

African Universities, the Private Sector, and Civil Society: Forging Partnerships for Development

Keynote Address By

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**Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Educators,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

All of us are busy people with too many demands upon our time. I can tell you that when your distinguished Chairman's invitation came asking that I address you, there were those on my staff who noted the ever so many other matters demanding my attention. But they failed to understand the big picture. And the big picture is that I am deeply committed to fostering education in Africa and that I want to help build bridges across sectors and interests for the benefit of human development in Africa.

The really

_____ big picture is that I am an alumni of the University of Ghana and that this is the first time I have the pleasure to meet with academic colleagues on this campus since my graduation in 1968 and sendoff one year later to get my doctorate at Berkeley. And the really really big picture is that I did not participate in the University's 50th anniversary celebrations three months ago, so I felt that I had better work on my good deeds so that I am sure to be invited for the University's 75th anniversary, and perhaps 100th anniversary!

So for all of these reasons, I am delighted to be with you. I am challenged by the aims of this conference and applaud your theme.

Friends,

In my remarks today, I want to discuss three related topics. First, I would like to talk about the overall economic situation in Africa and the long term development challenges facing the continent. Second, I would like to discuss what I see as a changing role for higher education in Africa's development. And third, I would like to present a menu of partnership options with the private sector and civil society that you might wish to draw upon in your important deliberations.

In my current work, I am charged by Africa's ministers responsible for finance and planning to annually review Africa's economic position. Last month, at a historic first joint meeting of these ministers, which also involved senior-most officials from 18 African central banks, I advised the ministers that Africa's development was at a turning point.

An increasing number of countries are reaping benefits from initiating and carrying out macroeconomic policy reforms. For the past four years, per capita growth has been strong enough to exceed population growth by a generally comfortable margin. As we look across the continent, we see a generation of Africans asserting its commitment to growth and progress and to the need for Africa to stake its place in the global economy. This is also a generation that is increasingly shifting to democracy and peace, though we have major reversals in some countries.

If we look at Africa's development today, we see a dynamic yet differentiated Africa; one where many countries are progressing, and some are not. Nonetheless, we do see a continent making a lot of progress; -- a progress that is fragile and also still loaded with many outstanding development challenges.

This vision of progress can well be our fate – but not if we in the public and private sector act as if we are passengers along for the ride. This vision of progress will only become reality if we are talented drivers of the economy, making long-sighted choices and staying with the tasks as we address the challenges facing the continent.

To my mind, Mr. Chairman, the overarching challenge is the eradication of poverty. About two-fifths of Africa's population lives in absolute poverty, defined as the equivalent of less than a dollar a day. While this incidence of poverty is comparable to what is found in South Asia, the depth of Africa's poverty, as measured by the average "poverty gap", is by far the largest in the developing world. The poverty gap is a measure of the severity of poverty and relative deprivation in a society.

Moreover, poverty has been on a rising trend overall in Africa. Based on the most recent data available, the number of Africans living on less than a dollar a day increased by almost 40 million from 1987 to 1993 – an increase of 22 percent.

Reducing poverty by half by the year 2015, the commonly accepted international goal, will require an increase in the growth in Africa's per capita income from an annual average of 4 percent achieved during the most recent years, to at least 7 percent. We also know that poverty is not a question of income alone. Inadequate consumption is a core dimension of poverty in Africa. But the harshness of day-to-day life facing Africans in the 1990s is also reflected in other, perhaps more direct, indicators of wellbeing; including lack of access to basic health and education services, insecurity, powerlessness, social or physical isolation, and vulnerability to shocks and violence. It is therefore reasonable to examine the welfare of Africans in terms of aspects of these qualitative indicators.

Based on analytical work we did at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), we conclude that despite the recent positive trend, most

African countries do not as yet have the conditions to sustain growth at a level required to meet the poverty reduction target that has been established. We also know that growth alone will not be sufficient. We must couple growth with deliberate policies attacking poverty and promoting education, health, and social safety nets. This will require an appropriate balance between short-term stabilization and adjustment measures and longer-term considerations including capacity building, institutional reform, and ecological balance.

