

Case Study 3



Institutional capacity development and innovation at Makerere University



History of the University

Early history

Makerere University was established in 1892 as a technical school. It is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Africa. The technical school was renamed Uganda Technical College, with the first 14 students studying Carpentry, Building and Mechanics. The College expanded over the years to become a Centre for Higher Education in East Africa in 1935. In 1937 it started developing into an institution of higher learning. In 1949, it became a University College affiliated to the University of London. In 1963 it became the University of East Africa, offering courses leading to general degrees of the University of London, clearly showing the influence of colonial powers in the shaping of university education in Uganda. In 1970 Makerere became an independent national university of the Republic of Uganda, offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses leading to its own awards.



Today Makerere University has 23 faculties/institutes/ schools offering day, evening and external study programmes to a student body of around 30 000 undergraduates and 3000 post- graduates. (www.makerere.ac.ug)

Financial difficulties

The global economic recession of the 1970s drastically reduced state budgets to educational institutions in Uganda. This, together with the early turbulence and decline of social services in Uganda's post-independence period, plunged the University into crisis. During the 1980s fiscal spending was cut severely, and education spending was hit hardest of all (Oula Obong, 2004). Other external factors also influenced the university, particularly the ideological shift in educational funding towards primary and secondary levels, and a parallel increase in demand for higher education and a resultant rise in enrolment. As enrolments increased in the 1980s, growth in student numbers was not matched with improvement in financial and material resources. This led to unsatisfactory working conditions and a massive 'brain drain' from the university due to poor staff conditions. Research declined, as did tutorials and other forms of student support, leading to a dramatic deterioration in the quality of teaching, learning and research.

These issues led to a crisis in governance, both within the University and between the University and the state (Oula Obong, 2004). In 1989 the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government adopted neo-liberal policies. In order to transform the higher education sector, it began to implement educational reforms proposed by the World Bank in 1993.

It is important to note that the University's financial position was affected by trends in the national budget. For example, whenever there were cuts in the government budget University funding was also reduced. The University's response has been to lobby the republican president (who happens to be the chancellor of the University) or the Minister of Education for special consideration. The president or the minister uses his discretion to bail out the University. On presidential directive the national treasury has often released additional supplementary funding to the University (Mamdani, 2005). Irregular cash flow from the treasury to the university has also affected the smooth running of the institutional programme.

The Makerere University Council was forced to respond to the financial squeeze by introducing cost-sharing in 1989. Parents were asked to meet the cost of university fees. This was a shift from the tradition of universities meeting the cost of feeding the students and paying book and transport allowances.



Other measures included revenue generation through commercial units such as Kabanyolo University Farm, the University Bookshop, a printing business and guest house. By 1992, university leadership was convinced that it was necessary to break away from total dependency on government funding that was cut annually. In 1993 a World Bank-supported study on ways of revitalising higher education in Uganda recommended the introduction of evening courses as a way of making better use of existing capacity.

Rejuvenation

Through the introduction of fee-paying students, and other changes, the overall student numbers grew by 340% between 1993 and 2000. Only 25% of the 25000 students registered in 2000 were state-sponsored, and the remaining 75% met the costs of their tuition. A second dimension of the reform drive was the expansion, modification and diversification of teaching programmes to ensure relevance to public and private interests. Special attention was given to courses that would meet the demands of the broader community. Other reform initiatives included broadening resource mobilisation, funding the training of staff, and the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms (ibid).

A newly emerging concern

Despite this impressive rejuvenation, there is concern about a decline in academic performance and the quality of scholarship since 1997. This is attributed to the rapid and unplanned expansion of the University. Neo-liberal policies have also been introduced and a move made from elite to mass higher education, and from controlling process to controlling product (Oula Obong, 2004). These developments have changed the purpose of higher education to being driven primarily by market demands, and provided a mechanism for public policy to 'regulate' individual institutional responses (ibid). This also signals a change in relationship between the University and the state, from a collegial (and mutually beneficial model) to a corporate model. This is indicated by measures such as "... enhanced evaluation mechanisms, multiplication of performance indicators and the elaboration of criteria to operationalise quality, in addition to the fact that greater responsibilities are thrust down to mid-level" (Obong, 2004:121). The discourse in higher education has therefore changed from a public good discourse to an efficiency discourse, and measurable quantitative aspects of professional practice have become dominant. Market forces now tend to dominate the teaching and research agendas at Makerere, which leads Mamdani (2005) to describe the emergence of a 'mercenary learning culture' in the institution. He also comments on the fact that the system of 'service'



courses is beginning to break down. This is linked to other issues such as expanding workloads and the complex economic environment created for Makerere by the 1993 policy changes. The result of these developments is a shift from a development-oriented mission to a market-orientated University.

Today, Makerere University views itself as a 'university in transition' (Makerere University Strategic Plan, 2004), which has been and is being affected by national policies of liberalisation, privatisation and decentralisation, that have brought about radical changes in financing and operations. So, while the University mission emphasises the role of the University in enabling sustainable development, there are many other complex factors at play in enabling it to achieve this mission.

The University has had to develop strategies to cope with several challenges associated with growth, including widening its source of funding to meet the demands that come with the change, coping with increased numbers of students and with the managerial challenges that come with transition. Key strategies have also been introduced in the curriculum, its delivery and management.

