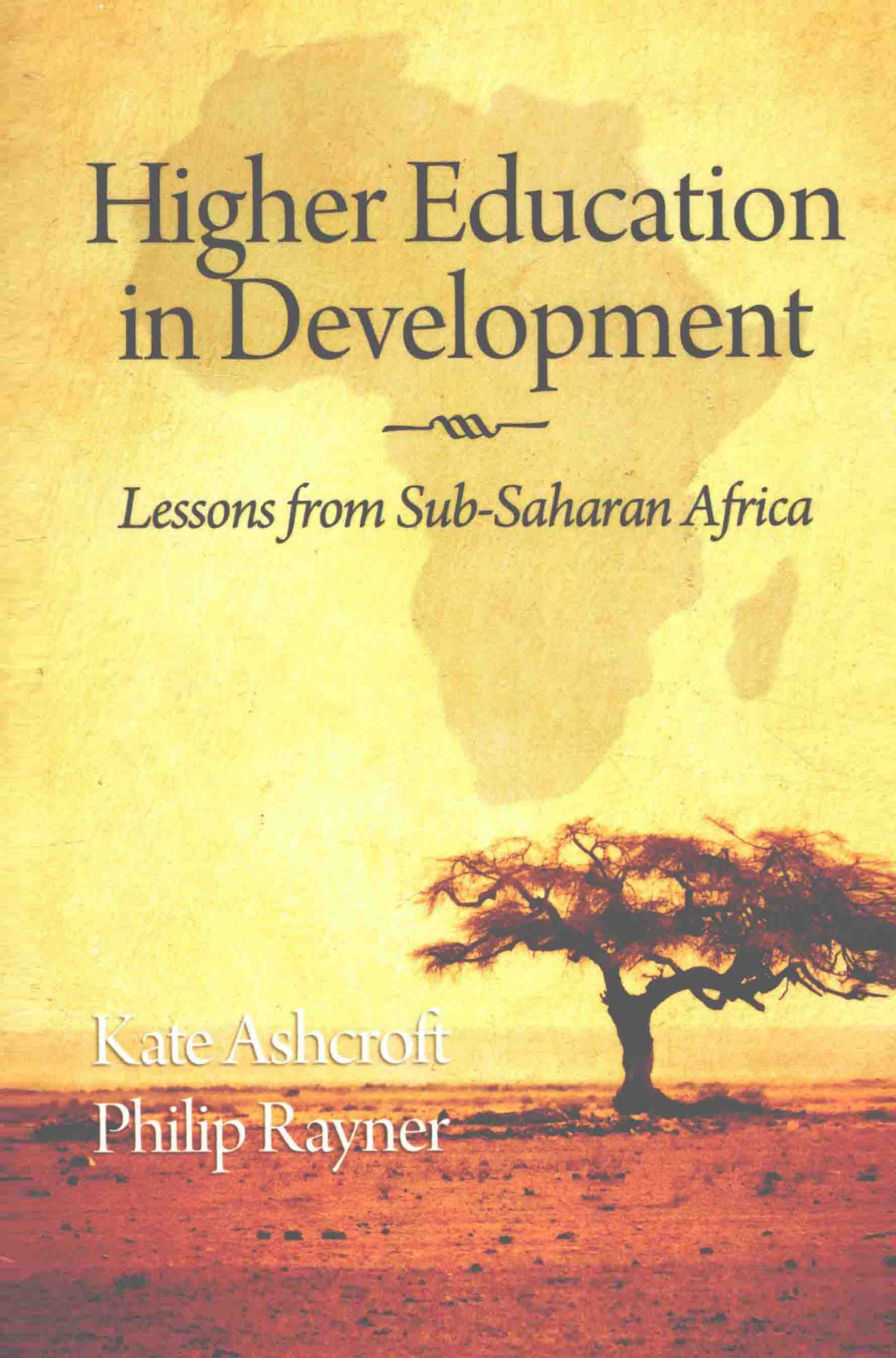
Higher Education in Development

Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa



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藏书章

IAP
INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.
Charlotte, NC • www.infoagepub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ashcroft, Kate.
Higher education in development : lessons from sub-Saharan Africa / Kate Ashcroft, Philip Rayner.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-1-61735-541-7 (pbk.) – ISBN 978-1-61735-542-4 (hardcover) – ISBN 978-1-61735-543-1 (e-book)
1. Education, Higher–Africa, Sub-Saharan–Case studies. I. Rayner, Philip, 1947- II. Title.
LA1503.A845 2011
378.00967–dc23