I am pleased to inform you that the ministers agreed with ECA's analysis and they adopted as their own statement a position that development should now move beyond adjustment and into a full fledged effort to reduce poverty. My analysis of the trends and the Minister's statement are available on ECA's website: www.un.org/depts/eca so I do not have to trouble you with all the details. However, I would like to share with you my thoughts on the major macroeconomic and sectoral dimensions that merit attention in our quest for poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa.

First, the nexus of high population growth rates, an extensive rather than intensive agricultural system and a fragile ecology are creating havoc with Africa's prospects. While there is a gradual but increasing recognition of the importance of this issue among policy-makers, what is missing is the sense of urgency that this issue deserves. I also want to add in this regard, that Africa has yet to tap the scope for application of science and technology to help address not only issues of agricultural productivity, but also to combat droughts, malnutrition, and controllable diseases. Application of science and technology is also crucial to improve Africa's international competitiveness and to open up new opportunities for Africa in the global markets.

Second, it is vital to promote investments in the social sectors that target and reach the poor. These investments include education, health, and employment-generating programmes. They ensure social development and a chance to improve the quality of life for Africa's peoples. If school enrollment and health coverage were both growing famously, it would be one thing; but since they are not, then furthering social development through sound policies and budgets is still a challenge to be faced. A fundamental dimension of this challenge is the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has now become a critical factor for planning in Africa.

Third, we need to systematically integrate gender concerns in development planning. As the poorest continent in the world, we can least afford, both on efficiency and equity grounds, to exclude half of our productive human resources base from contributing and participating fully in development. Surely, our development advances will not go too far if we fail to nurture economically productive partnership between the genders. This will not come about by rhetoric, but through deliberate, informed, fair and sound policies. As the trainers of Africa's future leaders, Mr. Chairman, I hope that your faculties are inculcating a climate of equality of opportunity for Africa's women.

Fourth, we must make every effort to tap into the global system of information and knowledge. I need not tell you the importance of the free and abundant flow of information for academic progress and for

development. You know more than most, that Africa's economic growth will be tied to both better access to information and to the ability of Africa to make known its own information on development, economic policy, investment and trade issues and opportunities.

Today, information and communication technologies, knowledge societies, and the information economy pervade all aspects of everyday life. The explosion of information technologies is just the most visible example of our era's extraordinary burst of technological changes. Yet, what has become the central feature of modern society globally is hardly felt in Africa, other than in elite circles of some capitals. If Africa remains on its present course, with the lowest teledensities in the world, with the fewest computers of any region, isolated from information and knowledge, it has no chance to compete globally.

Moreover, there is a political stake for us in facilitating regional information systems now increasingly available by satellite, which may do more to reduce artificial political barriers to interaction among our people than any single alternative approach. The academic community must therefore be in the forefront of those who want the technologies and freedoms to access information open to all our people.

And access to all means exactly that. In South India there are new programmes to extend computers to villages without telephone lines. In Bangladesh, cellular phone systems are being established for rural communities. In Peru, neighborhood computer centers are established as a public service like public libraries. We must raise our sights to new possibilities for bringing the information revolution to Africa.

Fifth, given that the integration process on the continent is essential to achieving international competitiveness, good planning and policies will put intra-regional integration on a parallel track with active participation in the global economy. As I stated in an address last year to African Ministers of Foreign Affairs: "Whether or not to integrate with the world economy is a false choice. --- We must integrate. But we will reap far greater rewards from integration into the world economy if our own house is integrated first. Therefore, we should choose actions that accelerate African integration, with the political will and selectivity of actions required."

Sixth, we in Africa must therefore bear the responsibility for acting on our own behalf. It is now widely recognized that good governance is not a luxury but a vital necessity for economic development. Accountability and fiscal transparency, including open procurement practices facilitate the achievement of basic macro-economic policy objectives. They also increase the productivity of public expenditures. We can learn from governance experiences elsewhere. But, Africa has its own experiences, its own best cases, and its own storehouse of culture and governance to draw on. And, Seventh, we all know that conflict is the enemy of development. There are serious post-conflict development crises that require solidarity. But we would also be wise to invest a lot more in conflict prevention as insurance against the destruction of societies.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, Africa's economic progress is the most optimistic in two decades, allowing us to contemplate significant global shifts. The development leaders you train will increasingly be called upon to

function in dynamic economies where private initiatives, information technology, more open borders and intense competition are givens. And they will also be called upon to understand how to empower poor people to function in economies, how to provide social services on a true national basis, and how to assure that the now poor are future engines of growth.