Innovations at Makerere University

With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Makerere University initiated a project known as Innovations at Makerere University, also referred to as the I@mak.com project. The project is meant to respond particularly to the needs identified in a study that assessed the human resource requirements of Ugandan local governments under the government decentralisation programme. It also addresses the skills and knowledge that Makerere graduates lacked. (www.makerere.ac.ug/innovations)

The major goal of the I@mak.com project is to develop Makerere University as an institution of excellence in higher education in the area of decentralisation through, among other things:

- Training existing and future district human resources according to the needs of government;
- Producing more and better educated graduates to meet changing needs in society, especially in relation to the decentralisation policy;
- Undertaking research to inform public policy on decentralisation; and
- Developing Makerere as a recognised centre for innovation.



To adequately respond to the challenges Makerere University embarked on several innovations through the I@mak.com project and a few relevant ones are described here.

Development of capacity at Makerere University

The University realised that if meaningful transformation was to take place it was necessary to invest institutional capacity-building in key areas within the institution. The University focused on:

- The development of an efficient, effective and competitive mechanism of decision-making for disbursement of funds under the capacity-building programme on training human resources for decentralisation.
- The promotion of innovations and changes in management that ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
- Systemic development through the strengthening of the offices of the Bursar, the University Secretary, the Planning and Development Department and others.
- Further decentralisation to colleges, faculties and institutes of a wide range of authority to encourage competitiveness and improve the quality of teaching.
- A systematic process of internal mobilisation of Makerere staff to train and enhance policy and research capacity for decentralisation and to produce better graduates.

Vice-Chancellor's Award for Innovation

Makerere University introduced the Vice-Chancellor's Award as one of the most progressive ways to stimulate and sustain staff interest and commitment to the development and implementation of good innovations. The award amounting to \$15,000 is given to the group/faculty/department/individual developing the best response to decentralisation. The award is given through the I@mak.com project by the Vice Chancellor.

Social relevance in courses

To enable graduates to meet the broader needs of Ugandan society including decentralised administration, the University has among other things:

- Supported the introduction of courses that cover ethics, professional motivation and job dedication. It plans to appoint an Assistant Academic Registrar with the sole responsibility for curriculum.
- Countered the common criticism that Makerere graduates are theoretical and not practical about life and work in rural Uganda, by organising training for staff in matters of decentralisation and local government. This training aims to



- enable academic staff to revise and develop new curricula relevant to training human resources for decentralisation.
- Funded research and the publication and dissemination of research findings. New knowledge and questions are integrated into the teaching and assessment of students in the various departments and faculties. Makerere also offers competitive grants to staff for work on decentralisation.
 - Encouraged and supported inter-disciplinary teaching and research by funding inter-disciplinary research projects.
 - Introduced community-based internship and practical training as an integral part of all university teaching particularly in long-term courses.
 - Introduced new courses within the conventional disciplines to address emerging issues such as poverty alleviation, universal primary education, modernisation of agriculture, community-based rehabilitation, social sector planning, community-based local government procedures, rules and regulations.

Partnerships with local district officials

The University trains district staff in several areas of need as identified by the districts. Workshops, seminars, collaborative research, and practical intervention activities are conducted for and with district staff to respond to society's needs and challenges. To motivate participants certificates of attendance/recognition are sometimes awarded. Because of the training activities, a number of changes have taken place in the way participating professionals conduct their business. More districts are approaching the university departments involved to provide similar programmes.

Development planning

The most recent Strategic Plan (2000/1–2006/7) (January 2004) articulates the University's commitment to sustainable development, as articulated in the University vision, mission and planning trends:

The vision:

To be a centre of academic excellence, providing world-class teaching, research and service relevant to the sustainable development needs of society.



The mission:

To provide quality teaching, carry out research and offer professional services to meet the changing needs of society by utilising worldwide and internally-generated human resources, information, and technology to enhance the University's leading position in Uganda and beyond.

“Recent major issues in the assessment and updating of the Strategic Plan were:

- The continued expansion of the student population;
- The delay by the Ministry of Education and Sports in approving and implementing a financial strategy based on unit costs of education students, submitted by Makerere University;
- The ongoing processes for restructuring the University, devolving powers and functions from the centre to units, and the proposed formation of Colleges;
- The importance of ensuring that University strategies and goals are compatible with national policies and development plans, as expressed in Vision 2025, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), and the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA); and
- The long time taken to implement the new Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001).

The main directions in the development and transformation of Makerere continue to be:

- transforming teaching and learning through the application of pedagogic and information technology, and curriculum reform;
- further devolution of powers to operational units;
- relating university education to the needs of society;
- advancing the development of a critical mass of science and technology and research and human resource development to harness natural resources and seize opportunities from international scientific breakthroughs; and
- gender mainstreaming.” (Ssebuwufu, Foreword to the Makerere University Strategic Plan, 2004: ii)

The Strategic Plan further states that Makerere University's ultimate aim is to “... make significant contributions towards sustainable and equitable social, economic and technological development in Uganda”.

The University's priorities are:

- 1) Information and communication technology
- 2) Library services
- 3) Research



- 4) Science-based disciplines: Agriculture and Livestock Management, Health Sciences, Science and Technology, Environment and Nature Conservation
- 5) Good governance and human rights
- 6) Gender mainstreaming.

References

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