2011028007

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Printed in the United States of America

List of Acronyms

AAU	Association of African Universities
ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency (or immunodeficiency) syndrome
AfriQAN	African Quality Assurance Network
AVU	African Virtual University
ADRC	Ethiopia's Academic Development and Resource Centres
BRICs	Brazil, Russia, India, and China
CEO	Chief executive officer
CIS/VU	Center for International Co-operation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
CHE	South Africa's Council on Higher Education
CHET	South Africa's Centre for Higher Education Transformation
DIF	World Bank's Development Innovation Fund
DfID	UK's Department of International Aid
EAU	European University Association
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQUIP	Educational Quality Improvement Program in Ethiopia
ETQAA	Ethiopia's Education and Training Quality Assurance Agency
GATS	World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross domestic product
GER	Gross enrollment rate
ICT	Information and communication technology
INASP	International Network for the Availability of Science Publications

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INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IPAGU	Pan-African Institute of University Governance
ISO 9001	International Organization for Standardization accreditation for quality management
IUCEA	Inter-University Council for East Africa
HERQA	Ethiopia's Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
HECSU	Higher Education Careers Services Unit
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HESC	Ethiopia's Higher Education Strategy Centre
HESO	Higher Education System Overhaul
HEQC	South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee
HIPC	Highly indebted poor countries
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HRM	Human resource management
LMD	Licence, Master, Doctorat
MADEV	Management Development Workshop
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIS	Management information systems
NGO	Nongovernment organization
NICHE	Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Development in Higher Education
NUC	Nigeria's National Universities Commission
Nuffic	Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OfSTED	UK's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PERii	Program for the Enhancement of Research Information
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
QAA	UK's Quality Assurance Agency for higher education
QANU	Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities
QIF	World Bank's Quality Enhancement and Innovation Facility
SIG	Special interest group
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association
SSRs	Staff student ratios
TB	Tuberculosis
TDA	UK's Teacher Development Agency
TRQ	Tariff rate quota
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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UNIFY	Science and mathematics foundation program at the University of the North in South Africa
VLE	Virtual learning environment
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

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1

Introduction

What Ethiopia needs is . . .
—A newly arrived VSO volunteer

Ethiopia's problems are just so complicated . . .
—The same volunteer a few weeks later

MAIN POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Attitudes and skills required for working in sub-Saharan Africa
- Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- Judging "success" and unsuspected consequences
- The World Bank Development Innovation Fund in Ethiopia
- The action research cycle
- The Centre for International Cooperation/VU University Amsterdam (CIS/VU) philosophy of collaboration
- How to use this book

We have lived and worked in sub-Saharan African countries for a number of years, working in higher education at the government level

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and within universities and higher education institutions. During this time, we have seen development workers, volunteers, and consultants fly in and out, some staying a few days, some for years, sometimes as part of a long-term project, and sometimes as part of a shorter program, sometimes individually, and sometimes as a group enterprise. We have noticed each of these groups trying, with varying degrees of success, to improve the quality of education in the country and, often, to promote other agendas, such as good governance and poverty reduction.

During this time, we have often noted a disconnect between the knowledge and expertise that development workers bring to the situation and the needs and interests of those working permanently in the country. Very often the ideas are good, the intentions are good, the methods are good, the values are good, but somehow the results are disappointing. Generally, this has not been because of any lack of willingness and interest on the part of the recipients; frequently consultancy missions and volunteers placed in institutions are very highly evaluated by those with whom they work. Very often the changes suggested by the development worker have been enthusiastically embraced, only to wither and die after quite a short time.

On other occasions, we have noticed some slower-burning initiatives, initiated through a development intervention, that have apparently sunk without trace and yet some time later reemerge within various contexts, having undergone a "sea change": the ideas, techniques, and knowledge that have been applied in the longer term have almost invariably been "Africanized," look far different from those originally presented, and seem to have a greater chance of taking root and effecting longer-term change.

