

# **AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: THE NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION FOR AFRICAN HIGER EDUCATION**

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The marginalization of Africa and Africans on the global arena should be a cause for concern for all Africans and friends of Africa. Africa is seeing its best and brightest kin flee abroad for opportunities which make leading a more productive, rewarding and challenging professional life possible. The seed of democracy has anchored around Africa, but can it find a fertile ground there with the massive brain drain of Africans abroad? Can we honestly talk about freedom in Africa without an informed electorate and a viable professional sector to drive and sustain the democratic process? What is the value of political reform in Africa if they are not accompanied by meaningful and relevant economic development? What is the meaning of political change if the quality of life for the average African is not improved?

Africa is pregnant with debt from the current and past generations, but can it repay its financial loans without the talent to generate, mobilize, and efficiently manage its resources? Can Africa sustain itself with the high level of intellectual loss it has and continues to experience? Is the need to move abroad for opportunities by African intellectuals mutually exclusive with the need to serve Africa? Can African intellectuals continue to abdicate their responsibility to improve the quality of life in Africa? How credible are African professionals abroad within the international community if they ignore the plight of their kin back home in Africa? How can an African society regenerate itself if the cream and crimson of its population live abroad?

Africans and Africa need to be engaged in global affairs in a more affirming and constructive manner. The international community must be concerned by the situation in Africa. Africa needs economic development which does not undermine its cultural heritage and enhances the potential of ordinary citizens. Africans and Africa cannot continue to be spotlighted on the global stage only when there is a crisis such as a famine. It is inhumane to perceive Africans and their homeland through the exclusive vista of one crisis to the next. A crisis-driven portrayal of Africans on the world scene is not healthy for the African psyche and the human family.

The media alone cannot tell the whole story about African needs. Statistics alone cannot tell all about what Africa needs. The international community alone cannot solve African problems. Africans alone cannot solve their current and inherited problems. Africans must be central players in the process of seeking solutions to the problems of Africa in particular and the world in general. In a nutshell, the needs of Africa are enormous and require immediate attention.

There is the need for a reexamination and redirection of human energy toward addressing African needs in these difficult times. It can be argued that such a renewed and revitalized emphasis cannot be sustained and actualized without revamping African higher education.

The need to redirect African higher education is overwhelming, but it is where any meaningful, lasting, and relevant reform in African society can begin to occur. The argument here is that a substantive and relevant change in the African higher education system will trigger a chain reaction which should engender a more critical, creative, vibrant, and productive African society. The need for an engaging and accountable professional sector cannot be overemphasized here. We cannot expect to begin to alleviate African problems without the investment of time, energy, and creativity of its professional talent pool.

The nature and quality of African education must be challenged to live up to its potential. The role of African professionals in the equation of African development must be constantly examined and questioned. Any society that does not value education and innovation is doomed to ignorance and subsistence. Erosion in the attractiveness of Africa to its professionals not only undermines the ability of African societies to respond effectively to the needs and aspirations of the common African, but promotes mediocrity and ultimately reduces opportunities for constructive change.

It is against this background that the idea of African University was born. African University is proposed as a new and unique model to provide an integrated higher education in Africa. African University will provide a unique mechanism to elevate the human condition by providing educational opportunity and hope to people in society. Africa needs all its citizens to be engaged in its development. Constructive ideas, values and leadership must be critical driving forces of the process of African development. African University will provide an empowering and enriching context in which ideas, values, and leadership can be cultivated. The African University project demonstrates a renewed commitment, confidence, and faith in Africa, Africans, and friends of Africa around the world. Although African University will find its home in Tali, Cameroon, its impact will go beyond the borders of Cameroon.