


**THE ROLE OF THE
UNIVERSITY AND ITS
FUTURE IN ZIMBABWE**

**INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE
PAPERS**



THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY
AND ITS FUTURE
IN
ZIMBABWE



International Conference Papers

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FOREWORD

by

Professor W.J. Karimba
Principal and Vice-Chancellor
University of Zimbabwe

This book is a record of the papers which were read at the Conference on the Role of the University and its Future in Zimbabwe, held on this campus in September 1981.

It was perhaps the most important Conference in the history of this University. It was attended by an impressive group of scholars from Africa and abroad, and Government leaders. The papers were highly scholarly and the debate which followed each presentation was very stimulating and thought-provoking.

This collection of essays constitutes a book of readings for students interested in problems of university development in Zimbabwe in particular, and in Africa in general, and those interested in university reform and the politics of higher education.

I must, on behalf of the University, express my gratitude to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for making it possible for us to hold the Conference, and subsequently for enabling us to publish these papers. To the participants who contributed immensely to the Conference; and to the Organising Committee for a job well done, I, also, express my profound gratitude.

Introduction

The new nation of Zimbabwe was born on 18th April, 1980. Consequently, independence ushered in an era characterised by radical changes in all aspects of national life. Institutions and organizations of all types and at all levels had to look at themselves in the light of the new order. Indeed, the reverberations of Zimbabwe's attainment of nationhood were to be felt at all levels of Society, including the University.

Developments during our first year of independence had a traumatic effect on the University and created a need for

- (a) greater emphasis on the role of the University in National Development;
- (b) greater communication between the University and Government, and between the University and the Community;
- (c) the University to expand rapidly to meet the country's needs.

It is axiomatic that the effectiveness of the University's response to the above national goals inevitably depends on the ability of the University to discuss, examine, re-examine, criticise and investigate ideas, indeed, to redefine and refine its goals and objectives in the new order.

To this end, it was decided that the University should organize an International Conference which would

- (a) focus the attention of the international community, as well as Zimbabwe, on the University;
- (b) discuss the role of the University in the development of Zimbabwe;
- (c) discuss the nature of changes which the University should implement so as to complement those changes that had taken, and were taking place in the Society at large;
- (d) discuss the nature of the relationship between the University and Government and between the University and industry;
- (e) discuss the nature of the international relationships which might develop in the future.

The Conference was opened by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe, the Honourable Comrade Robert G. Mugabe M.P., a scholar in his own right. Papers were given by such scholars of international repute as Professor Asavia Wandira, Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University; Professor Rolf Dahrendorf, Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Professor H.H. Patel, Head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Zimbabwe; Professor Philip G. Altbach, Director of the Comparative Education Centre at the State University of New York at Buffalo; Professor Dietrich Goldschmidt, Director of the Max-Planck-Institute of Educational Research in the Federal Republic of Germany; Professor Tibor Palankai, Vice Rector at Karl Marx University in Hungary; and Dr. Herbert Murerwa, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Manpower Planning and Development, himself a former academic of note.

Several other people, both local and international, including Vice-Chancellors of several African Universities participated in the Conference.

Perhaps the highlight of the Conference was the installation of Professor Walter Joseph Kamba as the first black Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe on the 8th of September, 1981. The installation was symbolic of a new beginning; of a new chapter in the annals of the history of the University. Indeed, it was an historic event in the life of the University.

The theme of the Conference was "The Role of the University and its future in Zimbabwe". All the papers and speeches touched on this theme in varying degrees. The debate which resulted from the presentations was of a remarkably high standard. If anything, one thing became very clear, that is, the question of the role to be played by the University is by no

means limited to Zimbabwe alone. It is an age-old question the world over. Thus the question to which various speakers addressed themselves was not whether or not the University had any role to play in society, but what role it had to play within the context of a given society, for example, in Zimbabwe.

The Prime Minister, in his opening speech, insisted that the University which had 'hovered in the outer space of foreign ideas, and practices...' 'should now effect a re-entry into the African atmosphere... and plant its feet firmly on our African soil'. He asked the University to review its curriculum, its institutional governance mechanisms, as well as its role in cadre-formation.

Professor Wandira, in his keynote address, 'The University in Times of Change' spoke of the 'need for the University to recognise the changes that have taken place and to seek a new role, a new mandate, a new accommodation...'

As if to underline the controversial nature of the theme, Professor Dahrendorf disputed the view that a University should be relevant. In advocating an independent, 'purist' type of University he argued: "Who-ever demands from a University that it be relevant throughout, that it responds to external demands in everything it does, destroys by the same token the heart of academic inquiry". But our counter-argument would be that the above position is only tenable in those countries (if any) which can afford such luxuries and in fact it is an exercise in idealism. As was to be shown in the ensuing debate, the question of relevance could not be ignored.

