

**Fifth Session of the Committee on Development Information (CODI-V)
Of the UN Economic Commission for Africa**

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Theme: Employment and the Knowledge Economy in Africa

“From the Vantage Point of a University Librarian”

**S. C. Otenya
Egerton University, Kenya**

The essence of the Session:

- To emphasise and fully understand the importance of high rate of employment in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).
- To develop appropriate policy options for expanding knowledge-centric employment in African countries.

Shared conceptual ground:

- A knowledge economy is one in which knowledge acts as the main engine of growth.
- At work is the continuum framework of: “Access to Information – Knowledge and Capacity – Innovation – Productivity – Growth – Employment – Poverty Reduction.”

The most important sub-theme from the point of view of a university is:
Enhancement of employability through access to information and knowledge through libraries and other information services.

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The university is the most crucial institution with respect to the agenda of this Session. On the one hand, it is the primary centre where information and knowledge are created and from where they are disseminated. The university library is the major instrument in these processes.

On the other hand, the university is the major producer of persons fit for employment. These belong to two categories: a) the students; b) the community. It has special responsibilities to both of these to make them highly competitive in terms of their employability. As far as the students are concerned, the university can achieve this through its academic programmes. As far as the community goes, through its outreach programmes.

Universities should develop strategic plans in which to project objectives, strategies and activities to ensure the above is done effectively.

Egerton University has developed a Strategic Plan for 2005-2015 which provides some pertinent examples.

The University's mandate includes:

- Teaching
- Discovery, transmission and preservation of knowledge
- Advisory and consultancy services

Its mission is:

To generate and disseminate significant knowledge and offer exemplary education to contribute to and innovatively influence national and global development.

Some relevant (to this Session) strategic objectives (SO), strategies and activities are:

SO: Provide quality higher education and training

Strategy: Expansion of learning and teaching resources

Activities: a) Expand University Library; b) Provide sufficient number of computers for instruction and research

SO: Develop market-driven quality programmes

SO: Staff to undertake research and publish

SO: Disseminate research findings to the scientific and industrial communities

Strategy: Dissemination of research findings to different interest groups

Activities: a) Organise workshops and seminars for consumers of research findings; b) Set up incubation units to promote transfer of technologies in priority areas

SO: develop technological innovations towards industrial development

SO: Develop and enhance ICT and networking of ICT in the University

SO: Promote and facilitate the expansion of Distance Education *To virtual library*

SO: Increase accessibility to higher education

SO: Engage in priority areas of community outreach programmes

Strategy: Improvement of the University – community relationship

Activities: a) Conduct needs assessment for communities; b) Develop outreach programmes for empowerment of youth and women groups

SO: Empower the communities living in the water catchment areas and the University to address the environmental challenges *- Resource station*

SO: Mobilise communities to develop environmentally sustainable modes of livelihood

SO: Promote and facilitate partnerships, networking, and collaborations with other institutions and organisations

SO: Establish linkages and partnerships with industry and organisations for mutual benefit

SO: Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the University staff

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To make students highly employable, the university should teach them to evaluate the information they encounter, particularly the various sources they use in their study and research undertakings. Not all resources are equally reliable or of equal quality. In dealing with potential sources, they should not assume that something is correct, truthful or credible just because it appears in print or is on the Internet. Some material may be based on imprecise or completely incorrect information or on faulty logic, and the author's knowledge or view of the subject may be marked by prejudice, or may be too limited. Students should be taught to weigh what they read against their own knowledge and intelligence as well as from a comparative perspective with other treatments of the subject. They should focus particularly on *authority*, *accuracy* and *currency* of the sources they use.