We became interested in this process of successfully achieving some deep change and the ways that change might become embedded, owned, and adapted over time. We wanted to tease out what the elements are in the mix of context, ideas, concepts, attitudes, behaviors, and qualities that makes it more likely that a development intervention will (a) be adopted in some form and (b) will then improve the situation. In this book, we are trying to distill our thinking and our reflections so that readers intending to work (or already working) to develop higher education in sub-Saharan Africa might be helped to be a little more insightful about the reality of the dilemmas Africa and its people face and a little more sensitive to the complexity of the development worker's task. This is what this book is about.

We felt that this book was needed to set out as clearly as possible the complex ways that higher education systems are changing, partly in response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but also because of a new focus on the value of higher education and its relationship with

particular countries' own poverty-reduction strategies. We were also motivated by a strong belief in the importance of higher education in enabling developing countries to reduce poverty. We draw from experiences across sub-Saharan Africa, but focus particularly on South Africa, Ethiopia, and Zambia as representing a range of political and colonial histories. Ethiopia is the only African country not to have been colonized and was until recently a monarchy that spanned millennia; Zambia having experienced British colonialism and a relatively peaceful democracy in recent times; and South Africa emerging to democracy from apartheid and protracted struggle for freedom in the second half of the 20th century.

We have undertaken intensive research into parts of the sub-Saharan African higher education system and listened carefully to what those within higher education at every level have to say. We have talked extensively to a range of stakeholders to find out what they expect, want, and need from higher education in a developing country. This book is intended to reflect their voices. It is in part the outcome of numerous interviews of top and middle managers, academic and support staff, and students in each of 26 public and private universities as well as interviews with employers and other external stakeholders. It is also based on insights from studies into the higher education systems of various countries undertaken by us and by others, and of working with staff in Ministries of Education and many universities on areas such as improved management and governance, pedagogy, strategy and policy development, and quality and standards. We draw on our experience of working with and acting as advisers to Ministers of Education and Vice Ministers of Higher Education and as leaders of major sector support units in Ethiopia.

We also bring insights from our work in Scotland, England, and Wales, including quality-assurance training with the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland, senior university management, faculty management, management of teaching and learning, and research and also of senior management in the Higher Education Funding Council for England. We have mediated this experience through the African perspectives and voices we encountered. Over our time in Africa, we heard many people newly arrived say, "what Ethiopia (or Zambia or wherever) needs to do is..." and then propound a nice tidy theory—perhaps about land reform, investment in ICT, laws against early marriage, or female genital mutilation. After a few weeks, these people became more thoughtful as they realized the economic, practical, cultural, and resource complications of their prescription and the complexity of the situations for which they are suggesting (easy) solutions. We are particularly concerned to discourage our readers from too-easy assumptions.

As a result of our observations, we have become particularly interested in the dilemmas these higher education systems face within a context of scarce resources but increasing and urgent demand for a more professionalized workforce and expert services. We realize how important it is to have a book that discusses with some sympathy and understanding the strength of the factors inhibiting development such as historical conflicts, a legacy of colonialism, trade and other imbalances with the rest of the world, cultural attitudes inimical to innovation, the challenges created by poor infrastructure, and the history of authoritarianism and centralized control of many aspects of the economy and public sector institutions.

We also realize that it is not just an easy matter of transferring a simplified version of "what works" in more-developed countries to the sub-Saharan context; that systems, ideas, and practices need to be questioned and modified in the light of particular local, national, and cultural situations. More-developed higher education systems are not fault-free, and there is an opportunity for sub-Saharan countries to learn from the experiences and mistakes that have been made during the expansion of higher education in countries such as Britain, the Netherlands, or the United Sates. Working in Africa is a learning experience too, and one that should lead us to question taken-for-granted assumptions that we know what is "right" and what is "the right way."

Sub-Saharan countries cannot wait for higher education systems to grow and mature as they have done in more-developed countries. The first European university opened in 1088, the first African universities opened in the 1820s; Europe has been refining its quality-assurance methods for higher education for nearly 30 years while many sub-Saharan countries still do not have any quality-assurance processes in place. So, sub-Saharan African countries are in a hurry; they cannot wait a millennia for their universities to fulfill their role in helping countries to develop; they cannot wait 30 years before they have effective quality-assurance systems. In the words of a state minister, "We cannot wait so long when we have people starving." Sub-Saharan African countries need effective and efficient higher education systems in place now to help them address the problems and opportunities of the 21st century.

