

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

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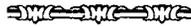
**INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
PAPERS**

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THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY  
AND ITS FUTURE  
IN  
ZIMBABWE



International Conference Papers

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# CONTENTS

|  | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| FOREWORD   |             |
| by Professor Walter J. Kamba   | vi          |
| <b>General Introduction</b> by the Editors   | 1           |
| <i>Chapter 1</i>   |             |
| <b>Opening Speech</b> by the Prime Minister, the Honourable Robert G. Mugabe, M.P.   | 4           |
| <i>Chapter 2</i>   |             |
| <b>The University in Times of Change</b> by Professor Asavia Wandira, Vice-Chancellor, Makerere University   | 8           |
| <i>Chapter 3</i>   |             |
| <b>The Role of the University in Development : Some Sociological and Philosophical Considerations</b> by Professor Ralf Dahrendorf, Director, London School of Economics and Political Science | 18          |
| <i>Chapter 4</i>   |             |
| <b>The Relationship between the University and Government</b> by Professor Hasu H. Patel, University of Zimbabwe   | 24          |
| <i>Chapter 5</i>   |             |
| <b>University Reform : Changing the University to meet new needs</b> by Dr. Herbert M. Murerwa, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Manpower Planning and Development                             | 38          |
| <i>Chapter 6</i>   |             |
| <b>University Curriculum and Research</b> by Professor Deitrich Goldschmidt, Director of Max-Planck Institute, and Dr. Rukudzio Murapa, Dean of Social Studies, University of Zimbabwe         | 43          |
| <i>Chapter 7</i>   |             |
| <b>The University in the Third World : Comparative Perspectives</b> by Professor Philip G. Altbach, Director, Comparative Education Centre, State University of New York at Buffalo            | 47          |
| <i>Chapter 8</i>   |             |
| <b>The University : From this time on</b> by Professor Walter J. Kamba, Vice-Chancellor, University of Zimbabwe  | 57          |
| <i>Appendix 1</i>  |             |
| Conference Programme   | 61          |
| <i>Appendix 2</i>  |             |
| List of International Visitors   | 64          |

## FOREWORD

by

Professor W.J. Kariba  
*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.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE UNIVERSITY IN TIMES OF CHANGE

*by Professor Asavia Wandira*

#### BY WAY OF PRELIMINARIES

Let me first of all express my gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, for bestowing upon me the honour of delivering this first address to the Conference. I am well aware of the close comparisons often made between the recent history of Zimbabwe and that of Uganda, and between the state of the University of Zimbabwe and that of Makerere University. Our two universities share with others in Africa a history that goes back to colonial times, to the period of Special Relations with the University of London, and to membership of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. But our two Universities differ from many others in that the misfortunes of our political environment, have in recent years meant the isolation of our institutions from other universities. We share the effects and emotions of that period as well as the devastating effects of liberation wars. Further, we share the upsurge of hope on the part of our people upon the restoration to full international interaction of our countries. These special circumstances have of late meant that you, Mr. Chairman and many of your distinguished leaders, have shared platforms with Ugandans seeking the ear of the same sympathetic friends. On the grounds of our common history, I am glad to be here.

I doubt, however, if special circumstances alone can explain my present role at the Conference. I am not unmindful of the presence of so many academic leaders from the Africa Region. I am tempted to emphasize that their presence here suggests a vivid African presence. I am also mindful of the presence of so many of our friends from far beyond this continent, lending to this Conference the international flavour and stature the University of Zimbabwe deserves. I should like, on their behalf, to convey to you Mr. Chairman, our gratitude for the invitation to come here, to congratulate you upon assuming the duties of Principal and Vice-Chancellor of this esteemed institution, and upon your imagination in calling this Conference. Our presence here symbolises the brotherly comradeship of millions in the university world who admire Zimbabwe and her courageous and enthusiastic people. We salute the determination of your university to map out new directions for the future, a future filled with hopes of change and development.

