

**Innovation, Higher Education  
and Research for Development**

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**Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET):  
Context and Role in Capacity-building and Policy Reform  
in South African Higher Education**

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## Higher Education Transformation: The role of academics

Before 2 February 1990, when President De Klerk announced the release of prisoner Nelson Mandela, opposition to apartheid was sharply dichotomised in what the French theorists Laclau and Mouffe (1984)<sup>1</sup> called the 'people versus state' antagonism. Under this kind of thinking, the opposition mass movements represented the radical needs of the oppressed people and the state represented the denial of the needs of the people. Such an antagonism could not be mediated; it could only be resolved through the obliteration of the state in a kind of Rousseauesque revolution where the people must rule via structures of direct social control which would represent the 'will of the people'. Popular expectation was that the Republic would result in the end of all want, inequality and private differences. This kind of thinking was very prevalent in the internal movements such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). As we know now, the external movement, much closer to the ideas of Vladimir Lenin, had a different notion – 'democratic centralism' assumed that the 'organic' revolutionary leaders knew what the needs of the masses were and they would 'liberate' them from the centre. Of course, in post-1994 South Africa, the state-civil society dichotomy is a perpetual tension between these two extreme ideologies.

Within the UDF-type mass movement, the role of intellectuals was twofold: protest and handmaidens to the struggle. The protest group became organised into the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA)<sup>2</sup> which participated nationally in protest marches, and organised the mass funeral of David Webster (assassinated by the cynically named Civil Cooperation Bureau). Handmaiden academics, particularly in education, had to provide expert information about schools and the effects of apartheid education to political activists who would use it to organise opposition and confront education bureaucrats. The role of the progressive social theorist was thus to join public protest and/or critique of the 'system', preferably demonstrating the impossibility of reforming the state. This was their (our) practise on the discursive plane which complemented the activist strategy on the ground. A major consequence of this was that the progressive academics were completely unpractised in theorising about reconstruction – or, in other words, in theorising about policy.

But 2 February 1990 changed this forever. By entering negotiation, the antagonism between the people and the state had to be redefined, and with the political leadership moving closer to 'the state' (becoming the new state), the antagonism posed complex choices for progressive academics. It confronted progressive academics with making a distinction between analytical interests (the traditional academic role) and strategic interests (the domain of the political), and with making the difficult transition from critic to reconstructor. Or, put another way, shifting from the radical

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<sup>1</sup> Laclau, E and Moeffe, C (1984) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

<sup>2</sup> Uduasa was formally launched in 1989 at the University of Durban-Westville campus. Key participants included Mala Singh (UDW), first president, Teboho Moja (Unibo), next president, and people like Naledi Pandor (Unibo), Nico Cloete and Derek Young (Wits), Mike Morris (UNatal) and the UDW launch committee with John Butler-Adam and Trish Gibbon. Pandor became education and science minister in post apartheid South Africa, Singh head of the quality council, Butler-Adam Ford Foundation programme officer and Cloete and Moja started CHET.

‘discourse of needs’ to the much more liberal ‘discourse of means’. A simultaneous question was about the form or organisation where this ‘reconstruction’ theorising would occur, because the traditional academic department did not provide space, nor funds, for this.

### Democratic (mediated) discourse/policy

In the democratic centralist mode the analytical and strategic roles are collapsed, either into the leader (Lenin or Stalin) or at least the central committee of the Party.<sup>3</sup> In more democratic societies, there are many ways of bringing analytical knowledge to reconstruction. A very traditional one is through advisors who ‘interpret’ research to politicians. The advisors are often connected directly to favoured (struggle-aligned) academics, or to consultants with a range of connections to government officials or politicians. This unmediated relationship often takes two forms in South Africa. The one is ‘serial brokerage’ where an individual intellectual speaks to a variety of needs or constituencies and, with modification (analysis), presents it to particular policy makers. Another form of handmaidenhood is where a group of intellectuals work directly in a clientelist way for a single interest group – a kind of policy lobby group. The privatising of research – tying research more directly to private or special interest groups (companies or governments) – undermines broader democratic participation even more. A good example is the United States where most of the ‘think tanks’ are either directly aligned to party politics or to a particular issue, with a predetermined ideological orientation.

How do we construct a more democratic mediation between needs, analysis and strategic reconstruction? During the 1980s, a number of papers were written on this issue, accompanied by considerable debate.<sup>4</sup> From these reflections and practises, a notion of fora, or forums, emerged where critics, reconstructors and interest groups can mediate concrete proposals with critique and research. In a 1993 article (Muller and Cloete) we wrote: “We can see the emergence of a new kind of institutional grouping, one that is expressly constituted as a forum for the consideration of public issues between contending interest groups, as well as between these and state officials” (p167). The article warned of two types of dangers to these mediated fora: firstly, the unmediated critics who, by monopolising meanings, collapse the space where mediation and compromise can occur; secondly, unmediated reconstructors who, by short-circuiting the public, or the academic domain, pre-empt democratic mediation.

### Pre-1994 organisational forms for policy in education

In the mid 1980s, universities like the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) were politically turbulent institutions. The debate around what academics should be doing was fierce, and the debate was

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<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that when President Mbeki tried to combine the role of policy maker and medical expert in the HIV/Aids debacle it was a throwback to his Russian and British far-left days.

<sup>4</sup> Muller & Cloete (1987) *The white hands: academic social scientists, engagement and struggle in South Africa. Social Epistemology*, 1,2: 141-154.

Cloete & Muller (1991) Social scientists and social change in South Africa. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 28(3-4): 171-192.