Professor Patel in his paper, "The Relationship between the University and Government", made reference to the unequal partnership between the University and Government, with the University as the junior partner. He highlighted some of the controversial aspects in University governance, the impending Bill to replace the Royal Charter. In his conclusion, he reiterated Professor Mazrui's advice that a University owes the government of the day neither defiance nor subservience but intelligent co-operation.

Professor Goldschmidt and Dr. Murapa, in their joint submission, "The University Curriculum and Research: Some Priorities" prepared at very short notice, gave a well-argued response to the Prime Minister's call for relevance in curricula and research. They stressed the need for the University to consider curricula reform in such areas as subjects taught, vocation-orientated courses, improvement of teaching/learning methods, combination of theory with practice, duration of courses, development of teaching materials, and the consequent increase of staff and facilities.

Dr. H. Murerwa, in his paper "University Reform: Changing the University to meet new needs" showed how the imported model had failed to respond adequately to the needs of African countries. He discussed the potential role of the University as an agent for change particularly in the realm of high-level manpower development.

Professor Altbach, in his paper, "The University in the Third World: Comparative Perspectives" dwelt on the character of international intellectual/academic inequalities, on comparative aspects of university governance, university reform, politics and higher education, curriculum, expansion. Professor Altbach concluded: "Without question, the experience of others can be useful and the lessons of the past and other nations may help to broaden perspectives and inform policy decisions. At the very least, expensive errors might well be avoided".

Professor Palankai, in his paper "University and Industry in Hungary" (not reproduced here) discussed at length the nature of higher education in Hungary. However, of interest to Zimbabwe, were these points: that the main objectives for the institutes and university of economics was to train professionals and experts for government and industry; that there was direct involvement of industry in university through membership of university governance bodies, through a system of honorary professorships whereby people from government, industry and research institutes participate in university teaching; direct involvement of the professionate in decision-making in government and industry; the requirement that all students should spend some time in practical situations; university participation in government initiated research; university participation in applied research sponsored by industry; university's own research into curriculum development; and, evening and correspondence education for those, who, for a variety of reasons, cannot attend university on a full time basis.

Professor Kamba, in his closing address "The University: From This Time On" outlined his vision of the University. Without being oblivious of some good work which had been done

in the past, he pointed out the areas in which there was need for change. He called for greater co-operation and closer communication between the University and Government; for greater relevance of the curriculum and research; for democratisation of university governance structures; for lesser dependence on expatriate staff; and for greater commitment on the part of all staff to the University of Zimbabwe.

GENERAL REMARKS

The Conference was, in the words of Professor Patel, the most important conference held at the University in the last decade, if not over the entire period of its existence. It afforded the University the opportunity of examining itself critically. The recurring sub-themes in all the sessions were the need for the University to be relevant to its environment; the need for certain reforms particularly in the area of university governance.

The Conference was held at a time when there was a great deal of talk about a new Act of Parliament to replace the Royal Charter. As this book goes to press, the Act has not yet been promulgated. However, the Principal and Vice-Chancellor has initiated several reforms.

On 26th October, 1981, he issued a directive which effectively Zimbabweanised academic appointments. The directive stated that non-Zimbabweans could be appointed only when it had been established that no Zimbabweans were available. In effect, whenever a Zimbabwean and a non-Zimbabwean with identical or similar qualifications were competing for either academic or non-academic posts, the Zimbabwean should be preferred.

On 13th November 1981, he announced that he had created a Working Party whose terms of reference were: "to examine and make recommendations concerning the organization and functioning of academic departments in the University, including the appointment, term of office and role of heads of departments; and the nature and extent of departmental participation in the appointment and promotion of academic members of a department".

On 12th January 1982, he announced that he had created a Commission under the Chairmanship of the Vice Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor to examine the causes of the high failure rate at the University in 1981. The findings are bound to have wide ranging implications for the University in such areas as the quality of teaching, the learning environment, student counseling services and the like.

These are only three of a number of significant steps which have been taken in the exercise to realise the goals and objectives of the University in the new situation.

The Editors

CHAPTER 1

OPENING SPEECH

by
Cde. Hon. R.G. Mugabe, M.P.
Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe

I regard it as a very great honour, indeed a singular one, to have been invited to open this International Conference on the Role of the University and its Future in Zimbabwe. This Conference dovetails neatly into the Ministry of Education and Culture's seminar on the Past, Present and Future of Education in Zimbabwe, which ended today and which I also had the pleasure of opening ten days ago. The planners and sponsors of these two obviously related and complementary events deserve all the accolades they have won for their success in organising what in effect amounts to a sustained and unprecedented examination of the entire educational enterprise in our country.