Unfortunately, my privilege to speak now brings no immediate comfort or solution to the problems which your university may be experiencing in these times of change. The management of universities at any time — changing or non-changing — is not yet a perfect science, not even a science of alternatives. In your search for a role for the University of Zimbabwe in the years immediately ahead, I can offer no models of perfection. For, in spite of concerted efforts over the last two decades in Independent Africa, there is no agreed model or set of models for university involvement with the national economy or polity. Instead, there have been prolonged discussions followed by a growing realisation that the search for new models for the University of Africa cannot yet be ended. Nor can I escape from the necessity for me to suggest a model for Zimbabwe, by pointing to a "World University Model", sometimes suggested by some scholars. There is not yet a globalized model whose idea and structure I would recommend you replicate in Zimbabwe. I must therefore ask you to treat me with the same tolerance that you would afford your economic advisers describing alternatives on the one hand and options on the other. Hopefully, you will not, like the famous industrialist in search of practical solutions, advise me to become one-handed. In mitigation, let me express the hope that the practical experience of Makerere University and that of other universities in our neighbourhood — which will form the background of my remarks — will throw some light upon your problems. Hopefully too, by speaking of the dilemmas I have witnessed at first hand in the institution-building and reconstruction in Uganda, I may be permitted to share a few worries and to ask if such worries could be avoided in your case.

## II BASIC ASSUMPTIONS.

Allow me at this stage to draw your attention to the basic assumptions behind this Conference.

### (i) Times of Change

There is first of all the assumption that major changes have taken place or are in progress; that a new disposition exists; that there is therefore a need for the University to recognise the changes that have taken place and to seek a new role, a new mandate, a new accommodation. Alternatively, it may be argued that the University can no longer operate as if changes did not take place and must in its own interest seek a new mode, a new metaphor. The time for institutional change is therefore now or very soon. Deliberate and sustained efforts must be made not only to change the university — so as to seek a new accommodation — but, and significantly, to throw the weight of the university behind change and, wherever possible, to tilt the balance of forces in favour of over-all change.

No one who has come to Zimbabwe, even for a few days, can fail to be impressed by the air of expectancy, the new confidence of the people and their enthusiasm for change. It is a joy to meet such people and an even greater joy to see their daily application to the search for change and development. A people that have reached the cross-roads and remained open to new ideas is a great asset for change, for they define a threshold situation which is the greatest opportunity for new leadership. Here in Zimbabwe, one is unavoidably reminded of the first decade of African Independence. A continent, hitherto regarded as conservative and hardly touched by change, spoke and acted as if change was a foregone conclusion. During that decade, the continent spoke with a distaste of colonial institutions, asserted independence and nation hood, stressed development and assumed the institutional irrelevance of all that was colonial and past. I do not say that all the assertions made during that decade were correct. Nor do I claim that good use was made of the opportunities of that decade. I must say, however, that it is not surprising if major changes in the political order in Zimbabwe, like similar changes elsewhere, should create a disposition in which the university feels obliged to re-examine its role and future. The very success of a major change in the political order sets precedent for and encourages thoughts of further change in other directions. Indeed the experience of effecting change in the political order can be used in at least suggesting change in other areas. In this regard, Zimbabwe seems singularly well poised for contemplating change. A nation once locked in the catastrophe of war, has learnt how to pull-back from the brink of self-destruction. The new Zimbabwe is fast re-applying its resources and energies to development in other directions. The material and technological foundation for a new society in Zimbabwe is fast being laid. In the re-direction of its resources, Zimbabwe has the advantage of a more advanced technological and industrial base, a larger pool of educated and skilled manpower and a national consciousness borne out of war, far greater than many an African country could count upon at the time of Independence. Above all, Zimbabwe has a determined leadership in all sections of society which is admired far and wide.

The main question that remains is whether the advantages that Zimbabwe has at this time of major political change, also suggest a fundamental change in the nature of society — its values, its spirit and its attitudes. We must ask this question because major changes in the polity and the economy do often lead to changes in the values, spirit and attitudes of a community. Sometimes, however, there can be cosmetic change in society. Those who study change must not therefore limit themselves to the polity or the economy. They must look further and more deeply. Only then can the desirability of major change in university be fully ascertained. Some assumption about the meaning of change in society is a prelude to the examination of change in its institutions.

