

# FOREWORD

Currently, Africa has more than half of the 20 fastest-growing economies in the world, which has contributed to what has been called the era of ‘Africa Rising’ or a ‘New Africa’. In order to further strengthen socio-economic development, African universities need to improve their ability to produce and apply knowledge in effective and relevant ways. In OECD countries there are several public and private sites for knowledge production, but in Africa the university is the only knowledge institution, and hardly any knowledge is produced outside of the university. However, the performance of African universities in knowledge production has not been impressive. It has generally been acknowledged by agencies such as the African Observatory for Science, Technology and Innovation and the World Bank, as well as leading development scholars, that African universities are lagging behind the rest of the world in their knowledge production function. There has been only weak empirical evidence on the actual performance of universities, with virtually no cross-institutional and cross-country comparative research on the factors that are responsible for the poor performance of universities in knowledge production across the continent.

The crossroads African universities are facing consist of, on the one hand, a familiar path of relative decoupling between the university and its nation’s socio-economic development and, on the other hand, a path that requires far-reaching changes that could make it possible for the African university to connect much more productively to the main actors in emerging national (and in some cases regional) development and innovation networks. For the latter path to become accessible, these universities and their national authorities need research-rooted information.

In order to address this need, the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) project was initiated by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) in 2007. Its main aim has been to investigate the relationship between higher education and development – economic and democratic – in Africa. The HERANA project, funded mainly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford Foundation, comprises a network of about 50 academics and practitioners from around the globe. The project has conducted several rounds of theory-driven empirical studies that involved the flagship universities in eight sub-Saharan African countries: the University of Botswana, the University of Cape Town (South Africa), the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Eduardo Mondlane

University (Mozambique), the University of Ghana, the University of Mauritius, Makerere University (Uganda), and the University of Nairobi (Kenya). The main underlying aim of the HERANA project is to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence the performance dynamics of African universities, especially when it comes to the role of these universities in knowledge production and their relationships to development.

The second phase of the project was launched towards the end of 2011.<sup>1</sup> In HERANA Phase 2, the project maintains its focus on Africa; eschews common assumptions about African universities (poor funding, low quality or lack of research infrastructure, lack of qualified staff, etc.); and persists with its strategy of scientific based advocacy. But while the lens is turned to Africa, the project speaks, as Sir Peter Scott suggests, to the current and future state of higher education globally.

The first section of Chapter 1 highlights that the project was grounded in seminars, discussions and book projects with prominent African (and global) intellectuals such as Mahmood Mamdani and Kwame Appiah, and with international higher education studies scholars such as Sir Peter Scott and Frans van Vught. Of particular importance for this volume was the influence of the series of seminars with Manuel Castells and his thesis on the contradictory functions of contemporary universities. While each of the HERANA Phase 2 research projects was conducted independently under the broader framework developed in Phase 1, this book refracts the findings and implications of each study to assess Castells' proposed functions, particularly in terms of what is revealed about how Africa's flagship universities are able to transform themselves into research-intensive institutions.

By mining the full breadth of its research activities, which include core themes such as information capacity-building for evidence-based planning, knowledge production indicators, incentives in African universities, the governance role of higher education and research councils, as well as community and student engagement, HERANA Phase 2 provided an empirical vantage point from which to examine contemporary theories on the role of universities in development. The eight African flagship universities formed the empirical cases for the research, but the project started with a review of two countries and a state in the United States (South Korea, Finland and North Carolina) that had been successful in connecting higher education to development. The HERANA Phase 2 project also drew on work that CHET had been doing in South Africa on performance indicators and differentiation since 2003, as well as a recent project with Manuel Castells on *Reconceptualising Development in the Global Information Age*. So, while the research focus of this book consists of the eight African universities, the theoretical underpinnings are global and, we think, many of the implications are far wider than the universities studied.

The HERANA project is focused on contributing to a better understanding of the (positive and negative) factors that affect African flagship universities in their knowledge production function. A better understanding of these factors, including from a cross-African comparative

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1 For further information on HERANA Phase 2 research projects and outputs, see <http://www.chet.org.za/programmes/herana-ii>.

perspective, will make it possible for each individual institution and the national authorities involved to develop more appropriate policies and to use more effective policy tools and incentives for stimulating the performance of the university in the direction the country requires; that is, in the direction of becoming a stronger and more relevant knowledge-producing university. This implies that the project is not set up to analyse the actual contribution of the participating universities to economic development, nor is the HERANA project aimed at finding and promoting ‘best practices’. Neither is the project set up to measure the performance of individual African academics, or to identify ways in which African universities can increase their income. That is not to say that understanding the actual impact of African universities, producing multi-level performance overviews, or stimulating income-enhancing activities are unimportant; far from it. However, these issues lie beyond the HERANA project.

Finally, from the outset, the priority of the project was on both the ‘R’ and the ‘A’ of HERANA; that is, on empirically based research linked to a multipronged advocacy component. Reflecting on the findings of HERANA Phase 1, Sir Peter Scott suggested that this yoking of research and advocacy is both radical and revealing. He concluded that the ‘work of HERANA suggests that it is to the global “periphery” (in fact, the global “majority”) that we should turn to anticipate the future of higher education in all its frailty and potential’.

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with Nico Cloete and Peter Maassen*