These remarks set the stage for my views on what I see as changing roles of higher education in Africa.

Up to now, higher education has almost entirely been a creature of the State in Africa. By many measures, the State has done reasonably well as the custodian of higher education. From six universities in sub-Saharan African in 1960 we now have 120 universities, with a number more in formation. Our growth rate for enrollment in higher education has led every other region by a wide margin. Our data needs updating, but higher education enrollment in Africa has gone from 1.5 million students in 1980 to 3.8 million in 1995.

You and I know, however, that tertiary enrollment ratios in Africa remain the lowest among regions, with demand for more spaces considerably exceeding supply. And, in the past years of persistent budget crisis, university budgets have been cut probably more than any other region.

With enrollment going up, and with continuing budget stringencies, you know the consequences: falling qualitative achievements, inability to address inequities within societies, and real hardships imposed on faculty, students and administrators. These factors have contributed significantly to rob Africa of its skilled manpower through the brain drain.

But, even with all the cutbacks, African higher education receives a higher share of the total education budget than any other region of the world. But the share of education budgets going to higher education, in all likelihood, will not increase. This calls for a new understanding of the situation of the university and what its options are.

In seeking a new view of the university Mr. Chairman, I first look at what is happening to its chief sponsor: the national State. Like many universities, the State is in dynamic transition. There was a time when the State was looked upon as the answer to everything, particularly to everything in education. If there were growth or change, the State would define it.

This was probably a necessary phase in our development, but the rapid spread of the private sector, civil society, knowledge, information, communications and peer learning from elsewhere, have led most national authorities to believe that the State is no longer able to be the one-stop shopping center for all public service needs. Life is too complex and abilities are too widespread, particularly outside of government, to risk giving the State much of a monopoly on most public services.

Instead of the totally Capable State, the goal now seems to be shifting to perfecting the Enabling State.

There may well have been a time, Mr. Chairman, when most talent was found within the civil service. But everyone now realizes that with far more widely distributed talent -- in part because of the success of your institutions -- one needs to operate the State in a facilitating way rather than as a monopoly of knowledge and ability.

Governments need to find many more services from the private sector and from civil society. Most governments recognize, sometimes reluctantly, that over time there will be larger roles for these profit and non-profit sectors. And they also realize that creativity and innovation are more easily manifested in these sectors.

The State now has the job not only of orchestrating pluralistic societies, but in being far better forecasters of change, guiding the forces in society towards productive roles and towards harmony. The State, therefore, must have the ability to reflect on trends, anticipate fundamental changes and to draw upon appropriate forces within societies to address new challenges.

In other words, the State, like all of us, must have the ability to learn throughout life and to adjust to new challenges and opportunities. This evolution in thinking is what has brought you to the topic at hand: Forging Partnerships among African Universities, the Private Sector, and Civil Society for Africa's Development.

The changing role of the State has powerful implications for universities. Students and researchers must be far more attuned to pluralistic society. Pluralism means much more wider diversity for employment of graduates, the need for more complex understanding of how societies operate and change, and, of course, far more facility in anticipating and coping with new social, demographic, technological and scientific transitions.

We are, after all, preparing our graduates to fulfill their potentials. Most of our graduates must find a way of being productively employed. So our first task is to assure that our economies and our graduates find a happy meeting ground.