Where, therefore, changes are assumed to have taken place or to be taking place, where the university is under pressure to change, the first responsibility of the university is to understand change, to take the lead in describing, analysing, and monitoring change, and to propagate its findings. Without proper understanding of change, there will be the danger of everybody talking about the same thing, without knowing its magnitude, effect or distribution. There will also be the danger that those less well-equipped to describe the magnitude of change will become the prophets of further change and will, if left to themselves, determine the directions of change — without adequate assessment.

In making this first suggestion as to the role of the university in times of change, I do not wish to say that the university is or should regard itself as the sole agent for spreading the

understanding of the meaning of change. I accept that there are other agents — government, party, church, voluntary associations, mass media, etc. I do want to say, however, that the university must be in the fore-front of understanding, monitoring and determination of what has happened and must keep the company of those who express concern for change. Lack of involvement in this early and grassroots determination of change, can only hinder the university's own vision of its future role.

Indeed a future role there must be. Perhaps none more urgent than the University's determination whether or not to respond to change and, as I have stated, whether or not to throw its weight behind change. Alternatively, university must determine whether or not to engage in efforts to change the very meaning of change. This must inevitably involve the university in direct dialogue, sometimes battle, with other institutions of society — about what is desirable and most valuable in society and about the limits of what is envisaged as change. I have no doubt that such a role could be a risky undertaking, especially for the leaders of the university. However, I do not envisage a satisfying role for a university, if all that a university will do, is to receive and respond to change. I do not envisage a satisfied university which merely regards itself as the victim of circumstance, the victim and slave of change. Ultimately, it is the university that loves and cherishes change that can remain at the centre of it — and to love and cherish are not possible without some contact, real or imaginary.

I also wish to say that while discussion at this Conference must necessarily centre around university, it has to be borne in mind that the university is not the only institution that should accept, cherish and love change. It would be wrong not to stress that change affects other institutions of society: Government — notions and structures of government; party; civil service, the judiciary, church; industry — a whole host of institutions and bodies are affected by and in turn affect change. I emphasize this wider context of change, because all too often those who criticise university for not changing fast enough, do far too little to set the example of change in their own backyard.

Let me now turn to the second of the major assumptions behind this Conference.

**(ii) National Consensus.**

The work of this Conference would be greatly eased if it could be stated that national consensus about the meaning of change has been or is capable of being achieved soon. Again, one is compelled to stress this aspect because the time-lag between the birth of a new polity and the establishment of national consensus has sometimes been filled with agonies whose very existence inhibits further change.

Universities like to feel that they are non-partisan national institutions — open to all without discrimination on grounds of sex, tribe or belief and towering above all these particulars, to propagate the universal. If, however, universities must seek a major role in the changes and particulars of their time, they need to be re-assured that they are not supporting one group of men against another, that the changes sought have general support and will endure the test of time, at least the time it takes to change institutions. It is wasteful to start changes at university which must be abandoned before their time of fruition. And the sense of insecurity which results in such circumstances, will necessarily encourage the maintenance of the status quo. It would therefore be helpful to university, if there was national consensus as to the major changes sought by society. Let me again remind you of the first decade of African Independence; full of assertions about the value of independence, national unity and development. It was also a decade followed by a growing difference as to the meaning of these very notions; the meaning of independence, from whom and by what mechanisms. Arguments persisted as to the basis and apparatus for national unity. Consensus about the meaning of development became eroded (Wolfe, 1978). The contribution of universities to the development of their nations remained a moot point (Court 1980). And so, lack of consensus on these important notions, inhibited change. Its establishment and maintenance would have been important to the formulation of concepts helpful to changes in the University.

