have not had an adequate grounding in fieldwork. This becomes a concern since public universities offer PhD training through supervised fieldwork only. There is no course work component integrated. Since students who register for PhD programmes have not had any experience of conducting fieldwork, universities

are contemplating introducing course work on research methodologies for such students. The University of Nairobi had introduced such a component.

The project component of postgraduate degrees is often limited to library research. The usage of the word 'research' has come to connote not a serious collection and interpretation of raw data to generate knowledge, but a desk review of academic works already done, which may not have been a product of any fieldwork. The numbers of students opting for the 'project' alternative are always more than those who endeavour to undertake fieldwork and write a thesis. For example in the 2003–2004 academic year, out of a class of 4,000 students in the faculty of commerce at the University of Nairobi, 1,600 were undertaking MBA degrees through project work (field data). In the faculty of education, of the 8,000 students studying education and liberal arts, 450 of them were undertaking M.Ed and MA (Education) under the project option. At Kenyatta University, in the Department of Educational Administration, the largest department of the school, about 286 students were registered for Masters Courses between 2002 and 2004. Only 41 of these students had indicated any intention of undertaking fieldwork for their programme by thesis, while the rest opted for the project arrangement (field data).

The field data reported above reveal curious trends. In private higher education institutions, not much critical reflection is given to the teaching of research methodologies. Most students are not interested in education for its own sake. This tends to the utilisation of applied research paradigms, thereby subverting the generation of critical basic knowledge. The Christian orientation of the private universities also seems to discourage critical fieldwork methodologies. In the private programmes offered at public universities, students are encouraged to register and complete quickly in order to make room for another cohort for the purpose of making more money for the institution. Students for their part do not want to take the fairly long, but critical, road of research by fieldwork and thesis. This results in most students taking the 'project' option that does not demand a firm grounding in objective research protocols.

It has been indicated that research and knowledge production in African universities has been strongly influenced by western social science in terms of methodologies and research protocols. There has however been the consistent demand from the scholarly community for an indigenous African intellectual research methodology. This is considered important as African developmental problems are unique to Africa and require approaches and solutions grounded on African epistemological thinking and responses to such. However, this challenge does not seem to be addressed by private higher education institutions and programmes. The students registered for postgraduate programmes in private institutions also do not want to take the field research option which take time, but short-term projects that can offer them a quick exit and promotion in the job market.

The relevance of research

Research has two major functions for society. In its basic sense (basic research), it generates new principles and knowledge that are the foundations for social transfor-

mation. This makes it possible for an enlightened populace who are able to be innovative and create the social and cultural base for development. In the applied sense (applied research), solutions to key problems are discovered and applied to their resolution. In any society, a key balance between basic and applied research is necessary to create a functional continuum between the general knowledge available and the use of such knowledge to advance the cause of human development. African development problems are known. They constellate around poverty, disease, the lack of managerial skills and the lack of a human capital base for science and technology to take off.

Except the private (parallel programmes) in public universities, the other private institutions are non-indigenous, some obtaining their funding from their countries of origin and religious based organisations, to transmit some knowledge about the societies they represent. Even in the case of public universities, there is constant encouragement that they should work with the private sector for research funding. Unfortunately, countries like Kenya do not have a vibrant indigenous private sector that can combine a nationalist vision to finance research for local problem solving.

The issues of relevance of research were central to this research project. In countries where there are partnerships between private universities and industry, the research agenda is likely to be abstracted from the problems of local communities. Those who fund industry may insist that the skills they require for their industries are included in the curriculum. Industries also may finance research that they find important for their immediate application, not for the utilisation of solving the problems of the communities where they are located. The extent to which global interests can benefit from local academicians without commensurate capital returns has been illustrated with the AIDS research that involved IAVI and KAVI at the University of Nairobi. There are also other issues, such as those related to research patents, and the confidentiality of research findings, which may alter the nature of research in privatised higher education environments, as industrial firms are not interested in basic research, but skewed towards applied and profit-making issues. Research issues that have broader public and social relevance may conflict with the needs of private sector financiers. This can undermine the public service mission of the university. In Kenya, as universities are privatising and marketing their courses, they are being encouraged to be sensitive and serve the immediate needs of society, but the private sector that should fund research also has its interests. This may have implications for the organisation of curriculum, the nature and scope of research, and the relationship between society and the university.

