

BUILDING CORE LEADERSHIP SKILL SETS FOR AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ITS UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESS SCHOOLS:

A focus on Kenya

From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)



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SYNOPSIS

In 21st century Africa, the paradigm of universities must shift from traditional teaching and learning to building communities, invigorating the economy, nurturing leadership, and developing skill sets. Education must play its key role in developing human capital. This paper, after a brief global overview of higher education and its input to economic development, focuses on African universities and business schools and their role in developing national skill sets and best practices. It then conducts the same exercise for Kenya. It identifies gaps and suggests initiatives to fix them, consolidated in a framework for expanding Kenya's skill sets, and looks at 10 pillars for how universities can stimulate economic development.

Among the key findings: There is a need to strengthen the "academic core" of universities. This is essential to producing knowledge, reproducing the academy, and providing the high-level skills that drive development. For improving policy (and implementation) there is a need for coordination at national and institutional levels to help tie universities more closely to development.

The main conclusion: Kenyan universities must cultivate excellent academic deliverables and a conducive academic environment to grow talent. Superior academic deliverables will make Kenya a regional hub as an academic destination—which will see university enrollment of non-Kenyans rise.

The main recommendations: Kenyan university education needs to be seen as an investment for the future by central and county governments, which should prioritize spending on education and research that will subsequently address the country's social, political, environmental, and economic problems.

Universities should be encouraged to share core resources and foster reciprocal partnerships with other educational institutions at home and abroad. Ideally, community development participation should be made mandatory for all universities (public and private) and the rating of universities should include their development impact in the community they operate in.

Global overview of higher education and its role in economic development

Universities have historically been viewed as *important* to economic development and that expectation has, in the 21st century, ballooned. They are now seen as *critical* to economic development (Anderson 2002).

Globally, education is thought to play a key role in developing human capital and, by extension, sound economies. Education and poverty are inversely related to each other: If the former increases, the later decreases (Malik 2014). Shaw (2013) asserts that high-skilled graduates are needed to help get the world's economies back on track.

Universities around the world are finding themselves going beyond their traditional roles of research and teaching to drive the development of local economies through collaboration with industry (Breznitz 2007). Thus in the 21st century, the paradigm of universities has shifted from traditional aspects of teaching and learning to building communities, economies, and patterns of leadership.

One study commissioned by US cities' chief executive officers found that there is relative economic impact of high school and college graduates: "educational levels were the single biggest driver of economic growth" (Weissbourd and Berry 2003).

Similarly, the Rockefeller Institute of Government (2010) in the United States found that universities and higher education systems were taking leading roles in their states' economic development efforts. This trend seems likely to strengthen as the nation moves into the era of the "innovation economy." The study established that higher education's importance goes well beyond the research strengths of universities, incorporating efforts as wide-ranging as job training, business consulting, rehabilitating housing, and even securing seed money for new businesses.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and systems successful in this area appeared to rely on a combination of four factors:

- *Innovation*—using their research power to create knowledge that can have an economic impact, and then working to help move new ideas into the marketplace.
- *Knowledge transfer*—helping businesses grow and prosper, through programs such as job training, and technical and other consulting assistance.
- *An activist role in revitalizing their communities*, such as efforts to help local elementary and secondary schools.
- Their core mission of *producing the educated populace* that is needed to build, run, and work in the innovation economy.

Reinforcing this view, Malik (2014) observes (based on the experience of Pakistan) that universities, when imparting education and conducting cutting-edge research, are the central mechanisms raising the otherwise declining social and economic infrastructure of the country. Much of Pakistan's economy today is intertwined with universities.

While it may be argued that there is a link between universities and the rate of economic development in a country, patterns among countries differ, but players like the US, Japan, and Europe are leading the way in that regard. (Anderson 2002).

Still, Breznitz (2014) cautions against the notion that one university's successful technology transfer model can be simply duplicated in another. Rather, the impact that a university can have on the local economy must be understood in terms of idiosyncratic internal mechanisms as well as the state and regional markets in which it operates. Nations—and universities in particular—must craft benchmarking strategies to allow them to harvest best practices from elsewhere and carefully nurture them in their own settings.