Muller & Cloete (1993) Out of Eden: modernity, post-apartheid and intellectuals. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10(3): 155-172.

conducted at the institutional level (how should the university be more responsive to ‘the community’) and at the individual level (how to be committed and helpful without crossing the line to political strategy). As to the former, a group of concerned academics at Wits conducted a survey of what Wits should be doing (called the Perspectives on Wits, or POW study, 1986), which led, in turn, to a series of Senate Special Lectures (Wits, 1987). After the launch of the NECC at Wits it was a few short steps to the establishment of an Education Policy Unit (EPU) – a joint university-community venture, to pursue education policy alternatives for a new state after apartheid. In short order, EPUs were established at the then University of Natal and the University of the Western Cape<sup>5</sup> as well.

From the start there were tensions: the university pulled towards criteria like publishing and peer review; the NECC sought, naturally enough in the circumstances, knowledge for the education struggle. The former pulled to the long-term; the latter to the short-term. The academics concerned tried to work around this but, all too frequently, felt ‘on the edge’, as the title of one of the papers at the time had it (Muller, 1991).<sup>6</sup>

The academics were clear what the socio-political project was. The problem was how to contribute optimally in a context that was opposed to it. It was clear too that what the NECC needed and would need was ‘powerful knowledge’ – conceptually and empirically robust knowledge. But there were several impediments to its satisfactory production. There was a severe shortage of people qualified to produce powerful educational knowledge. The universities had turned out activists skilled in critique, but not in advanced statistics or the economics of education. This shortcoming, together with short-termism and instrumentalism, had the consequence that when the ANC came to power, they were simply not supported by an existing indigenous body of powerful knowledge that made it possible to govern from a strong, informed knowledge base. Engaged organisations, in their nature, tended to produce specialised knowledge which, because it required a relatively long apprenticeship to master, meant that very few community interlocutors had what could be called ‘interactional expertise’, that is, enough background knowledge to converse with complete confidence about its implications. Academics found it extremely difficult to construct transaction zones to produce mutual intelligibility and, in the tug-o-war between specialised knowledge and politics, it was politics which invariably won. At its best, it attempted to connect an intellectual project to a socio-political project, and it attempted to bridge these by helping to bring powerful knowledge to bear on political and education policy and strategy.

It must be said, though, that common ground could be and was found in certain special cases: the case of the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI, 2001) being one. This joint EPU, NECC, progressive education academics and student leadership forums and working groups produced 13 volumes published by Oxford University Press. It also provided the framework for future education policy from preschool to post-secondary education. It was, however, one of the few national fora to

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<sup>5</sup> The general secretary of the NECC, Ihron Rensburg, is today rector of the University of Johannesburg. The second director of the EPU at the University of Western Cape (after Harold Wolpe’s untimely death), Saleem Badat, is today rector of Rhodes University. The second director of the EPU at Natal University, Blade Nzimande, is today Secretary General of the South African Communist Party and Minister of Higher Education and Training.

<sup>6</sup> In Muller, J. (2000) *Reclaiming knowledge: Social theory, curriculum and education policy*. London: Routledge.

succeed in civil society during this period.<sup>7</sup> After becoming Minister of Education in 2009, Blade Nzimande frequently referred to NEPI and the Post-Secondary Education group – and vowed to address issues raised in that report that had not been addressed in the post-1994 period.

The EPUs did not survive the ‘new’ South Africa. The great success of the Wits EPU was that it theorised and coordinated NEPI. After that, the Director (Johan Muller) left to become Professor of Education at the University of Cape Town. His successor, Nick Taylor, soon left to head South Africa’s most successful school education NGO (Joint Education Trust). His successor, Linda Chisholm, reverted to the handmaiden role of becoming advisor to successive ministers and ministerial committees. Not before long, the EPU was moribund. The Natal EPU, according to an official review, completely failed to fulfil its knowledge-producing and mediating function and had been closed down by the late 1990s. But its Director (Blade Nzimande) became a very prominent politician, while other EPU fellows, such as Thami Maseleku and Duncan Hindle, became directors general in national government departments, and Ben Parker became chief director of teacher education in the Department of Education. This EPU had thus been extremely ‘successful’ in producing a cadre for government.<sup>8</sup>

The high point of the University of the Western Cape’s EPU was the work it did for the National Commission on Higher Education. After that, it started struggling with the tension between the demand for academic work and to provide policy advice. As the National Department became more inward-looking (the global bureaucratic tendency of defensiveness under delivery pressures), the EPU became disconnected. It then turned to training higher education masters students, for which it did not have the capacity, and, by 2006, it was renamed the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and became moribund.

What seems quite apparent is that in the post-struggle environment these institutions could not fulfil the mediation role; nor could they handle the academic-education policy-politics tension. As a result, they either returned to a more traditional academic role, or became handmaidens, or became paralysed.

### Post-1994 organisational forms for policy in higher education

The first major ‘new’ South Africa initiative, modeling itself on NEPI and the EPUs, was the Nelson Mandela-appointed National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, January 1995), which was a massive endeavor. It consisted of 13 commissioners with working groups similar to the NEPI groups – research groups dealing with a wide range of aspects of higher education (e.g. history of apartheid higher education, new vision, principles and goals, a single coordinated system, cooperative governance, goal-orientated funding, and a transformation strategy). In addition to the more than 100 South African researchers/participants, there was huge international technical/research assistance, including the American Council on Education, the Association of African Universities, CHEPS in Holland, Commonwealth Management Services (UK), CRHEW (Germany), Unesco, World

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<sup>7</sup> The Post-Secondary Group of NEPI included, amongst others, two future ministers of education (Pandor and Nzimande) and two advisors to education ministers (Moja and Badsha).