Again, it may be argued that one possible role of the University in times of change lies in encouraging national consensus, acting as catalyst in the establishment of the common understanding of major issues affecting society. In this regard, it is with some nostalgia that one recalls the role of Makerere in the first decade of Uganda's independence. While places for public debate became fewer and fewer outside the University, Makerere remained an island of refuge, a platform where government and opposition leaders argued in the open, before mature and critical audiences, the major issues affecting Uganda

society. Again with some nostalgia, one must add that in many modern democracies, party platforms and even Parliament have ceased to be the chambers for mature, non-partisan, national debate. The quest for power has come to dominate strategy and debate. Many nations are the poorer for lack of a platform where academics, politicians, senior civil servants and ordinary people can debate national issues outside the power structures. Can universities in the new nations of Africa offer this platform? Do we need specially created institutions, like the Australian National University in Canberra, before we can expect this role to be discharged by universities? What options has a university got in the parameter of the one-country-one-university (Wandira 1978)? Fortunately, the situation in Zimbabwe offers some hope. Here, as I have observed, a leadership has emerged and demonstrated a unique capacity for realism. Such realism increases the chances of establishing consensus, taking account of national realities and laying a practical basis for moving the nation forward. As part of that realism, I would make a special plea for the University of Zimbabwe to be allowed to play host to all manner of ideas, to examine those ideas and to arrive at consensus through vigorous interchange, in which persons in and outside the university will freely participate.

Perhaps I should add that my description of the desirability of national consensus, the dangers of its absence and my admiration of the way the Zimbabwe leadership has sought to establish it here, should not be read to mean that the university as an institution must at all times feel duty-bound to follow, support, preserve or promote the existing consensus. I am all too well aware of the internal contributions which beleaguer universities and prevent them from achieving and maintaining consensus on any issue — university or national. The many estates of the university are often at logger-heads. Within each estate, conflicts between groups and individuals exist. The most common state of the university is one of dissensus, not consensus. No one should be surprised if some persons on campus — staff or students — were not agreed about what is commonly accepted as national consensus or if they wished for freedom, within the framework of the law, to work towards a transformation of the elements of that consensus. A quiet university may be rather nice to have and may cause leaders fewer headaches. This, however, is not necessarily the most interesting or exciting place to work and learn in. A national institution set aside for the sharpening of the mind must surely do better than this!

It remains for me to emphasize that there is no freedom without responsibility. My plea for a university at the centre of, sometimes upsetting, the national consensus must be immediately qualified. Institutions and individuals, be they academic or not, working in delicately balanced societies, bear great responsibility when considering whether or not to act in contradiction of national consensus. There are times in the affairs of men, when greater service to society lies in silence, when the articulation of the things that bind men is more important than in the propagation of those that divide them. Should that time ever arise in Zimbabwe, the responsible use of knowledge by university men will exercise the very conscience of the institution.

### (iii) **University Capacity for Change**

Permit me now to briefly turn to the third assumption underlying this Conference: namely, that the University of Zimbabwe must develop the capacity to change and to handle change. Such capacity would enable the university to absorb change, to take in new ideas and to adopt new operational models. The hope is that there would develop within the institution itself a *dynamism* and *will* to master change, to marshal existing and future resources and to apply them in the pursuit of new objectives. The University would thus avoid a situation where there is more talk about change than change itself.

I need not emphasize the frustration of an institution which wants to change but lacks the capacity or *will* to do so. Even more frustrating is the situation of a university told to change by national leaders, but denied the resources to do so.

Every existing university seeking change, starts off with a heritage of its own — the plant, the staff, the limited funds, the teeming and restless body of students, the existing curriculum, traditions of the university in general, notions as to what is proper in the university world, the self image of the university etc. It must also reckon with existing notions governing resource allocation to the university and within the university. For instance it will find that many financing arrangements for the university reflect out-moded concepts such as 'payment by results' 'cash on delivery' and, not, infrequently, 'cash long after delivery'. Consequently, many a university is faced with constant cash-flow crises and threats of curtailment. In Africa, unlike in Britain or Canada or Australia, these crises do not arise out of falling student population dictated by demographic patterns of their

countries. They coincide with the unprecedented influx of students of all ages, forced upon the university before the university is ready for them. The management problems involved in keeping universities open, attending to their frequent crises, as well as maintaining some dialogue with the rest of the world, are often enough to exhaust the energies of academic leaders most enthusiastic about change. Indeed to preserve those energies and to ensure freshness of mind, academic leaders need regular retreats — in the same way as religious leaders retreat for prayer and contemplation. So much for the poor state of universities called on to change!