As pointed out, there was a paucity of research at the private universities. The research programs at Daystar University target only Christian communication and consultancy. This focus limits its scope to address social problems in a broader context. Within the private university context, only CUEA has a defined programme of research and themes that address both religious and secular social issues. The main thrust of research at CUEA is in the area of enculturation and contemporary social issues. The university also has a proviso for members of the faculty who

compete for the various research grants to adhere to a research ethos. This is intended to encourage originality in research and avoid fabrication, falsification and plagiarism. The University identifies priority areas for research. The themes that had been identified for funding during the 2004–2005 academic year were:

- African Christianity and enculturation;
- Indigenous knowledge systems;
- Integrated rural development;
- HIV/AIDS;
- Empowerment of disadvantaged groups and communities;
- Good governance; and
- Human dignity.

The other private universities do not have much focus on research. This is particularly a concern at USIU, as it is a large secular university that has operated in the country over a long period. It is of course possible that faculty members in the institution undertake some research. However, these could be private initiatives not reflected in the academic programmes of the university. The private universities, besides CUEA, do not have any research policies in terms of funding, execution and dissemination.

The public universities, despite privatisation that forced most lecturers to focus on teaching, still boost critical human capital in research. The problem facing public universities is lack of adequate funds for research. The few research projects that were ongoing in the public universities were critical to national and regional development imperatives. Sustaining the research tempo in public universities in the context of privatisation remains a challenge. The percentage of funds allocated for research needs to be raised to reflect the commitment of the institutions to their mission. Privatisation should not transform public universities into purely teaching institutions. The universities should be doing as much research as they are teaching.

Systems of knowledge dissemination and transmission

Knowledge derived from research is supposed to be disseminated to various stakeholders for it to be useful. The stakeholders for university-level research are the government, the financiers (private sector, NGOs, etc.), academic peers, and the local communities served by the university. For this goal to be achieved in substantial manner, it is imperative that:

- Faculty members engage in research on topics and issues relevant to their calling and that of the stakeholders, on a continuous basis. Research also includes the teaching content by faculty members, as it serves as a means of knowledge renewal.
- Faculty members must regularly publish their findings in books and journals of academic repute as a way of sharing knowledge with peers.
- Through seminars, faculty members can summarise such research findings in academic newsletters, newspapers and as abstracts in avenues that have a wider circulation.

- Attendance and presentation of research findings in learned conference and seminars.
- At the university level, there should be various units where faculty members can post and access latest research topics and findings. These include well-stocked libraries linked to the Internet, research bureaux, and research and policy units.

CUEA, among the private universities, has in place systems of knowledge dissemination and transmission. The university publishes a journal, *The Eastern African Journal of Humanities and Sciences*. This journal is dedicated to the scientific research, and is published twice a year by the Department of Research at the university. CUEA also publishes a quarterly newsletter that contains information on the latest research by faculty members, funding, scholarships, conferences, workshops, seminars and general research activities. Such avenues for dissemination of research findings are not common in the other private universities. The universities connect to the community through open days and outreach or community service activities. The activities are however meant to 'market' the programmes of the universities rather than to disseminate any new knowledge.

At the public universities, research and publications have declined considerably with the advent of private students. This reflects the wider problem of funding to support broad based research, journal publications and subscriptions. To qualify for promotion, lecturers have sometimes had to pool finances and other resources to meet the costs of publishing their works. Such investments however only pay back in terms of promotion. Buying and selling of academic materials has considerably declined even among lecturers. A book on Development Studies whose publication had been funded through resource pooling to which one of the lecturers for this research participated had stayed for two years on the office shelves without a single copy sold, despite advertisements within the universities.