<sup>8</sup> The question as to whether this cadre had been good for South African education is an entirely separate discussion.

Bank, etc. While the NCHE followed the NEPI model of putting researchers and practitioners in the same working groups, and organizing numerous consultation meetings (one of more than a 1,000 'stakeholders' ), a major difference was the entry of the international higher education community which flooded the working groups with international 'best practices'.<sup>9</sup> This interaction pulled South Africa out of the academic boycott and international isolation into the international expertise limelight. In addition to the South African government, the Human Sciences Research Council, USAID and the Ford Foundation contributed funding.

The NCHE even had an international consultation as part of the famous Saltzburg seminar series sponsored by Ford, Kellogg and Rockefeller. At this meeting, Derek Bok, then president of Harvard University, declared that the NCHE Discussion Document was, along with the California Master Plan, one of the best higher education system frameworks he had ever seen. While still at the Saltzburg seminar, a group of academics in South Africa, from the so-called historically disadvantaged institutions, issued a statement declaring that the report had marginalized them. (This was despite the fact that the chair and the deputy chair of the NCHE, and both the vice chancellors on the NCHE, came from the historically disadvantaged institutions.)

There have been many published reviews of the NCHE.<sup>10</sup> What is fairly uncontested is that its main contributions were: to initiate a discussion on higher education by providing a common starting point; and, to establish an admirable example of transparency, consultation and democratic participation during the process of developing the final report. In addition, despite the ideologically varied composition of the commission, the final report represented a progressive approach to overcoming the inequalities of the past.

The NCHE transformation framework appeared deceptively simple: increased participation, greater responsiveness, and increased cooperation. In more conventional policy language, this translates into equity, development and democratization. The big issue, introduced by the University of the Western Cape EPU, was the tension between equity and development. In the post-2000 period, it became internationally quite widely accepted that the way to bridge this tension was through a massified, but differentiated, system. In 1996, the NCHE proposed 'weak' massification, without participation targets. Owing to the competing interest groups within the Commission, the NCHE remained silent on differentiation – in order to secure a consensus report. These tensions remained unresolved throughout the post-1994 period, but both massification and differentiation features in the 2012 Draft Green Paper from Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET formed in 2010) and more strongly in the final National Plan 203 of the National Planning Commission (15 August 2012). Massification is proposed, but with unrealistic growth targets, and differentiation without a methodology of how to effect it.

It could be argued that most of the CHET work in South Africa revolved around the policy issues associated with the equity-development/differentiation tension. The other work of CHET was

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<sup>9</sup> A serious criticism against the NCHE proposals was that it contained too many contradictory best practices and the majority of examples reflected our colonial history – UK, Australia, New Zealand. When given the choice to visit any higher education system in the world, only two commissioners chose Africa!

<sup>10</sup> Kiran Odhav (2009) South African post-apartheid Higher Education policy and its marginalisations: 1994-2002. *SA-eDUC JOURNAL* 6(1): 33-57.

Council on Higher Education. Higher education and social Transformation. 2004.  
[http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000066/HEandSocialTransformationReport\\_25Feb2004.pdf](http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000066/HEandSocialTransformationReport_25Feb2004.pdf)

informed by the last chapter of the NCHE report, the Proposed Higher Education Transformation Strategy which stated that “a transformation strategy based on the Commission’s proposals for transforming higher education will require a considerable amount of appropriate human resources capacity at national and institutional levels. In fact one of the major features of the proposed transformation strategy is that it establishes a vehicle for developing these capacities.” (NCHE Report, p252)

### CHET Phase 1: Organization, capacity-building and globalization

CHET was established with encouragement from, amongst others, the minister of education at the time, Prof Bengu, and the Ford Foundation. It started (in late 1996) with a high profile South African Board: Brenda Gourley, chair of the Association of Vice Chancellors; Mike O’Dowd, director of Anglo American corporation; Walter Kamba, first president of the International Association of University Principals; Rolf Stumpf, president of the Human Sciences Research Council; and Teboho Moja, advisor to the minister of education.

The fulltime staff compliment totalled three – a director, a secretary and an administrative/project officer. Following the NEPI and NCHE models, expertise were to be sourced from within the national and international higher education community on a project/honorarium basis (no consultants or fulltime research staff).

Following the NCHE recommendation, the first project was about capacity-building in two areas agreed to with the Department of Education. These included strategic planning (for both the Department and institutions), and training workshops for the reconstituted university councils, which had numerous new members who had little or no corporate governance experience. This immediately raised the question: what is the knowledge basis for capacity-building? Not surprisingly, at the time there was no South African research to inform the capacity-building programme. So, a dual approach was followed, namely, to combine South African expertise (practise) with international expertise (e.g. combine an experienced South African institutional planner with a US counterpart, provided by ACE). It was decided that the local/international expertise, combined with the interactions with institutional leaders, must be codified into a series of booklets that could be used as manuals for the workshops. The knowledge at the workshops was never intended as ‘truth’, but rather as local and international practices to be discussed, debated and adapted to particular institutional circumstances.