Given the constraints under which universities operate, it is important to recognise that building the capacity of the university for change will most probably mean an increase in its resources, a re-definition of the use and deployment of resources, a re-examination of the relationships between men, buildings and materials, the search for academic structures and mechanisms that are more responsive to new needs and that ensure the continued production and productivity of the institution. (I shall have more to say about the problems of achieving these operational ideals). In addition, building the capacity of a university for change means building new concepts of what universities are or should be. The problem of the university which seeks change, lies in how to build an adequate fund of ideas and resources that will enable it to transform itself. The problem is made all the more difficult by the fact that basic changes in university often take time and painful application before they bear fruit. Poor nations sacrificing an ever increasing percentage of their resources to support one university, are anxious for a quick return. Can they afford to pay the cost university reforms will demand? One possible answer lies in the history of the university in Africa. In the last two decades of African development, the dilemmas created by resource scarcity on one hand and the demand for university change and returns to investment on the other, have led to a forceful examination of the contribution of the university to development. The hope has been that a university contributing to development will have a more thriving economy to support desirable change at the university. What has not been answered is: What comes first, university change or economic change. The African sentiment was for changes in both at the same time. It is therefore important to examine the emerging "developmental model" of university in Africa.

### III THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IDEAL AS A CONCEPT OF UNIVERSITY CHANGE.

#### (i) Pursuit of Relevance.

Let us then examine in the first instance, the expectation over the last two decades of African Independence, that universities would make a direct contribution to the economic well-being of their nations and the transformation of their societies. Colonial models of the university and their operation were rejected as being irrelevant to the burning national issues of development, and universities were expected to oblige by changing themselves. An era of conflict between the ideals of the emerging societies of Africa and their inherited institutions had set in. So perturbed were African universities themselves that they spoke of creating a new African university. They emphatically declared: *"The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil"*. (Yesufu 1973: 40)

The response to this call for social and economic relevance differed from university to university, and from country to country. By and large, however, no university seemed to have escaped the pressure for change. Areas of response included closer links with government through consultancy services and committee work; emphasis on manpower development and the greater vocationalisation of the curriculum; the use of the local environment in teaching and research; attention to research in specific problems and the establishment of specialised research institutes; multi-disciplinary approaches to research and teaching; work-study programmes, community — involvement and outreach programmes to sensitize students to community problems; national service as an instrument for correcting values and attitudes and for generating new skills; and more flexible admission policies to improve access to the university (Court 1980: 657). Of equal concern, was the building of sizeable cadres of indigenous academic and administration staff (Wandira 1978: 86). Conference after Conference examined university involvement in the training of development activities, while university acceptance of a greater role in non-formal education was seen as an essential part of its development strategy.

All in all, therefore, the concept of what universities could do to enhance social and economic relevance, greatly expanded. So too did the scope for relevance itself.

**(ii) Expanding scope for university involvement**

In trying to comprehend development which universities were supposed to enhance, many universities found themselves faced with an endless agenda. First, development meant for institutional planners, the increase in the size of universities and an increase in opportunities for university education. Departing colonial regimes had to be replaced. Industrial and managerial manpower was urgently required. There was pressure to expand secondary and higher education. More was better. Universities had to open their doors in a hurry. Then came the need for special kinds of development: entrepreneurial and management development; technological and scientific diffusion; agricultural modernisation; rural development; urban re-development; environment. Soon the dictates of social justice and equality called attention to special groups: minorities, neglected majorities, women, children, the handicapped, and, in more modern jargon, marginal and peripheral groups. The important thing for me to say is that each new emphasis, each new aspect of development, left a new responsibility for university, a new opportunity for it to find relevance.

**(iii) Diminishing resources.**

Unfortunately, the favourable climate for universities to increase their involvement with the development process, did not coincide with a favourable financial climate in most of the countries of Africa. In a continent starved of all forms of development, the competition for the diminishing cake of the state has been fierce. University budgets have not grown as fast as has the pressure on university to offer additional services. An uncomfortable gap exists between conceptualisation as to role and function on the one hand, and the material base for change in university. Even in oil-rich Nigeria, the temptation has been to expand the university system as a whole, while leaving each individual university as short of funds as would not be suggested by the increased wealth of the nation.