Developing national skill sets and best practices—Africa and worldwide

Very little has been researched in Africa on the role of universities in economic development. But one of the most compelling reports on African universities and economic development was conducted by Cloete and others (2011) in the HERANA research project that drew on experiences at eight African universities. They observed that:

- Governments, universities, funders, and other stakeholders agree on a central role for higher education in economic development and the knowledge economy.
- There is a need to strengthen the “academic core” of universities. This is essential to producing knowledge, reproducing the academy, and providing the high-level skills that drive development.
- For improving policy (and implementation) there is a need for coordination at national and institutional levels to help tie universities more closely to development.

The project generated three main research findings.

First, national and university levels showed a lack of clarity and agreement on a development model and the role of HEIs. They showed, however—particularly the government—increasing awareness of the importance of universities for the global knowledge economy.

Second, research production at the eight universities was not strong enough to enable them to build on their traditional undergraduate teaching roles and make a sustainable, comprehensive contribution to development through new knowledge production.

Third, in none of the countries in the sample was found a coordinated effort between the government, external stakeholders, and the university to systematically strengthen the contribution that the university can make to development.

The following points were suggested for consideration.

First, for Sub-Saharan Africa, there was a need to establish universities as the “engine for

development.” Borrowing from three OECD systems studied in this project, it was suggested that knowledge and education are key productive factors in development. From the sample of eight African countries, three (Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa) were in the “efficiency” phase, where higher education and training were increasingly playing an important role in economic development. The rest, including Kenya, were not.

Second, universities have become “globalization’s muse,” producing knowledge that can connect the institution to both the global knowledge economy and the local community,

These deficiencies explain perhaps why Africa remains underdeveloped—few of its universities or top brains play any real significant role in African economic development (Bloom, Canning, and Chan 2006). Moving Africa’s knowledge economies forward calls for at least four elements (figure 1):

Figure 1. Essentials of the knowledge economy



- *Agreement* on the importance of knowledge in development and the special role of universities.
- *Strengthening* the academic core, particularly knowledge production.
- *Greater coordination* among stakeholders involved in higher education.
- Ensuring that development activities strengthen rather than weaken academic *capacity*, particularly for flagship universities.

Elsewhere it has been suggested that African higher education can assist countries with technological deficits to play catch-up and improve the potential

for faster growth by helping them develop sound policies.

Some World Bank research (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2007) showed that Africa is home to several of the most corrupt countries in the world. (For this reason some Kenyan universities run courses on ethics.)

Encouragingly though the number of universities is rising and management education (which is critical to economic growth) is increasingly being taught in many of Africa's Business Schools (Skae 2014), equipping Africans with vital skill sets essential for economic growth—especially considering as, stated by Pfeffermann (2008) “Business schools are key to achieving development goals in Africa and they are starting to take a growing interest in the continent.”

Skae (2014) takes it further:

Business schools exist to address fundamental questions about the why, what and how of business towards achieving the sustainable growth and development that our economy and all our citizens require. This rests on experienced leadership, the hallmark of which is the ability to steer a course through diverse and complex issues by embracing solid, principled, humanitarian values, while remaining competitive.

The key contributions of universities are considered under six heads.

- *Human capital development.* This is the provision of key skill sets for development.
- *Research.* The innovative outputs of faculty promote local economic growth and development. These impacts include the attraction of industrial laboratories to the area, the start-up of new high-tech businesses, and any competitive advantages enjoyed by local businesses when their technology is advanced by university research. The most spectacular examples are the electronics clusters in Silicon Valley (with ties to Stanford University) and Route 128 near Boston (with ties to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

- *Job creation.* Universities are employers and create jobs (within or through their affiliates). Many become incubators, nurturing start-ups and securing seed money for new businesses.
- *Innovation.* This entails using universities' research to create knowledge with economic impact, and then working to move new ideas into the marketplace.
- *Knowledge transfer.* This helps businesses grow and prosper, through programs such as job training, technical and other consulting, and assistance to startups.
- *Revitalizing the communities in which they are located.* Efforts include helping local elementary and secondary schools, markets, or businesses, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Research by the Rockefeller Institute of Government (2010) found other benefits of the presence of a university.