But before proceeding, let me in my capacity as Prime Minister of this young Republic, welcome to our country and to our capital city all the distinguished guests and prominent scholars from other countries, near and far, who have come to participate in this Conference. We extend a very warm welcome to you all. We are confident that the deliberations of this Conference will be enlivened and enriched by your participation, for the wealth and diversity of academic experiences and intellectual traditions you bring with you to this Conference can only inject a broader dimension and perspective into these deliberations.

The international character of the Conference assures that discussion will not take place within too parochial a frame of reference. And as we are a young country with an equally young University, we look forward to deriving much of value from the contributions of those who are here representing older established institutions of higher learning around the globe.

To ask what the role of the University is in Zimbabwe or, for that matter, in any other country at a comparable stage of development, is at once to ask what the role of the University has been down the centuries. What the University reflects today in respect of its organisation and mission is, to a large extent, the image of its origins and history.

And while it is true that institutions and practices change, change is not synonymous with obliteration. Typically, change is a dialectical process. It is dialectical in the particular sense in which the new incorporates the old or, putting it slightly differently, in which the old gives way to the new but without itself thereby suffering complete liquidation or displacement. In this sense, the past is also the present. Not infrequently, in fact, the baggage of the past weighs so heavily upon the present that the elements of change appear at best imperceptible, at worst conjectural. It is then that, in given circumstances and in respect of social institutions, radical or revolutionary change presents itself as the only strategy for overcoming the oppressive weight of the past.

The Modern African University is a creature of colonialism and in varying degrees bears the stamp of that genesis. I would like to revert to this aspect a little later in my speech if I may.

The Mission of the University, as I understand it, has traditionally encompassed three main elements. Firstly, universities have put considerable emphasis on their role as teaching institutions, that is as centres for the advancement, dissemination, and communication of knowledge of all kinds. This function of the University is evidently crucial even today. Yet the teaching function, however effectively discharged, should not be seen in isolation from the substance of what is taught. We must therefore ask whether what the African University teaches has any measurable relation to the needs and interests of contemporary Africa. This is a matter I would like to return to in a moment.

Secondly, and closely related to the foregoing, universities have traditionally served as

repositories of knowledge. This role is expressed and manifested concretely through the physical assets without which no institution can deserve the name of a University - libraries, document depositories, archives, and computers. Clearly, the concept of a University as a repository of knowledge cannot be given a static connotation, in as much as the volume and variety of such knowledge is changing constantly. Old concepts, old "facts", old "truths" are constantly being challenged, refined, up-dated or discarded altogether. This is as it should be for the true University is a dynamic organism, not a museum.

Finally, the traditional role of the University has included the aspect of research. Research extends the frontiers of knowledge and, where it concerns itself with matters of social significance rather than trivia, holds out the possibility of providing solutions to vexing societal problems. Research must, therefore, be at the centre of the University's activities. But it must be socially relevant research. Practically all great advances in science have been made in the effort to find answers or solutions to practical problems. Hence, the belief that scientific discoveries are fortuitous or are unrelated to any practical social purpose must be rejected.

There are, however, two observations to be made in respect of the traditional "uses of the University," to borrow a phrase from Professor Clark Kerr. The first is that, in defining and carrying out its mission, the University operates within the confines and constraints of a particular time, place, and above all, cultural milieu. If it is the function of the University to dispense knowledge, this process is necessarily coloured by, and is responsive to, a particular social context, a particular national reality.

As Raymond Williams has noted in his book, *The Long Revolution*: "It is not only that the way in which education is organised can be seen to express, consciously and unconsciously, the wider organisation of a culture and society, so that what has been thought of as a single distribution (of knowledge) is in fact an active shaping to particular social ends. It is also that the content of education, which is subject to great historical variations, again expresses, again both consciously and unconsciously, certain basic elements in the culture, what is thought of as "an education" being in fact a particular selection, a particular set of emphasis and omissions."

The second observation to make is that the traditional functions of the University, laudable though they are, definitely require supplementation if the University is to constitute, as it must, a vital component of the institutional nexus that sustains our modern civilisation and propels it toward higher levels of development in the service of mankind. In this respect, and having regard especially to the African situation, we insist that the African University must not merely exist and operate in Africa. It must sink its roots into the African soil, from which it derives its sustenance. The African University can not be a mere carbon copy of alien institutions.

As the late President Kwame Nkrumah put it in 1956: "We must in the development of our university bear in mind that once it had been planted in African soil it must take root amidst African traditions and culture." More specifically, the African University must be actively engaged in what the French refer to as *cadre-formation*, that is, the "training of the minds of men" and the extension of their skill horizons with a view to meeting urgent national needs. *Cadre-formation*, is, as I see it, the intellectual and emotional transformation of an individual in the positive direction which equips and enables him to play a constructive role, interacting both vertically and horizontally with the roles of other transformed cadres in the organised pattern of a society's politico-socio-economic endeavours to grapple with its developmental problems.