We set out to write a book that is based on and informed by research (our own and that of others), but which is not solely (or mainly) designed to speak to other researchers. We want our book to be both practical and well informed; not to oversimplify the issues that very poor countries face, but rather to explore research and look for lessons from particular reforms in sub-Saharan African higher education that may be applied to other contexts. We draw on case studies of reform in higher education in Africa; the stories of what has been tried, sometimes with mixed success, are useful as a

means to explore underlying theoretical ideas of development and higher education management and bring these to life so that they can be analyzed and a critique developed about their strengths and limitations.

Therefore, in this book, we use actual examples to describe reforms, and from these, develop ideas as to the means to increase the effectiveness of higher education systems as a means of fighting poverty and stimulating economic and social development. Higher education in these countries exists within a context of a hostile international and historical situation that has often influenced the establishment of inadequate democratic institutions, ethnic and political tensions, volatile civil relationships, systems run on influence rather than competence, and a lack of human capacity and modern infrastructure systems. "Higher education" is a term that has many meanings, and although we generally use the term to refer to education within degree-awarding institutions, these might not be universities in name but also colleges, university colleges, institutes, polytechnics, and so on.

The Reflective Approach

We approach the issues of higher education in development through the idea of reflective practice. The concept of reflective practice was developed by Dewey and others (Ashcroft, 1999; Dewey, 1916; Zeichner, 1982),[1] and its application is based on the notion that development is a multifaceted issue, with layers of meaning and complexity.

There is a danger of imagining that some relatively simple intervention, such as a training workshop, will result in changes in behavior and transform the problems of an institution, when in reality, it can only touch the issues that need addressing at the very periphery. Most problems faced in sub-Saharan African higher education involve deep cultural and practical questions. We suggest that it is useful for those who wish to make positive interventions to base their actions on deep enquiry into the development context. Unfortunately, our experience is that there are few simple questions in development and no simple answers, so it seems important that potential solutions are properly problematized.

This is not to say that one stands as a helpless bystander until one can be certain of having all the available evidence. Each of us working within the development context must do the little we can based on our state of knowledge and capability, and each of these little interventions, together, may make a real difference. Rather, what we advocate is that such interventions are conducted in a spirit of humility and willingness to learn from those inside of the situation and from those who are more experienced. These insights should encourage a partnership strategy and influence the way to approach

a problem at each stage; in the beginning, as progress is made and toward the end in the evaluation of actions. Working well within development contexts requires knowledge of the subject (for example, management or pedagogy), but just as important, a responsiveness to the context and a willingness to adapt the approach, the content of actions, and the methods used in the light of an openness to new ideas that emerge from the context.

This brings us to the first of our prerequisite qualities for reflection: *open-mindedness.* Open-mindedness implies a willingness to seek out and reflect on alternate perspectives to your own. These alternative perspectives may be found in the literature or in the development field. Some of them may be discovered just by being approachable; allowing and encouraging people to talk, communicating ideas, and seeking feedback from those who have more experience of development issues, listening, observing, and testing out emerging ideas.

This is a good start for development work and is the very minimum for effective action. However, it is not enough. There is also a need to actively research the issues and contexts. This implies a process of critical enquiry into what you are doing, what the effects are, and how people you are working with interpret what you are doing. It also implies that you seek out the wisdom of people who are separated from you in time and space; through reading the research and through discussion (for example, using ICT-based SIGS[2]).

There have been a great many critiques of the development process and those who have worked within in it; some suggest interventions are based on the pursuit of self-interest rather than the interests of those living with the consequences of underdevelopment (see, for example, Hancock's *The Lords of Poverty*, 1989[3]). Dambisa Moyo (2009) suggests that aid is in fact counterproductive and produces a culture of dependency;[4] Paul Collier (2008), a former director of research at the World Bank, indicates that for the "stagnant bottom billion," aid is often ineffective and can exacerbate poverty by encouraging corruption and kleptocracies.[5] Many schemes set up by the developed countries lead to resources flowing, not into the developing country, but rather back into the donor country. It is common in capacity building for contracts to be awarded to universities or other bodies within the donor country to manage the scheme. Most of the funds might be used to pay for experts sent from the donor country or to the managing body for their administration costs. The less-developed country benefits to the extent that the scheme does indeed increase capacity, though the extent this might happen is likely to be limited by the terms of reference for the scheme set up by the donor organization. However, it gains few of the incidental benefits from spending the donor funds on goods, services, and

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