In many African countries the increased pressure on university resources has meant an absolute deterioration in the living and welfare conditions of staff and students. In some instances, the material support for teaching and learning at the university, leaves much to be desired. Water under the financial bridges of universities has dried up.

The diminution in national resources available for university education, has in the 1970's been followed by a regrettable pull-back in the commitment of external donor agencies to university institutional development. The same agencies that had led the way in calling for relevance, now find themselves unable to support institutions anxious to be relevant. The university in Africa has not only ceased to be the 'ivory tower'. It is no longer a place of luxury and economic comfort. As the tempo of inflation increases — academic communities dependent on fixed incomes and grants — are passing into the poorer sector of their society.

What are the consequences of this diminishing resource base of the University? First and foremost, that while universities are rich in what they want to do or ought to do, they are poor in their means. Secondly, the impoverishment of the university decreases their WILL for change. The very idea of change is a liberal idea. Comfortably supported university communities can be counted on to be tolerant of change. The great question then is whether poor countries can afford to support a liberal university, anxious and engaged in change?

**(iv) Which way, Zimbabwe?**

Where does the University of Zimbabwe fit in all this? Clearly, there is need for the University to define its role in the development of Zimbabwe. Clearly also, it starts off from the advantage of knowing what its neighbours have attempted. The conceptual problems that beset the early days of de-colonisation need not unduly exercise the University of Zimbabwe. On the outside and seeing its campus — buildings, laboratories, workshops, libraries — and talking to its staff, the University looks comparatively well-endowed and preserved. Zimbabwe has already demonstrated a remarkable capacity to tap international resources to its advantage and the strength of the Zimbabwe economy, the end of hostilities, should help to build up resources for the University. Above all, a large number of Zimbabwe academics scattered all over the world during the war of Liberation should in due course want to come home.

Here, then, is a University with some capacity for further change. This is not to minimize the challenge of change to the University of Zimbabwe.

By and large, the University faces the same and increasing number of tasks as have faced other African universities on diminishing budgets. Already the University has had to accept unusually large intakes and is under pressure to show firmer links with the polity, the economy, and with other sectors of education and the social services. Like other universities in Africa and elsewhere the University of Zimbabwe faces the hard prospect of increasing its role and responsibility in a cost-conscious world.

#### **IV THE OPERATIONAL IDEALS OF UNIVERSITY**

Given the extra-ordinary pressures under which universities in the developing world appear condemned to work, it is important for them to have a clear perception of what makes universities tick. I say this because in the quest for relevance and in times of rapid change, it is all too easy to emphasize relevance at the expense of excellence, and to forget that that which is relevant must also be well done or otherwise it ceases to be relevant. In the light of my own personal observation and involvement with universities in a state of change, I should like to mention four essentials — to which you can add during this Conference.

##### **(i) The maintenance of good learning**

First of all, I now believe that it is essential to maintain universities as places of good learning and good teaching, places where the extension and examination of knowledge is both possible and prized. It seems trite to say this. Indeed, many might be surprised that I choose to mention it at all. Let me explain. Universities strive to mark the mastery and extension of knowledge by appropriate awards, status and promotion. However, more and more there is a growing number of persons in the university who prize these symbols of university success for other reasons. Individuals in search of social justice, equality and the extension of job opportunity will seek university labels for other than their scholarship. Similarly, manpower planners, employment agencies and politicians anxious for their targets will look askance upon delays in manpower production even on academic and professional grounds. Internally, there is the perpetual body of student — and teacher — politician whose priorities in the university lie outside the narrow paths of scholarship. I do not wish to mention the young woman student in search of a husband. Both internally and externally, the university system can come under pressure to 'pass' the student and to 'make' the successful teacher-politician a professor. Additionally, as resources become scarce, there is real danger of inadequate investment in learning and the extension takes priority over the qualitative aspects of expansion. When that happens there is real danger that both staff and students become mere consumers of learning — satisfied with knowledge and skills developed by other scholars and unable to experience the real excitement of new learning and commitment to scholarship. A university can hardly exist without such excitement and the whole hearted pursuit of learning.

