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Plenary A: Skills for Tomorrow

***Graduate Unemployment in Africa: Causes,
Consequences and Responses***

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Outline of Presentation

1. Need for Skilled Workforce
2. Tertiary Education Enrolment
3. Graduate Unemployment in Africa
 - a) Quality
 - b) Relevance
 - c) Employability Skills
 - d) University–Productive Sector Linkages
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I. Need for Skilled Workforce

- Close relationship between a country's economic development & the proportion of its skilled workforce - human capital development is a major strategy used for national development
- Africa has experienced laudable, consistent economic growth and development over the past decade; for it to be sustained requires more skilled workers
- Africa is also the region with the highest rate of population growth; it is estimated that about 11m youth in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) will be joining the labour market every year
- Yet, all indicators show acute shortages in trained workforce at all levels in SSA: this could hamper the continent's future economic, social & sustainable development

2. Tertiary Education Enrolment

- SSA has the lowest tertiary education enrolment ratio (GTER = 8%) than any other world region
- Hence the need for African countries to increase their tertiary enrolment
- Paradoxically, there has been a dramatic increase in tertiary student enrolment in all SSA countries over past decade (by 6 - to 10-fold from 2000 to 2011)
- This is mainly because of increase in access to and output from primary & secondary education sectors - this will continue
- For social and political reasons, African univs have had to increase their enrolment well beyond their carrying capacity, hence increase in graduate output; again, this will continue

3. Graduate Unemployment (1/2)

- Almost every African country is facing graduate unemployment - in some countries figure is alarming
- A recent British Council study showed graduate unemployment rate in Nigeria was 23%; estimated figures for Ghana was 41% and Kenya 16%
- In Kenya, on average it takes 5 years for a student to secure a job
- Social & political consequences of large unemployment among youth can be serious, e.g. 2011 'Arab Spring' uprising
- Theme for AAU's 2013 General Conference was 'Graduate Employability and Socio-Economic Development,

3. Graduate Unemployment (2/2)

Four main, inter-related reasons for graduate unemployment in Africa:

- a. Poor **Quality** of higher education provision
- b. Poor **Relevance** of programmes & institutions
- c. Poor **Employability Skills** of graduates
- d. Poor **University-Productive Sector Linkages**

3(a). Quality

- Rapid expansion of tertiary enrolment & lack of funds have led to deterioration of quality in univs: poor & insufficient infrastructure, shortage of faculty, etc.
- In a 2014 survey in 5 East African countries, employers reported 51-63% of graduates to be 'half-baked'
- In 2011, Engg Reg Board of Kenya refused to recognize engg degrees from 3 leading public univs: poor curricula, lack of qualified lecturers, shortage of facilities
- In 2010 in Nigeria, accreditation of several academic depts of over 20 univs withdrawn by National Univs Commission because of lack of infrastructure & qualified staff
- In 2011, Council of Legal Education of Kenya rejected applications to practice law from graduates of several public & private univs

3(b). Relevance

- Programs in social sciences & humanities still dominate most univs – more STEM courses are needed in Africa
- Univs do not undertake regular surveys of labour market skills demand to determine their course offerings – such surveys at national level are rare and usually too vague
- Few univs in Africa carry out regular graduate tracer studies, so they have poor feedback on how their graduates fare in employment
- Curricula are rarely revised to suit changing skills demand in labour market
- Africa needs not only graduates but also (perhaps more) practically-trained technical diploma holders. But most polytechnics are upgraded & converted to univs and are not replaced

3(c). Employability Skills

- Whole approach to teaching is still aimed at passing exams – students not trained to become knowledge seekers
- Employers' surveys regularly show that graduates lack 'soft skills' (oral communication, team-working, problem-solving) – often valued more than disciplinary knowledge of students
- Graduates are often trained to be employed in one sector, yet employment situation is constantly evolving in Africa & students do not have skills & competences to adapt to changing situations
- Employment opportunities are becoming rare in Africa & students are not trained to become entrepreneurs – to become job providers rather than job seekers

3(d). University-Productive Sector Linkages

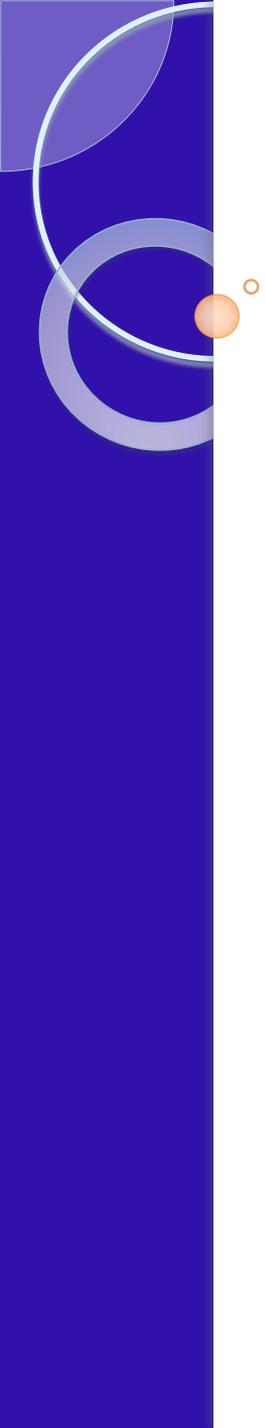
- Linkages between univs & the community (business, & industry, public bodies, rural areas) are weak & univs are often cut off from world of work
- Univs do not make sufficient effort to bring stakeholders to their campuses & to reach out to them
- Univs should employ industry/business professionals as adjunct faculty, involve them in their governing bodies & seek their advice on curricula
- But private sector, now the largest employer of graduates, also share responsibility. They are major beneficiaries of HE & they must offer student internships, provide soft skills training, sponsor students & contribute financially

4. Ways Forward

- Appropriate formulae must be found to fund public HEIs. Cost-sharing & tuition fees should be seriously considered
- National QA agencies must be established, as well as internal QA system in all univs to ensure quality
- Need to stop creating new univs if physical & human resources are lacking & converting polytechnics to univs
- Univs must ensure the relevance of their programmes to labour market needs and place greater emphasis on employability of their graduates
- Univs can no longer operate as ivory towers; they must link up with the productive sector in all their activities - the onus is on them, not the community

5. Conclusions

- The paradoxical situation of African countries having to substantially increase their tertiary enrolment, and yet large numbers of graduates remaining unemployed, must be urgently addressed
- African countries need a differentiated HE system that provides a diversified workforce in response to their development priorities
- Matching skills to labour requirements, whether at national or institutional level, is not easy, but it must be done
- Under its Partnership for Science, Engineering & Technology (PASET) project, the World Bank is assisting several African countries to undertake a national survey to identify their current skills gaps and future skills demands so as to match these with educational provisions – should be replicated in all countries
- Large graduate unemployment will not only hamper economic progress in Africa, but it could also threaten its social stability



THANK YOU