The best known of these booklets, still used today by some institutions, is *Effective Governance: A Guide for Council Members of Universities and Technikons* by Daniel J. Ncayiyana and Fred M. Hayward (1999). In total, eight workbooks were produced with titles such as *Strategic Planning*, *Student Representative Councils*, *Effective Financial Management*, *Student Services*, etc. This was a joint project between CHET, the Department of Education and all 36 higher education institutions (at the time). In total, more than 100 workshops were held with over 1,000 participants. However, when the USAID funding ran out in 2002, and the Ford Foundation had shifted to supporting globalization, performance indicators and assessing system performance/change, the national department decided to make it an internal departmental responsibility. This was the end of the development of new materials, and of capacity-building.

In 1997, concurrent with capacity-building, it was decided that in order to maintain the momentum in terms of the new international connectivity. In particular, a series of seminars/debates, with resulting books should be organized around important or emerging global issues. One of the first seminar series was amongst university leaders, senior government officials and Ford foundation staff across three continents (South Africa, India, the US), and it resulted in the publication of *Diversity and Unity: The Role of Higher Education in Building Democracy* (1999). This was addressing the big issues of South African higher education, along with two other countries which were struggling with the same vexing problems of diversity and democracy.

Closely related to diversity and higher education was the perennial question of curriculum responses to a changing national and global environment and the African context. This resulted in a book called *Knowledge, Identity and Curriculum Transformation in Africa* (1997) with illustrious contributors such as Kwame Appiah (Harvard), Peter Scott (Times Higher Education, London), Carol Schneider (Association of American Colleges and Universities), Donald Ekong (Association of African Universities), Mahmood Mamdani and Jo Muller (University of Cape Town), and William Makgoba (Wits). This indirectly led to *A Tale of Three Countries: Social Science Curriculum Transformation* (South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, 2003).

An important issue raised in the knowledge, identity and curriculum series emerged in Peter Scott's paper called *Changes in Knowledge Production and Dissemination in the Context of Globalization*. South Africa was now part of the global economy and society and what would be some of the major implications? CHET brought to South Africa, through a long standing anti-apartheid education theorist (Martin Carnoy<sup>11</sup> from Stanford), at that stage the most cited social scientist in the world, Manuel Castells, author of the trilogy: *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (1997). The series of seminars (Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town during 2000) attracted more than 1000 participants from government, business and higher education. This became CHET's most high profile event ever and it included sessions with Thabo Mbeki (who incorrectly described Castells to the South African Cabinet as the "the Karl Marx of the information age").

This series, which covered topics such as the network society, the internet and the self, technology and development, and higher education and the network society, resulted in a book called *Challenges of Globalization: South African Debates with Manuel Castells* (2001). It also led directly to President Mbeki establishing the Presidential International Advisory Council on Information Society and Development. This 'think-tank' was launched in late 2001 so that the Mbeki could seek advice from world leaders on using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to boost social and economic development. It included high-profile members such as Oracle's CEO Larry Ellison, Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, Teledesic CEO Craig McCaw, DaimlerChrysler CEO Juergen Schrempp, and South African billionaire Mark Shuttleworth.

Alongside capacity-building, knowledge and globalization, CHET started what is still today it's 'backbone' programme, namely performance indicators. This arose from the question: is the South African higher education system transforming? By 2000, the concept of 'transformation' had become so ideologised that it had no empirical meaning. In fact, during his visit, Castells commented that "South African's use the term transformation when they stop thinking and start making social

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<sup>11</sup> Carnoy was directly involved in Ihron Rensburg (Vice Chancellor, University of Johannesburg) and Johanathan Jansen (Vice Chancellor, University of Free State) studying for their PhDs at Stanford.

conversation". CHET, with encouragement from Ford, started, in 1999, a project to assess progress with transformation in higher education in South Africa, but soon realised that it could only be around a combination of empirical indicators and theoretical reflection that a conversation could be started. Using the Government White Paper of 1997 as framework, and involving a large number of institutional leaders, academics and government officials, CHET produced in 2002: *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. This became CHET's signature book, and was reprinted in 2006 by Springer (Holland) in their international series Higher Education Dynamics. It is widely used as a prescribed book in higher education studies.

## CHET Phase 2: Transition – reorganization and a new direction

By 2002, CHET was becoming a bureaucratic NGO with 12 staff members, in plush offices in a newly-renovated UNISA building in Pretoria (physically close, but in reality increasingly distant from the Department of Education). The end of the million dollar USAID grant provided a moment for reflection and reassessment which, in typical CHET style, included a Kruger Park retreat with some prominent figures in higher education, locally and internationally. From this came a new mission statement, a new organizational form, and a new intellectual and strategic direction.<sup>12</sup>

CHET relocated to Cape Town and became organizationally, but not programmatically, connected to the Cape Higher Education Consortium. This enabled CHET to share administrative, financial, secretarial and ICT services on a cost-per-use basis. This drastically reduced the staff component to a director and a part-time administrator, which brought about a major reduction in overheads. In 2012, CHET still has the same staff structure. But, with the increase in projects, CHET now has part-time project managers who manage specific projects in their areas of expertise.

In terms of the NCHE framework principles, increased participation and cooperation had been partially addressed in the governance project and there was no further funding available. The article in the Sunday Independent (29 July 2012), entitled 'Poor leadership cripples tertiary institutions', argues that there is indeed again a need for university council and leadership capacity-building.