First, faculty and other professional personnel are part of the community's “creative class” that is key to economic growth. Regional economic growth is often driven by the location choices of creative people.

Second, universities are the ideal location to connect knowledge creators with knowledge commercializers through technology incubators, entrepreneurial development curricula, and relations with community-based venture funds,

Third, higher education can help prepare a country's workforce for economic change.

These findings by the Rockefeller Institute reflect experiences elsewhere, particularly in Europe, Japan, and (more recently) China and India, which have invested heavily in higher education.

According to Bill Gates (2005):

The percentage of a population with a college degree is important, but so are sheer numbers. In 2001, India graduated almost a million more students from college than the USA did. China graduates twice as many students with bachelor's degrees as the USA, and they have

six times as many graduates majoring in engineering.

His point resonates for African universities and business schools, both in the diversity of disciplines and the numbers graduating.

By raising their game to expand their higher education sectors, African countries—including Kenya—stand a better chance to strengthen their economies.

Developing national skill sets and best practices—Kenya

Given the paucity of research in this area, once again we turn to Cloete and others (2011), who found that Kenya is moving from “factor” endowments (natural resources and a low-skills base) toward efficiency, implying that higher education and training need to be accelerated.

Findings from the University of Nairobi, one of the eight universities in the HERANA research project, were not particularly uplifting:

- The knowledge-production output variables of the academic core did not seem strong enough to enable the university to make a sustainable contribution to development.
- The university was not changing much from a predominantly undergraduate teaching institution.
- It scored poorly on all three output variables (teaching, research, and knowledge transfer).

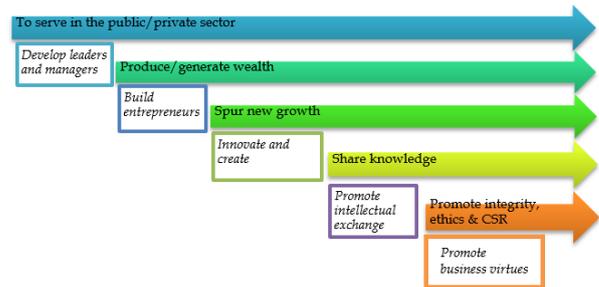
These findings may be representative of other Kenyan universities. Most Kenyan universities are said to suffer from an acute shortage of high-caliber research staff who can push new ideas into the marketplace. Nor is there an HEI development model.

The newly industrialized economies also struggled with similar problems, but overcame them to show remarkable economic growth that was underpinned by critical investments in key areas: reforms to modernize HEIs; collaboration in academic Research and Development (R&D) by government and the

private sector; and clear links between higher education and the economy (Nyangau 2014). Kenya ought to emulate these innovations.

Kenya’s business schools are credited with contributing to the country’s economic development in five ways (Elimu Centre 2015; figure 2).

Figure 2. Role of business schools in Kenya



- *Developing business leaders and managers.* This enables managers to develop skills that drive businesses in the 21st century, create jobs, and raise income through taxes and increased investment.
- *Building entrepreneurs.* Although the spirit of entrepreneurship may be inborn, many entrepreneurs are made in business schools. More business schools are starting business hubs to nurture and launch new businesses.
- *Fostering innovation and creativity.* Business schools are innovation hubs in developing new business ideas to meet society’s needs.
- *Promoting intellectual exchange.* Business schools pursue exchange programs that help local students to have interaction with corporate staff in organizations in the rest of the world.
- *Promoting business virtues.* Kenya is known for massive corruption that has cost taxpayers a lot of money. Schools are now incorporating ethics to help combat the underlying malaise (table 1).