Moreover, there is an almost inevitable shift of emphasis from pure theory to pragmatic applications. I do not want to be misunderstood on this point. I am not arguing against theory. I am merely saying that it may well be necessary, but it is not sufficient in today's world. Most students will not have the luxury of dwelling in a world of pure theory; they must have abilities which directly lead to pragmatic employment opportunities.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished University Presidents,

If a state wants to be the enabling State for higher education... a higher education facing growing demand, inadequate state resources, a need to foster pluralism, and a need to seek new solutions... then we should have a ready set of policy recommendations. In essence, we should be saying to the State: We know that higher education yields a social rate of

return upwards of 10 percent. But in today's world, you will not get that rate of return unless we can conduct business differently. So here are the five points I would be presenting to government were I in the august position of running a public university.

q First, we need to manage our business more independently so that we respond to the market. We must be able to set our own fees, generate revenues and keep those revenues, and have the management flexibility to create real economies;

q Second, we must allow and even encourage private universities and training centres. It will be healthy competition which could lead us to specialize;

q Third, we must not only be allowed, but encouraged to find private sector services at lower cost than operating every campus service ourselves;

q Fourth, we must be encouraged to undertake research under private contacts as long as this fits our academic goals. But part of that encouragement must be to allow us to keep the revenues generated without penalty to our budgets; and,

q Fifth, we should do all this in a coherent policy framework, which encourages higher education, allows us more autonomy, and gives us incentives for quality improvement and better service to the public.

I hope that in your deliberations, you will consider these ideas at reform and exchange lessons of experience to encourage progress along these lines.

This brings me to my suggestions on partnerships between African universities, the private sector, and civil society. A progressing Africa, where higher education seeks and receives more authority and responsibility to be innovative, can implement a full menu of relationships with the private sector and civil society. No one person or institution has all the answers as to what every specific menu should be, so this is another area in which to share ideas and experiences.

My menu, like all menus, has some tried and true recipes, and some pure experiments. But unlike most menus, this one has a philosophy. It is this: the wise university will diversify its sources of information, it will enter into strategic alliances, it will be experimental, and it will mix boldness with prudence. But the wise university will also remember who must be in charge. You must serve the future job market, not be a slave to it. You must seek new relationships, not give up your ultimate responsibilities. No. Far from seeking to put a "for sale" sign on your office door, I seek ways to make your work even more successful.

So here is a buffet line, a menu of ideas as a start to a much longer set of offerings which will emerge from this meeting on ideas to engage your institutions with the private sector and civil society. But let me preface these suggestions by saying that although I have come from Addis Ababa,

which is at the same elevation as Mount Sinai, I have nine, and not ten, suggestions for your considerations. Moreover, like all buffet lines, there are choices to be made, but it is so good to reflect on the ability to choose.

The first idea is to encourage advisory boards from leading experts in a number of sectors to work with specific schools or even departments. They should help your deans and department heads to be more creative and open to new opportunities. And they might well be able to mobilize resources for special programmes.

The second idea is to establish a quid pro quo of public service for receiving government scholarships. In Pakistan, for example, the late Mahbub ul Haq established a system whereby students on government scholarships had to spend their summers in public service, mostly at village level. In India, Medical School students in some parts of the country must do service in the villages. The fact is, we must erase the dichotomy between students and serving the public good. All students must be led to expect that in some way they will serve the public good, no matter what sector they work in.

The third idea is to establish an office to promote internships with locally based private profit and non-profit institutions as well as with government. The office would assure that internships offered real training instead of slave labor, and that the training would be significant enough to extend university credits for successfully completing the internships. Such offices would establish relationships, work out real agreements and monitor for academic compliance.

The fourth idea is to encourage research on the relationship of the State, the private sector and civil society. There are real problems to work out where creative thinking is needed. By raising the issues in research, and by promoting seminars on the results, you can help promote an atmosphere of jointly seeking solutions in which all sectors have a stake.

The fifth idea is to establish adjunct and visiting professorships with the private sector so that leading people from civil society, the profit sector and leading government figures become engaged in teaching at the university. This has an advantage of spreading teaching loads while enabling good people to take the time to reflect upon what they are doing. Naturally, this is an investment in goodwill as well as in education.

The sixth idea is to give points towards final examinations or similar benefits for important community service by students. The point is both to encourage working for the public good, as well as, in picking up new practical perspectives as part of education.

The seventh idea is to encourage students to become politically active by allowing them to elect representations to the university's board. Universities, in the best of circumstances, teach responsible governance through the classroom and through applied experiences.