Regarding the NCHE's demand to increase participation (equity), the problem had changed from just getting more historically disadvantaged students into historically advantaged universities. By 2006, more than 60% (currently over 70%) of all students enrolled in the university system are African, against just over 50% in 1996. However, the participation rate for Africans was only 14%, up from 12% in 1996. For whites, the percentage enrolled in the system had decreased from 35% in 1996 to 20% in 2006, but their participation rate had only changed from 60% to 57%. This is due to the fact that South Africa still had an elite higher education system. The 1997 White Paper rejected the NCHE

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<sup>12</sup> CHET mission: mobilise trans-disciplinary skills for specific projects by tapping available expertise in the national and international higher education sector. A non-hierarchical, flexible management style, modern information technology, and a heavy reliance on commissioned work and steering committees affords CHET the unique capacity to respond to higher education needs with only a limited number of full time staff. CHET also provides a forum for interaction between the different structures, stakeholders, and constituencies in higher education. To this end, CHET is currently collaborating actively with the Ministry of Education, the Committee of University Principals, the Committee of Technikon Principals, Committee of College Education Rectors South Africa, and the National Centre for Student Leadership. International collaborators include the American Council on Education, the Association for African Universities, the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Services, Centre for Higher Education Policy (Netherlands) and HEDDA, University of Oslo.

massification argument in favor of 'planned growth', but this resulted in a minute overall increase in participation rate for Africans of 2%. Equity was no longer about getting more blacks into the white universities, but about expanding the entire system.

While pondering the problem of drastically expanding the university system when the school system was not producing enough adequately prepared matriculants, the question arose from the performance indicator data: where are all the students who leave school but who don't go into university? This turned the attention to the Youth study, which became one of CHET's signature studies by 2010.

The third NCHE framework proposal, increased responsiveness (development), had changed from 'community engagement' (service) to 'development'. The 2004 CHET seminar with incoming Minister Pandor was called *Lets Begin the Real Debate*, and the subsequent booklet published from it: *Higher Education and Development: Reflecting on the Challenges* (2005). For CHET, this brought the focus to knowledge production (particularly PhD production and research output), connectivity, development and, of course, from the globalization debate, differentiation.

Two issues not directly addressed in the NCHE were Africa, and the strengthening of research and training in higher education studies. The deputy director general in the Department of Education (which included higher education), who was also an NCHE commissioner, recently said that one of her regrets of 10 years in government was that she did not once interact with or visit higher education bureaucrats in other African countries. There has been a flood of memoranda of agreement between South African universities and other African universities; an increasing flow of students and academics from African countries to South Africa; and also a steady increase in collaborative research between individual academics. However, the gaze of the South African system continues to overlook Africa and, prior to the HERANA study, there were no systematic, comparable performance indicators between the different institutions.

In terms of research and training in higher education studies, after the flurry of NEPI and NCHE work, there was, in addition to the EPU, an increase in centres and academic departments studying higher education and offering postgraduate degrees and diplomas. However, by 2006, and with the decline of the University of the Western Cape EPU, it was clear that, apart from teaching and learning programmes, studies in research and policy was in a decline.<sup>13</sup>

### CHET Phase 3: Participation, Development and Africa

Changing the intellectual agenda of CHET can be traced through the titles of workshops during the period 2005 to 2007: *African Higher Education Expertise Network in Higher Education Studies* (February 2005), *Proposal: Transforming Higher Education for Development Through Research* (December 2006) and then, finally, *Establishing a Higher Education Advocacy, Research and Information Dissemination Network in Africa* (Dar es Salaam, January 2007).

However, to work more effectively in Africa also required a change in the CHET Board, and the December 2007 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CHET provided such an opportunity when a number of founding

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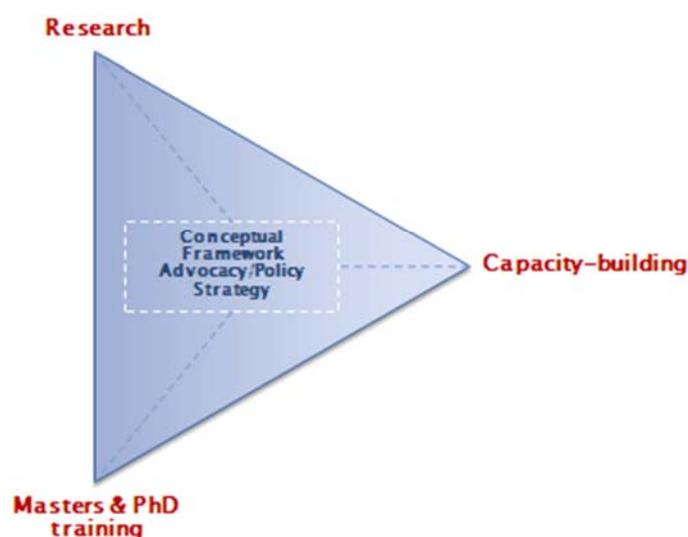
<sup>13</sup> By 2012, this situation had deteriorated even further, with the once vibrant University of Free State and the active HSRC unit being incorporated into other units that do not deal with policy.

Board members retired. The new Board members were more prominent in Africa and internationally: Goolam Mohamedbhai, former President of the International Association of Universities and general secretary of the Association of African Universities; deputy ministers of higher education in Ghana (Esi Sutherland-Addy) and Mozambique (Lidia Brito, who is now Unesco director of science policy); and Juma Shubani (Unesco, Africa). Currently, only three CHET Board members reside in South Africa, namely Brian O’Connell, Vice Chancellor of University of Western Cape, Saleem Badat, Vice Chancellor Rhodes University and the Director of CHET, Nico Cloete. Having a global high status board has been one of the major factors contributing to CHET’s success.