Our own University, now twenty-four years old, should play a significant role in ensuring this transformative process, and yet in many crucial respects, it continues to bear the imprint of its colonial past. While efforts are being made to change this institution at the level of structures and provide a new definition of its mission in the new Zimbabwe, I cannot but observe that the change which has been brought about to date falls far short of the ideal which Kwame Nkrumah portrayed as that of an institution that transcends its foreign origins and identity, and becomes fully integrated into its socio-cultural environment.

We simply cannot brook for example, a curriculum that puts emphasis on the study of foreign peoples and institutions, while remaining largely silent on the history and meaning of the Zimbabwean Revolution. Moreover, studies in African sociology, geography, economics, history and other disciplines have had their curricula and content so designed

that in the majority of cases, they have served more the interest of imperialism and capitalism than the interest of Africa and the new social order of its territories.

The situation does not change because African scholars are engaged in the investigation of the problems of these studies, because they act nothing more than as a channel of academic imperialism. What problems are investigated and what paradigms are employed in their investigation are both matters of the utmost importance. In other words, the scope and orientation of our University studies must take into account, as a matter of duty, the scope and orientation of our socio-economic system and try to serve and, indeed, save it while taking cognisance of the world context in which it exists.

Further, we must surely question mechanisms of institutional governance and decision-making that eschew democracy and remain as living symbols of the racism and authoritarianism of the colonial era. This institution must, in other words, relate adequately, positively, and meaningfully to our society now caught up, as it is, in the throes of a multisided process of transformation.

I have referred to cadre-formation as an important function of the University today, but we must also understand that training people is one thing, imparting an appropriate and relevant orientation is another. Our universities will have failed us if their products turn out to be imbued with an individualistic, elitist, and reactionary outlook more suited to other social environments perhaps, but certainly fundamentally at odds with our circumstances, perspectives, and aspirations. We must at all costs ensure that the young women and men who come out of our institutions of higher learning have a socialist, people-centred orientation.

Individualists who put themselves first and society after, and would rather society served them first, are anathema to the society we wish to build. They constitute a dangerous intellectual bourgeoisie in our midst. We already have many members of this clan, and may the University save our society from the perpetuation of their clan. To achieve this, we must ensure that we do not perpetuate at this institution or any other like it, the tragic posture and image of the African University and the African student so graphically captured in Professor Joel Barkan's book, *An African Dilemma*, wherein it is observed.

"The world of the African University student is a rarefied one, for he lives in a realm which less than one per cent of his countrymen of the same age ever see. His time is monopolised by an institution which is both physically and spiritually removed from the society which surrounds it. He attends class and resides on a campus that forms a self-contained community, segregated from the rural areas where he was raised, and often detached from the main urban centre of his country as well. With few exceptions, the University which he attends has not attempted to create its own identity and academic traditions, preferring instead to imitate those found in the land of the former colonial power. Even though his country has been independent for several years, many of his teachers continue to be white expatriates."

It cannot, in the light of this, be a surprise to anyone that we should demand that the African University shall acclimatise itself to the African environment. We insist that if the African University has hitherto, for whatever reason, hovered in the outer space of foreign ideas, and practices, it should now effect a re-entry into the African atmosphere and, if I may change the metaphor, plant its feet firmly on our African soil. In particular, we insist that our own University shall convert itself from a University in Zimbabwe into a genuine and authentic University of Zimbabwe. Its structure and procedures must be rationalised and infused with a democratic content. Its curriculum, while not confined to, must necessarily lay considerable emphasis on our national realities in all their diversity and interconnections. It must equip its graduates with the necessary intellectual tools to enable them to take their full part in the resolution of the problems we face as a nation. Indeed, as they pursue their studies in whatever field, our students must, as our friend President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere has put it, regard themselves as the people's "servants-in-training."

If I, in some ways an outsider, sound as if I am laying out a programme of University reform, the reason is simple. To paraphrase that famous aphorism about generals and war: higher education is too important a business to be left entirely to deans, professors, lecturers and University administrators. More pertinently, the need for change is clearly recognised in

the theme of this conference: the Role of the University and its Future in Zimbabwe. The key phrase here is *its future*. If, as an American, David S. Jordan, has asserted, "the true American University lies in the future," the same is even truer of the African University. More so than its American counterpart, the African University lacks a local identity and, barring a few exceptions, has not even begun self-critically to conceptualise and advance a theory of its purpose and function. A conference such as the present one is thus to be welcomed. It puts the spotlight on the University's capacity to put the spotlight on its environment to the advantage of our society.



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