##### **(ii) Continuity**

Secondly, at a time of rapid change it is important never to lose sight of the need for continuity of good research, teaching and learning. Yet continuity is what rapid change sometimes first threatens, because in the minds of some people it is necessary to destroy in order to build. Scholarship and excitement built up over the years may suddenly become lost. Departments with a good reputation become mediocre. In a situation of rapid change of staff, those who examine are different from those who teach and students excited by a new engagement with a scholar cannot find him to continue their interaction. Even the mundane task of record keeping in the university becomes difficult. It is vitally important that universities give attention to mechanisms for the management and maintenance of learning and scholarship from one change to another.

##### **(iii) The productivity of scholars.**

Related to good and continuous learning, is the problem of the productivity of the individual scholar and the individual department. Rapid change and the uncertainty of change impose heavy burdens on individual scholars. Over time the achievements of scholars from day to day and the factors that mitigate against success might be analysed. In this regard, it is not enough to look at the total production of scholars in a department or over a stated period. One must look more closely at what is happening to each scholar over shorter and shorter periods of great difficulty given present university systems of rewards and incentives, and of sanctions against poor or inadequate output.

#### (iv) **Cost-coverage**

At a time of financial cut-backs, there will of course be pressure to achieve good learning and teaching at lowest cost. Universities will need to convince their financiers that they are efficient and responsible users of scarce resources, that they are cost-conscious and cost-effective. For this reason, a university which does not already have a scheme or unit for the improvement of learning and teaching and for the improvement of institutional management, must of necessity give thought to its establishment. Further a university must give serious thought to ways and means of raising funds from non-traditional and non-government sources. In this way, universities can maximise resources available to them as well as their more economic use.

The operational ideals of a university then call for good and continuous learning, productive and scholarly individuals, and the efficient use of scarce resources available to it. In the traditional operations of the university these ideals reinforce each other and tend towards stability rather than rapid change. A university that wishes to preserve these ideals in a situation of change therefore needs to give special consideration to the dynamics of change in the university.

### **V DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN UNIVERSITY**

We have so far considered the forces that occasion fundamental changes in the university. We have suggested that changes in the political, social, economic and moral order may well call for changes in the university. Indeed, the university itself may be instrumental in the definition of a new order and in the establishment of consensus about that order. However, these considerations must be balanced against resources available for change and against academic and professional considerations. Public accountability — which is necessary and proper — must be balanced against academic and professional accountability which is also necessary and proper. In the end, it is this balancing that will define the nature of the institution to be born out of the pressures of change. Similarly, it is the identification and handling of issues resulting from the tensions of change that will determine the atmosphere and flavour of the institution that results.

Permit, therefore, to end by saying a word or two about two managerial considerations which frequently determine the flavour and dynamics of change in university.

#### (i) **Conflict over ideals.**

As a prelude, I should perhaps emphasize that I do not see university change as a matter of 'stages of development', a movement from one static position to another and heralded by periodic development plans. I accept that in times of change all fixed values come under pressure and may well yield and become unstable themselves. There is then constant need for review, revision and, sometimes, complete change of direction. Forces interacting in the arena of development do not always produce a clear linear progression of change. What is taken to be political necessity or industrial and practical reality may cease to be so. Yet academics by their training are conditioned to respect constants and to generalise on the basis of repetitive or cumulative evidence.

In a situation of frequent change, therefore, there is a strong likelihood of conflict and tension among academics on the basis of ideals and their perception of those ideals or between the academic community and persons or bodies outside the university.

The managerial problem is how to provide for the resolution of conflict on campus while at the same time allowing for the expression of legitimate dissent. Alternatively, the problem is how to steer the university through change, lending it that vision and sense of direction necessitated by the times, without killing legitimate dissent or minimising the divergence and diversity of expression characteristic of an active and healthy campus.

Here, I would like to suggest that the first quality a university must cultivate at a time of change, is tolerance. Uniformity of views or blind flattery of authorities should never be expected of those who are learning the responsible selection and use of knowledge and of criticism. This means that government leaders may have to accept and tolerate juvenile academic debate on campus — which is totally harmless — and to resist rushing in with the police on the first appearance of student or staff dissent. In turn, the university community needs to learn the distinction between academic and responsible debate, and outright political opposition and sabotage. The one calls for tolerance and accommodation. The other invites suspicion and sometimes sanctions.