The work of CHET in Phase 3 in South Africa is around increasing participation (youth project), knowledge production (strengthening doctoral studies), and institutional clusters (differentiation), underpinned by performance indicators. In HERANA, the focus is broadly on higher education and development. More specifically, it is about strengthening the participating universities to institutionalise their information, in order to improve their self-understanding, and ultimately to move more towards evidence-based planning and management. CHET does not believe that evidence provides direct policy answers. Instead, in an environment that is filled with ‘self knowledge’ and which is over-politicised (what Marx called ‘surplus ideology’), evidence is a starting point for discussion and debate. In this sense, CHET both fills the capacity void in the ministries and the institutions by providing empirically-based comparative analyses of higher education, and provides a basis for policy debates and assessment.

Crucially, with HERANA, CHET finally addressed the research/capacity-building dichotomy by developing a project that links research and student training in higher education studies to capacity-building, with an inbuilt advocacy policy component (see diagram below). CHET’s South African work and HERANA are both underpinned by performance indicators and the notion of strengthening the academic core. These two components are also becoming increasingly interlinked.

HERANA: Resolving the dilemma between research and capacity-building



### Reflections on Impact of Phase 3

Both the Carnegie Corporation and Ford, under 'new regimes' of short-term impact, have recently requested impact reports. It is assumed that these reports will simultaneously provide information on the programmatic activities during the post-2008 period. Determining 'impact' is difficult at the best of times and particularly so before projects are concluded. Often, impacts happen long after a particular policy idea is first mooted. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify various areas of real or potential impact, particularly in the following areas of CHET's programmes: the production of new knowledge; national and institutional policy and planning; and networking, raising awareness, and stimulating debate about the importance of higher education for development.

#### Production of new knowledge

The HERANA projects contributed to the existing, somewhat limited, body of knowledge about higher education in Africa and, in particular, the relationship between higher education and development. New knowledge has been produced in the following areas:

- Identifying nine similarities in the ways in which three successful OECD countries link higher education and economic development, despite very different contexts and practices.
- An analytical framework that includes concepts such as 'pact', 'academic core' and 'connectedness', as a lens through which to investigate and understand the complex relationships between higher education and economic development. These concepts have been operationalised through detailed sets of indicators.
- The nature and strength of the academic core of eight 'flagship' universities in Africa. This includes a never-done-before cluster analysis of 28 universities in sub-Saharan Africa.
- A methodology, with a set of indicators, to assess the relationship between external connectedness and the academic core in the development-related (engagement) activities of universities.
- Comparative data on the 'cognitive democracy' of students at three prominent universities in Africa.

The following are specific impacts:

- The study on the three OECD countries (*Linking Higher Education and Economic Development*), and *Higher Education and Economic Development*, are prescribed for the joint NOMA masters courses (Western Cape, Oslo, Eduardo Mondlane and Makerere universities).
- The analytical framework and some of the indicators were presented as part of the opening keynote address at the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers annual conference held in Oslo in June 2010 (250 participants from 35 countries) and will appear in a new book called *Effects of Higher Education Reforms: Change Dynamics* (2012, Sense Publishers, Holland).
- The student democracy report was presented at an international student leadership seminar in South Africa, in a session with former President Thabo Mbeki.

In total, the HERANA project has produced 20 publications/reports, at least 10 Masters dissertations. In addition to the academic contribution to knowledge, the HERANA projects have also contributed empirical and comparative evidence which can be (and has been, in some cases) used by universities and government ministries/agencies for evidence-based policy and planning.

Perhaps the biggest accolade about new knowledge came from Sir Peter Scott:

*“Perhaps we assume too readily that the development of higher education systems, and the internationalisation of the academy, will be decisively shaped by the market agendas that dominate policy making in the old hegemonic ‘core’. But 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”.* (Peter Scott is Professor of Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education, editor of the Times Higher Education Supplement and Fellow, Royal Society of Arts).

## Policy and planning

### *Development aid*

The most direct policy influence thus far has been on the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD). During HERANA Phase 1, three HERANA presentations were made at NORAD headquarters. The new NORAD guidelines for development aid in higher education reflect a significant shift from the previous three separate divisions (research, training and institutional capacity-building) to a new integrated approach based on the HERANA model of linking research, postgraduate training and institutional capacity-building. The new programme (NORHED), announced in 2012, is, according to the NORAD website, designed to be responsive to the priorities of the partner countries, be flexible, and have a long-term perspective. It will encompass support to country/regional Masters and PhD degree programmes, joint research projects, systems for improved knowledge management and information dissemination, as well as institutions’ and systems’ strengthening.

In March 2011, the HERANA project findings and implications were presented to UNESCO’s division of Science Policy and to the International Social Science Council in Paris. Subsequently, we were asked for advice about restructuring UNESCO’s higher education division, which is currently in process, but delayed due to funding cuts.

In July 2012, the lead education economist of the World Bank contacted CHET and praised the book on higher education and development (“very good, very pertinent”) and asked for a meeting to discuss the Bank’s proposed new *PID\_Regional Higher Ed July 2*. He said that “In particular, I would be interested in your comments on which policy and institutional bottlenecks would have to be addressed before supported higher education institutions can become effective drivers of development within specific development challenges”.