Table 1. Selected Kenyan university courses in ethics

Course title	University	Level
Certified Ethics and Integrity	MUA	MBA
Corporate Governance and Ethics	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)	MBA
Business Social Ethics	Kenyatta University	Bachelor
Ethics in Development	UEA - Baraton	MIDA

While Kenya has recorded a rapid expansion over the last 15 years in its higher education sector, with well over 67 universities on the roll of the Commission for University Education (CUE 2015), this growth has not been supported by commensurate expansion in university capacity. The research culture among university dons has not flourished and few academics engage in research. Consumption of research output has largely stayed minimal and is far lower than expected of an economy of Kenya's size. Universities have yet to forge strong productive links with industry and government to shape their curriculum and provide customized solutions to the economy's needs.

Still, they have created some initiatives, including the following.

Working with central/county governments. Some universities are working with central and county governments to resolve development challenges, including Egerton University's partnering with Homa Bay County to rehabilitate its arid lands; Maseno and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga universities' partnership with Kisumu County to conserve wetlands and promote ecotourism along the shores of Lake Victoria; and JKUAT's collaboration with Nairobi County to promote health services.

That said, major human capacity and consultancies still go to the private sector, depriving universities of

cash. Thus universities must do much more to expand such partnerships and tap such resources for their own development.

Research. Some universities, like Nairobi's, have developed distinct arms—UNES to conduct research and consultancies. Others like JKUAT are following suit. All public universities in Kenya now have a chair in the name of the deputy vice chancellor responsible for research and knowledge transfer, and nearly all universities (including MKU, MUA, KU, DeKUT, Baraton) are building capacity for their staff research or consultancy capacity.

Still, DfID (2010) lamented low consumption of research output in Kenya. Central and county governments, and the private sector, should be encouraged to rely on research more.

Curricular collaboration. Universities are forming more working collaborations on skill set development with county and central governments, the private sector, and donors. JKUAT (JKUAT 2015), Riara University, and Strathmore have teamed with IBM to create an advanced educational and training environment. These partnerships will help students develop critical information and communications technology skills in areas such as analytics, cyber security, big data, social businesses, and cloud computing.

Similarly, JKUAT has collaborated with the Nairobi county government to allow researchers at its School of Architecture and Building Sciences to access city facilities to advance sustainable urban planning research and development. Likewise, Kenyatta University (KU 2015) is working with California State University, San Marcos to use Kenyan professors in the African diaspora in the United States to develop online curriculum and materials for its teacher professional development program.

Nearly every parastatal or government ministry is setting up its own training institute or wants to do so, but this limits the potential for collaboration between these government arms and universities. Local institutes like the Kenya School of Government, Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Institute of

Primate Research, and Kenya Agricultural Research Institute work largely on their own with minimal collaboration with local universities. Universities should thus do more to work with these institutions.

Incubation centers. Nearly all business schools have set them up. Strathmore University (Business Daily 2016) hosts one, where entrepreneurs with “green” projects will be nurtured to scale up their ideas into viable businesses. Similarly, Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre based at Kenyatta University (KU 2016), is nurturing young entrepreneurs and university-born enterprises to feed into economic development.

Collaboration with the private sector. Some universities are partnering with the private sector to support vital national skill sets. Examples are the University of Nairobi and Huawei, Dedan Kimathi and KenGen/Geothermal Development Corporation, and Kenyatta University and Chandaria Industries.

Internships. Some universities are designing academic programs that have internships to allow learners to acquire vital workplace skills.

“Parallel programs.” Kenya is witnessing unprecedented growth in those wanting a higher education with numbers fueled by working people. These so-called parallel programs have attracted adult learners from all walks of life and professions into all disciplines.