The large numbers of students coming through the private programmes do not translate into a ready market for educational materials that lecturers can invest in. In all the public universities, printing and photocopying bureaux have become a thriving business as students increasingly rely on photocopied notes and book chapters. Noticeably, this photocopying has been extended to thesis and projects by masters degree students. In a private market system, the options that are available to both consumers and providers target the improvement in quality. The development of private higher education in Kenya contradicts this tendency. Systems of knowledge creation and dissemination have been eroded in favour of practices that encourage entry and exit with ease.

The erosion of a research culture has been undermined more by the high need for lecturers occasioned by the establishment of the private universities in an environment where qualified teaching staff were lacking even before privatisation. The movement of staff from public to private universities on promotion without reference to standing in research and publication was one indication of this malaise. The efforts of public universities to stem this exodus, and other considerations

through the relaxation of the criteria for academic promotion from one based on research and publication, in favour of more ambiguous ones, have led to the serious decline of scholarly discourse. In Kenyan public universities it is common for the criteria for promotion to change depending on the personalities involved. There are those who have been promoted on merit based on academic work and classroom teaching. These are however few. Most are promoted on grounds of administrative duties not related to academic work. In one of the public universities covered by this study, the assessment marks awarded to administrative experience for the purpose of promotion were higher than those allocated to research and publications.

The criterion for promotion is sometimes never fixed and rationalised. It is negotiated from time to time according to the identity and personality of applicants due for promotion. Moreover, in some bizarre cases, moving from one university to another without any evidence of scholarly work merits promotion. This is common in newly established public universities and all private universities. Hence there are lecturers who became associate professors by moving to one university and then movement to another makes them full professors. These practices demean the quality of academic work, especially research. Senior staff who have been promoted without due regard to their scholarly output are unlikely to inspire this in their students and the young generation of scholars.

Lecturers in Kenya public universities can be categorised into four groups, according to the findings of this study:

- (a) Those who are engaged in teaching are the majority and are paid between 35 and 45 percent of the moneys generated from the tuition fees paid by private students;
- (b) A small percentage are engaged in consultancy, often in areas not related to strict scholarship and their own academic fields;
- (c) An even smaller percentage engages in critical field research and seeks research funds independently from the universities;
- (d) Those who have taken full time administrative appointments, such as heads of departments, heads of schools, directors and registrars. Among this category there are those who have rotated from one position to another as if scared to venture into the classroom or university activities that are strictly related to academics.

The above classification is important as it explains the lack of emphasis on research and knowledge dissemination at the universities. Noting that some professors stop doing research and publishing immediately they obtain their final promotion, public universities are now suggesting the hiring of professors on contract with renewal pegged to research output and publication. (Memorandum to the public universities inspection board presented by Prof. G. Magoha, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi, 2005). Some of these developments indicate the extent to which privatisation and private higher education have altered the logic of research and dissemination of knowledge.

The study did establish the availability of digital libraries at both private and public universities. This allowed lecturers and students keen on advancing their scholarly horizons to access the latest journals and research findings online. There was no evidence, however, of journals and research processes by the faculty from the universities covered in this study posted online.

Conclusions

The development of a critical research agenda is one challenge that private higher education institutions have to overcome. Although they have gained prominence as teaching institutions, their relevance would be enhanced if national research priorities were integrated into their programmes. The private higher education sector in Kenya is dominated by religious based institutions that are established locally. The presence of multinationals in the provision of higher education is limited to the AVU and a few other small-scale franchise operations. While this fact may limit the amount of funds at the disposal of private universities to expend on research, it creates room for them to develop a locally relevant research focus, free from multinational interests in the medium term.

The public universities boast of good levels of human capital to deploy for research purposes. Funding has been a problem. The universities have also been operating without a defined research policy. The controversy between the IAVI and KAVI at the University of Nairobi was a consequence of this lack of policy. The intended establishment of a research policy by the University (*East African Standard*, 26 November 2005:1), should be the case in all the other universities.