The eighth idea is to develop research collaboration with the private sector to jointly conduct research, or accept grants for specialized research, as long as the findings can enter into the public domain. Carry the research

idea further, by helping to set up, in collaboration with the private sector, research centers near the university, such as Taiwan's Hsinchu Science-Based Industrial Park, or Korea's Daeduk City.

These eight suggested areas of partnership bring me to the ninth idea – the need to foster an entrepreneurial spirit aimed either for the public good (these are called social entrepreneurs) or for the private good. Courses can ask for term projects in terms of proposals for actual private sector or civil society initiatives. In a number of institutions around the world, these concrete proposals have turned into start up firms and community services. Private and non-profit experts working with the professor should review these proposals. All would learn, including the professor. And the university's role as innovator and incubator of ideas would be strengthened.

I had thought, Mr. Chairman, that I could hold my tablet of ideas to nine, but forgive me: I have a tenth suggestion.

This one is for a cordial invitation for collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa. There was a time, not too many years ago, when the Commission sought to be intellectually self-sufficient. Not even the largest multinational corporation would attempt that today. Now, ECA seeks to work with serious scholars and practitioners throughout the continent. We are pleased to help showcase excellent work by African scholars in our working with the public sector here in Africa and with Africa's partners abroad. If we can highlight rising African policy stars, that is all to the good. If we can work with you to have the benefit of outstanding graduates as post-doctoral fellows for internships, that is also good. And if we can add outstanding policy centers in your universities as part of collaborating institutions, that we also seek.

We are doing a lot of things that I hope will be of interest to you:- fora on senior policy issues; fora on governance which we conduct in collaboration with UNDP; operation of a regional center to strengthen Africa's civil society organizations; work on the urgent topic of post-conflict development; and leading work on gender issues as well as on information systems and technology.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me illustrate the scope of our collaboration with a sample of activities in which African universities feature prominently. Two months ago, the UN General Assembly approved our first funding of a programme with a grant of \$2.5 million to implement some of them.

Through a variety of ways, we will be providing high quality research, very largely by Africans, to Africa's policy-makers. We will strengthen research networks throughout Africa. We will support an electronic communications network with policy-makers and researchers. We will strengthen policy fora with top policy-makers. We will involve Africa's intellectual diaspora in the network to draw back to Africa many of our bright brothers and sisters anxious to re-link. Already, we are working with networks, such as the African Economic Research Consortium, involving many of your leading academics. New programmes will enhance linkages with your campuses through visiting fellowships with ECA, staff exchanges

and an internship programme. We already have a few such arrangements in place.

Also, in the area of information technology, ECA is currently carrying out activities, co-sponsored by UNESCO and Carnegie Corporation, to develop training centres of excellence at national and subregional levels, using existing infrastructure, largely at universities and schools of technology and communication. A critical activity in the application of information and communication technology in Africa is ECA's support to the effort of the World Bank and the Association of African Universities to establish the Virtual University, which is now in advanced stages of implementation.

In addition, for many of our substantive programmes we have set up advisory panels consisting of eminent specialists and academics to provide us guidance to enhance the relevance and quality of our analytical and policy work. I am pleased to say that three distinguished Ghanaians – Professors George Benneh, your Chair, Adjei-Bekoe, and Mrs. Christina Kissiedu are members on three of our panels.

Finally, in collaboration with the Association of African Universities, we are sponsoring a Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building here in Accra later this year. The Conference will review the causes and impact of the African brain drain, and government-education-industry relationships in capacity building.

Our interest in all these areas is not just to tap the expertise that abound in the continent and in the diaspora, but more fundamentally, to put in place networks of enduring value to your institutions and to policy-makers.

I suspect, Mr. Chairman, most of you do not have the chance to see our work, so as a start, let me again repeat our website: www.un.org/depts/eca. My colleagues and I would welcome discussions to explore what I think are real collaboration possibilities.

Colleagues,

I can only hope that my few remarks here have started your ample gray cells to vibrate. Your meeting is important. So much so, that I urge a special effort be made to organize the notes of this meeting into a user-friendly publication which is sent to many other policy-makers on this continent.

Thank you very much for the privilege of being with you, of returning to my campus and for thinking with you about a golden time for Africa's universities.

Thank you.