### *National governments*

#### *South Africa*

The 2009 study on South African Post-School Youth had a number of direct impacts. It shocked the government into an awareness of the problem and also into action. Minister Nzimande recently told Charles Sheppard who had done the census analysis for CHET that: “I quote these figures at least

once a week and when are you guys producing new figures based on the 2011 census?” For the DHET, the findings directly contributed to the creation of a new division (Vocational and Continuing Education and Training) with a Deputy Director General in the restructured national department. The functions of this new division are: to support the development of college institutional capacity in order to achieve transparency enhanced performance, accountability and efficiency; to effectively manage and support the transition of colleges to an exclusive national legislative competence (this required new legislation); and, to regulate and support private colleges, as a means of expanding the institutional base for providing quality post-school education and training opportunities. The government’s new Green Paper (January 2012), and the National Development Plan (2011) from the Presidency, quote statistics from the report and incorporate many of the main recommendations, such as a drastic expansion of post-school education opportunities, improved mobility (transitions) between different sub sectors of the education system, and capacity-building in the further education and training sector. The association of university vice chancellors (Higher Education South Africa) commissioned a report from the CHET network which has been submitted as a special policy recommendation to government about strengthening the college sector, as well as the possible approaches to university-college collaboration and capacity-building. All this is unprecedented in the history of South African post-school education.

The second direct and indirect policy impact has been in the controversial area of differentiation in the university sector. Based on work on performance indicators and clustering South African universities according to certain academic core indicators, CHET was requested by the DHET to make a presentation at the Minister of Higher Education’s Summit (2010). After this CHET was asked, with government support to the Ford Foundation, to do more analyses and to investigate an approach (methodology) to a differentiation policy. Subsequently, Higher Education South Africa requested CHET to facilitate a historic workshop between the departments of higher education and training, and science and technology, and the vice chancellors – the first time that these three constituencies had a joint policy meeting. In January 2012, the DHET requested CHET to facilitate a workshop on differentiation for its senior staff and participants from the Department of Science and Technology, the DHET Funding Review Committee, the National Planning Commission, Higher Education South Africa, and a number of prominent vice chancellors. At the March 2012 CHET Board meeting, the Chair remarked that: “This is the closest CHET has come to ‘coordinating’ higher education in South Africa”.

Perhaps more important than the Green Paper was the request to the director of CHET, by the National Planning Commission in the Office of the Presidency, to do a position paper on Higher Education 2030 – with recommendations for the next five years. The commissioned paper, based on the Ford-funded support for work regarding performance indicators, doctoral education and differentiation, argues for an increase in knowledge production (masters, doctorate and publications) and an increase in the participation rate. For increasing knowledge production, international and South African institutional performance data was provided to the National Planning Commission, and, for participation, a massive expansion in the further education and training sector. Not only do most of the statistics and the recommendations appear in the National Development Plan 2030, but also some targets based on CHET work. CHET can take credit for foregrounding both at the national and the institutional levels the knowledge production dimension (which came directly from the HERANA academic core project). The *Final National Plan 2030: Our*

*Future – Make it Work*<sup>14</sup>, presented to Parliament on 13 August 2012, uses not only CHET’s ‘diagnosis’ of the South African higher education system<sup>15</sup> but includes all the main recommendations: expand participation rate, mainly at the college level (to over 30% by 2030), and an increase in knowledge production, crucially by doubling the percentage of staff with PhDs, and aiming for at least 25% of enrolments to be at the postgraduate level. And, for the first time in the post-1994 period: “South Africa has a differentiated system of university education ... a detailed analysis of the nature and extent of differentiation in the university sector has been done. Such analysis enables policymakers to make sober decisions about funding, support and performance targets for the different kinds of institutions”. The National Development Plan then proposes a set of steps based on an institutional profile method of differentiation. Finally, the whole section of the report is called a Post-School System, the first Parliament-approved national government plan that accepts a massified, improved knowledge-producing, differentiated and coordinated post-school system. In some sense, the NCHES policy agenda is finally completed, but the implementation tasks are formidable.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Botswana and Mauritius*

During HERANA Phase 1, the Tertiary Education Council of Botswana approached CHET to assist them in drafting a policy proposal for Parliament about enrolment, research and innovation. Using the HERANA network, a project group was assembled. Following the notions of expanding participation and strengthening research, proposals for the system were developed, and these were accepted by Parliament (2011) for implementation by the Tertiary Education Council.

The Mauritian Tertiary Education Commission has taken very seriously the higher education and development aspect of the HERANA work. In addition to organizing a national seminar in 2011, which included the education and finance ministries, the Council has organized for September 2012 an international seminar with 120 participants from 20 countries. Keynote speakers include the lead education economist from the World Bank, a representative from the African Union, Manuel Castells, and five members of the HERANA network.

#### Networking, raising awareness and stimulating debate

Perhaps one of the most powerful areas of impact is, and will be, raising awareness and stimulating debate about the importance of higher education for development, and some of the critical features that need to be put in place. The HERANA projects have already made a visible contribution in this regard by providing platforms for networking and dialogue between national and institutional stakeholders in the eight countries, including academics and students working in the higher education studies field.

To begin with, the network now includes more than 50 academics, university leaders and postgraduate students in higher education studies, in more than 10 countries. In addition, the project has developed a working relationship with the eight universities in Africa with at least two

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<sup>14</sup> National Planning Commission, Presidency:

<http://www.npconline.co.za/MediaLib/Downloads/Downloads/Executive%20Summary-NDP%202030%20-%20Our%20future%20-%20make%20it%20work.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> South African universities are mid-level performers in terms of knowledge production, with low participation, high attrition rates and insufficient capacity to produce the required levels of skills.

<sup>16</sup> It could be argued that CHET’S post-NCHES policy task is now completed.

'dedicated' collaborating senior people in each institution, and one representative from each of the eight tertiary/higher education councils/commissions.