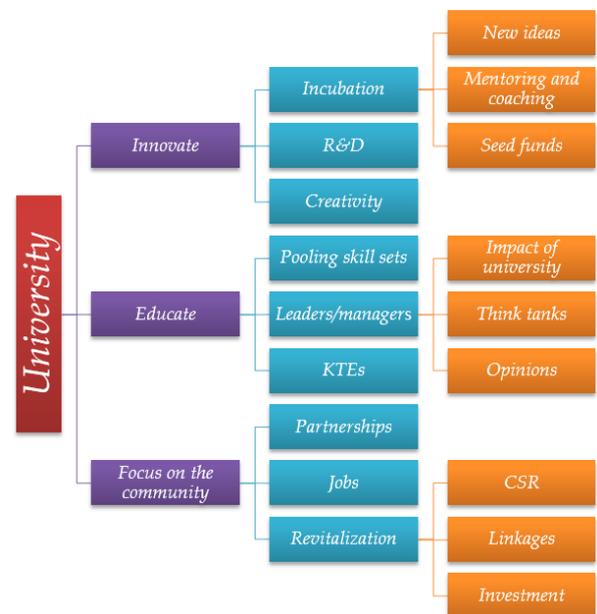
Universities and the growth of towns. Universities spur the growth of towns. In Kenya, the fastest-growing towns are those that house universities (university towns). A university in a town creates a multiplier effect, spurring economic activity. Universities also concentrate people (students and staff) who demand goods and services.

Kenya’s universities are on a slow track to contributing to the country’s economic growth, and need to accelerate their input to economic development, for which reason we suggest the following framework.

The way forward: A framework for expanding Kenya’s skill sets

Kenya’s universities have yet to fully position themselves as engines of economic development. They are expected to expand skill sets and provide leadership in economic development, more specifically aiming to innovate, educate, and focus on the community (figure 3).

Figure 3. Framework for expanding skill sets



Innovate

Universities and business schools should serve as the innovative engine of the nation. A country’s prosperity is in testing and creating new ways of doing things better. At its heart lie three functions (see figure 3).

Creativity. Universities must be the engines that harvest new ideas and transform them into new wealth in the form of new (or better) goods and services. They must create an environment in which staff, students, and other stakeholders identify and tap such creative ideas, nurture diversity of thought, and create or transform them into customized solutions. Universities collaborating with strategic partners should endeavor to commercialize these ideas. Equally, curricula should be revised to

incorporate strategies of fighting corruption in society (Tripathi and Nyamsogoro 2015).

R&D. All universities should make R&D a priority for it to spur community development. Kenyan universities have always scored poorly on R&D, and research funding is getting harder and harder to secure. Kenyan governments' appetite for using research in supporting decision making is low (World Bank 2013), compared, for example, with the Asian tigers. Yet there is evidence of increased government contracting of universities to undertake research, like the commissioned Winnie Mitullah project on traffic systems in Nairobi.

Universities are thus encouraged to cultivate closer relations with governments (county and central) and other development partners to earn research contracts and stimulate consumption of their research output.

Incubation. Universities should be pivotal in nurturing new business concepts before launching them. This presupposes that they will open their doors to the community and tap into new ideas and talents, and work to refine them before launching. Mentoring and coaching of local businesses must be synonymous with universities' missions, which will accelerate community regeneration. Likewise, universities may source seed funds to support local businesses.

Educate

This is the core mandate of a university. As argued by scholars like Malik (2014), Anderson (2002), and Shaw (2013), universities are engines of local development, more specifically achieving the following.

Develop a pool of skill sets. A nation develops when its population has the skill sets to drive economic development—range, quality, and numbers. Kenya is still lacking in the essential skill sets to spur development: engineers, medics, scientists, nuclear physicists, and so on, are all in short supply, as are business leaders and managers. This shortfall gives Kenya one of the largest concentrations of foreign managers in East and Central Africa (World Bank

2013), which may be a pointer of the quality of university graduates' ability to turn into leaders and managers.

Produce leaders and managers. At the heart of any organization is credible leadership and skilled management. But what if the graduates that Kenya's universities produce are not up to scratch (Wanzala 2015; Business Daily 2013)? How come the country has one of the highest start-up and company attrition rates, and "mega scandals" in the public and private sectors, involving the loss of colossal sums of public funds?