It is often suggested that conflict on campus is caused by lack of national commitment on

the part of the academic community; that if there was greater commitment to, for instance, national development and ideals, there would be fewer conflicts with government and other outside agents and that, therefore, selection and admission to the university of those who teach or learn there, should be based on some monitoring of this commitment. Where these special arrangements are made, it is argued, "the university no longer stands apart from the government but is one component of a triangle with the Party and its planning and policy committees as another and the government as the administrative arm forms the third" (I.C.E.B. 1975: 19). And, government need no longer fear that opposition elements on campus will wreck the ship of state or university. The temptation for government to close the university now and again in order to enforce political conformity may disappear, leaving the university free to enjoy freedom within the system.

While these suggestions must command the attention of the Conference, it must nevertheless remain an obligation to examine how far conformity may by itself prejudice the very purpose of the university. The challenge to universities in the 1980's "is to convince their governments and national populations that their contributions to national development lies not in the extent to which they can conform to certain material and intellectual prescriptions, but in their ability to demonstrate that above all the process of development requires the kind of trained minds and thinking society that universities are uniquely equipped to promote" (Court 198 : 657).

#### (ii) **The danger of obsolescence**

The university teacher and researcher practices a noble and honest art — that of the brokerage of ideas, skills, and determinants for selection. His ultimate aim is to instil in the student the desire to search for choices of his own, to make independent judgements of his own. His assumption as a teacher is that real freedom exists and the rules of choice are known and well respected. It may therefore be legitimately asked whether if he is not to be forced into conformity, there is a limit to his scholarship. Is commitment to scholarship the sole criterion of his worth? And can there be such a thing as irrelevant, obsolete or dangerous scholarship? If, as we have argued, the rapidity of change renders values, choices and rules variable, are academics and scholars liable to make and set choices which cease to be popular and soon pass out of vogue? The businessman or the politician who makes the same kind of choice, suffers financial loss or rejection by his electorate. What should the academic suffer? When, for instance, the historian chooses to sing the praise of notorious Idi Amin, should he be dismissed from university service on the liberation of Uganda? Or should he be protected from the wrath of academics returning from exile? What process of renewal and rehabilitation should universities prescribe for their apparently obsolete academic staff? Are the normal and traditional processes of staff development, establishment, review or even disciplinary proceedings, adequate for this purpose? Or should extra mural considerations govern staff retention and improvement?

Apart from the obsolescence of staff, there is the possibility of obsolete plant, equipment, books and materials. Modern building technology allows for flexible partitions so much so that the volume and area of teaching and research space can be altered as needs change. Unfortunately, heavy equipment, books and teaching materials are less easily changed once bought. Yet, ideally a university should be constantly reviewing its equipment and materials, and will need to do so once involved in change. The corollary is that it will be necessary for universities to find ways and means of minimising wastage and disuse of equipment once the process of change is begun. More systematic and less wasteful methods of resource control and renewal will have to be devised. This is an area of management in which many universities are not fully developed. Perhaps I should add that it is not past the ingenuity of universities to devise systems for the renewal of their staff and plant. Equally, it is possible for universities to avoid situations in which they as institutions are threatened with wholesale obsolescence. No modern society has yet reached the stage of doing away with all its university institutions : this inspite of the prophets of doom in Deschooling society. Some departments, some colleges, even individual universities, have at times of doom or national catastrophe, been closed. Nowhere, however, do we find efforts to declare the university system as a whole to be irrelevant or obsolete. This is a tribute to the adaptability of the university as an institution to changing times.

I am confident the University of Zimbabwe, whose ancestors go back to ancient times to the mystique of the ancient nation-state of Zimbabwe as well as to the beginnings of modern universities in Bologna, has as good a chance as any other university, to steer a course someway between obsolescence and loss of structural identity. In seizing that chance, it can re-shape and re-define its role in the future of a nation we all love and admire.

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