This is the first time that CHET projects have had a dissemination strategy built into the project plan from the start and it has paid off. Thus far, a total of 15 seminars have been presented at all eight participating universities (Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Ghana, Nairobi, Makerere, Mauritius, Cape Town and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan). These seminars have been attended by more than 500 participants from government departments, universities and funding agencies. Participants have included ministers and senior officials from the ministries of education, science and technology, and finance; tertiary education and research council representatives; vice chancellors and senior university leadership; and professors and project leaders.

The CHET website has been improved to make CHET's research on African higher education produced by CHET more accessible. In particular, the website has been redesigned to take account of different audiences (e.g. researchers, policy-makers, librarians, funders, students, etc.) and their respective needs. This has primarily been done by creating multiple channels to the same underlying content (e.g. content accessible either via research area or via CHET programme), and by aggregating a wider variety of content types (news, events, resources, etc.) around thematic areas.

Brief CHET website statistics 1 January to 31 June 2012 (6-month period):

- 6,822 unique individuals visited the website
- 69% new visitors; 31% returning visitors
- Typical visit: 2.5 pages lasting three minutes
- Top cities (excluding South Africa, in descending order): London, Oslo, Singapore, Nairobi, New York, Tblisi, Addis Ababa, Accra, Port Louis, Gaborone, Paris)

Beyond the immediate network membership, HERANA has sought to bring issues relating to higher education in Africa to the attention of a much wider audience on the continent and internationally. One such strategy is the HERANA Gateway, a specialised search engine which provides a central point for the dissemination of research-based information on higher education in Africa to relevant experts and decision-makers. This year, the HERANA Gateway has had more than 3,000 users from 108 countries.

In keeping with its open access policy, CHET has made three data sets available on its website (<http://chet.org.za/data/sahe-open-data>). The data sets are all drawn from CHET projects completed over the past two years and deal with performance indicators for all 23 South African public universities, data by province on further education and training, and performance indicator data on eight sub-Saharan flagship universities. These data sets enable users to construct do-it-yourself graphs and download the underlying excel sheets. In addition to the national education department, staff members, numerous university planners and researchers are already using it for comparative statistics.

Another dissemination impact is *University World News* Special Africa editions and fortnightly Africa Edition e-newspapers, which were launched in 2008 in collaboration with the HERANA project. By end of 2012 there were 41 000 people in 150 countries registered to receive UWN's weekly e-newspaper. Of these, nearly 19,500 people receive the Africa Edition, including some 8,000 readers

in Africa, with the other Africa Edition readers based outside the continent but with an interest in African higher education. The biggest African readerships are in South Africa (more than 3,000), Egypt and Nigeria, followed by Mauritius, Namibia, Uganda, Morocco and Kenya. Most Africa articles appear in both the Africa and Global Editions, meaning that all 35,600 *UWN* readers receive comprehensive coverage of African higher education.

*According to a UWN reader, "The impact of UWN on comparative higher education studies has been to provide a comprehensive, reliable and (above all) sustained evidence base which up to now has largely been lacking. Other higher education publications have tended to downplay their international coverage as the cost of providing such coverage has increased and also as domestic agendas have become more dominant. Above all, UWN provides a powerful link between comparative higher education and policy borrowing – by providing a more extensive evidence base and offering more sophisticated, and nuanced, analysis. (UWN, 17 October 2010)*

So for the first time CHET is simultaneously visible and exerting policy influence globally, regionally, nationally and institutionally.

Nico Cloete  
29 August 2013

## Appendix 1: History of agencies, issues addressed and funders

Agencies	Period	Policy issue	Method/participants	Funding
EPU/Nepi	1989-91	Start Policy Investigations	Academics/NECC education activists	European
Udusa /Policy Forum	1993/4	Prepare for NCHE	Academic Union, CEPD	Us Aid, Ford
NCHE	1995/6	Equity, democracy and development	National Commission appointed by Mandela	US Aid, Ford
CHET ACE	1997	Capacity Development Strategic planning for new framework	Workshops with DoE, institutional planners	Ford, Kellogg TELP (United Negro College Fund)
CHET AGB (Washington) Diversity & Unity	1999	Capacity Development Governance, Planning Equity & democracy India, SA, US	Workshops for Councils, Forums, Instit. Leadership Seminars in 3 Countires	US Aid Ford
CHET Cheps (Holland) SA Govt	2000	Performance Indicators Regional Cooperation Globalisation	Network of academics and planners  Castells seminars	Carnegie Ford
CHET UPE, Eduardo, Namibia	2002	Social Sciences Curriculum Assessing SA system	Authors form 3 universities produce a book and seminars	Ford
CHET Africa Student Leadership Network	2004	Student leadership Capacity development	Series of workshops East and North Africa	Ford
CHET Hedda (Norway)	2005	African HE Expertise Network (HES)	Joint SA/European Universities about HES	Ford
CHET, Uni Oslo	2007	HERANA	Consultative meetings	Ford
CHET, Uni Oslo, UWC & 8 Flagship Universities	2008/9	HERANA	Data gathering, institutional visits, workshops Enrol Noma Masters Students	US Partnership Norad
CHET FETI (UWC), SALDRU (UCT), DoE	2008	Youth Study	Analyse Census data and FTE Colleges	Ford
CHET Crest, Uni Pretoria	2009	Strengthen Social sciences & doctoral study	Longitudinal study of PhD's, case studies productive Dept's	Ford Carnegie
CHET Crest	2010	Knowledge production in HE	Policies and practices about research and doctoral studies	Ford Carnegie
CHET DHET	2010	Differentiation	Research network DHET, National Planning Commission	Ford
CHET & African flagship universities	2011	HERANA 2	Indicators, Academic core, pact, connectivity	Ford Carnegie Norad: Noma extended