

Association of African Universities Declaration on the African University in the Third Millennium

Preamble

Education for change in the developing countries, particularly in Africa, has never been as critical as it is today. Besides the perennial issues of relevance inadequacy of resources, explosion in enrolment and demand for access, African education confronts the challenge of the “knowledge revolution” and globalisation, phenomena fuelled by the rapid advances in knowledge, most of which is produced outside Africa. These are matters in respect of which higher education, as the principal venue for knowledge creation and dissemination, occupies a very special place. Additionally, higher education has the function of fostering the capacity of individuals and communities to embrace democratic principles, to uphold human rights and to promote sustainable development. For these and other reasons, higher education must receive the support the sustainable development of the region.

When the Association of African Universities (AAU) was established in 1967, its membership was only 34. Today the Association has grown into a body of more than 170 universities, drawn from 43 countries. The Association provides a platform for reflection, consultation, debate, co-operation and collaboration on issues and projects of interest and benefit to its membership and to African development. Over the years, this has contributed to the enhancement of the capacity of African universities for teaching, research and service to their communities and nations. It has also facilitated a constant review of their performance and role in the socio-economic and political development of their individual nations and of the African continent as a whole.

In the last quarter of the 20th Century, higher education in Africa experienced serious setbacks. Higher educational institutions suffered neglect as a result of reduced resources in most African countries and the low priority given to it by African governments. Under-funding, the deterioration of basic academic and research infrastructure, unsatisfactory terms and conditions of service for university staff and the persistent brain drain were the inevitable result. These problems have not only adversely affected the quality of higher education provided by the universities but also have had a negative effect on the overall development of African countries.

Thirty-four years after the establishment of the AAU, three years after the Dakar “*Declaration and Action Plan on Higher Education in Africa*”, two years after the “*World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century*”, and at the beginning of the Third Millennium, African universities have had the opportunity to examine the emerging trends in higher education, especially the impact of information and communication technologies. They have reflected on the

problems of their institutions, with a view to enhancing their contribution to the socio-economic development of the continent. The start of the Third Millennium provides African universities and the AAU an opportunity for redefining their vision, mission and role, as well as for re-examining the role of government, students and other stakeholders in the development of universities in Africa.

Declaration

In consideration of the above, WE, REPRESENTATIVES OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 10TH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on 9th February 2001, call for the revitalisation of the African University, and for a renewed sense of urgency in acknowledging the crucial role it should play in solving the many problems facing our continent, and MAKE AND ANNOUNCE TO AFRICA AND THE WORLD, this

DECLARATION ON THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

In order that African universities should be in a position to fulfil their mission and fundamental obligation to the people of Africa and to the world community:

- African universities must strive to create an institutional environment that fosters the development of the mind and the ennobling of the spirit, inculcating responsible citizenship and the will to serve
- Through the promotion of research and free enquiry, the open contestation of ideas, and the appreciation and tolerance of difference, African universities must generate and disseminate knowledge and understanding, foster the values of openness and respect for merit, and enrich the general quality of the social life of their communities.
- African universities must give priority to effective and positive participation in the global creation, exchange and application of knowledge. To this end, the universities should exploit fully the potential of the information and communication revolution to enhance teaching, learning, research and management. Urgent consideration should be given to recent developments in teaching applications, networking, distance education and opportunities for life-long learning.
- Recognising the critical role of universities in national development, African governments must continue to assume the prime responsibility for sustaining their universities, in partnership with other stakeholders, including the private sector and cooperating partners. To ensure this, African universities must continue to engage their governments, communities and other stakeholders in a dialogue aimed at arriving at appropriate understanding on the issue of diversification of sources of funding, including cost-sharing initiatives.
- While recognising the accountability of African universities to various stakeholders, including governments, we stress that a large measure of institutional autonomy is critical if they are to fulfil their historic mission.

- To a greater degree than ever before, African universities must renew their commitment to helping Africa and effective solutions to its perennial problems of poverty, hunger and disease. They must, by their research and teaching, strengthen their contribution to improvements in food production and distribution, disease control and health service delivery, and the general well being of their people. In particular, the HIV/AIDS crisis poses a serious threat to African within which the universities are situated. We recognise that the solution to this problem might well lie in Africa. African universities must, in any event, be in the forefront of research, education and action in this matter.
- African universities must strengthen their linkages with the productive sector, private and public, in agriculture, industry and the services, in order to increase the relevance of their work and to ensure its easy infusion into production for the benefit of society and the economy.
- African universities must contribute more actively to the removal of incessant social conflict, civil war and sub-regional disputes and the displacement of human beings, by establishing research projects and courses on peace and conflict resolution, democracy and human rights, solidarity and good governance.
- The rapid expansion of university enrolment in a situation of inadequate resources raises major issues about the quality and effectiveness of all aspects of university life and work, including teaching and academic programmes, staff and students, research and facilities. African universities must encourage regular institutional evaluation, internal and external, to help improve their functioning and enhance their contribution to national life and development under these difficult circumstances.
- African universities need to develop and implement deliberate policies to address social and gender imbalances at all levels within their institutions. In this regard, greater access of women to university education, their employment as academics and management staff, and appointment to leadership positions, as well as the introduction or strengthening of curricula on gender studies, should be given special attention.
- A particularly troubling feature of African university life is the academic brain drain. To contain this, proper material and other conditions must be created to attract and to retain qualified young scholars in academic life, and to encourage experienced staff to remain at post and to serve as role models for younger staff. Raising participation rates in their education on the continent is also a high priority. Responsibility for creating these positive conditions rests primarily with governments and the universities.
- African universities should take full advantage of their collective potential by pursuing with increased vigour opportunities for inter-institutional cooperation and academic mobility, directly and through supporting bodies such as AAU and other regional and sub-regional associations. For the success of such initiatives, staff and students from other African universities should be welcomed as colleagues and made to feel at home in their host institutions.

DONE IN NAIROBI, KENYA THIS 9TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 2001