These challenges should call Kenyan universities to rethink their mission and collaborate with strategic partners and world-class universities to improve what they offer and provide customized solutions. The experience of the Asian tigers should be replicated—creating a pool of leaders, sometimes through think tanks, and then wooing back talent in the diaspora.

Transfer knowledge. Universities must reach out to communities and impart knowledge. Consultancies, field days, community partnerships with universities, or corporate social responsibility initiatives must be the norm not the exception. Because universities use community resources, they must pay back to these communities by identifying their problems and exploiting their own knowledge. Universities must open up to their communities and tap into local talent.

Focus on the community

Universities do not live in isolated islands but in communities. They interact daily with them and should ensure that their impacts are positive, often through the following productive links.

Partnerships. Universities should partner with local communities to foster local development. Communities have resources (which can feed the universities) and challenges (which can serve as a testing grounds for applying new knowledge). Some communities have been denied access to university facilities (despite hosting them), generating local bad-will. Some communities have even resisted the

establishment of universities in their area because of “periodic strife and wanton destruction of community property” by university students. It is no wonder that some universities are struggling with a negative image in society.

Jobs. Creating employment must be a priority. But while employing from the locality a certain caliber of workers is good, some universities in Kenya have gone too far and become ethnic, if not village, universities. Corruption is rife in employing university workers and often some talent is locked out due to ethnicity.

Universities must fight nepotism, ethnic bias, and corruption. Strengthening the capacity of county governments to foster ethnic inclusivity, and equity and transparency in sharing national resources, should be a university duty.

Revitalized communities. Universities must revitalize communities, yet in Kenya they have not done so. Corruption, poverty, illness, urban filth, and traffic deadlock (in Nairobi and Mombasa) symbolize its towns and cities. Yet with all these challenges, Kenya’s universities and dons are silent, instead of offering thought leadership, leaving the field to politicians, sometimes seeing their communities disintegrate.

Universities may have satellite campuses but this is not the same as creating community networks. Touching communities with real solutions to community challenges is what Kenyan universities must address. Variable fee charging based on community affordability rather than uniform fees across the country may help with university access.

CUE is in fact now exercising leadership through accrediting all academic programs in universities, and closing universities and campuses that are below par (CUE 2015; 2016). The cabinet secretary in charge of education has dissolved all public university councils in a bid to refresh them and add vitality to public universities (MyGov 2016).

Practical and policy implications

The measures in the above framework require admission by universities that it is no longer acceptable to generate knowledge without transferring it to local communities. They have to usher in a new system based on mutual coexistence. To realize the framework, each of the the following agents have their role.

Universities. They must agree to promote excellence in academic deliverables and promote meritocracy rather than mediocrity, foreclosing on selecting by ethnicity in employment. Cultivating an academic environment that promotes diversity and excellence of thought and allowing dons to experiment with ideas in the community—not just classrooms—must become more common. Universities must promote vigorous exchange of ideas by creating platforms, and by financing them. They must fight corruption vigorously, and reclaim their lost glory as engines of development.

Governments (county and central). They must support universities and be at the forefront of consuming university outputs. Governments are starving universities of funds. Continued isolation of local universities in favor of multinational companies and consulting firms when awarding local tenders does not augur well for the nation. Local universities now see parallel programs as their mainstay and are fiercely competing with each other setting up satellite campuses and, with that, diluting the quality of university education—undermining the very economic development they exist to foster.

Kenyans and their communities. They must refuse to be shortchanged by universities that produce mediocre higher education. They must insist on an arms-length transaction from universities by receiving reciprocal value for their money. Communities must demand to be represented on local university boards, to articulate their concerns and ensure that universities are being ethical corporate citizens. Communities must also open their enterprises to university guidance through

research and knowledge transfer, and hold universities to account for corrupt practices.

Higher education agencies. These are critical in holding universities accountable and must insist that all universities operate within the scope of the Universities Act (2012) and CUE guidelines and standards. The value of these agencies will be equal to the quality of universities under their watch and, because universities—particularly those in the public sphere—are financed by Kenyans, their continued existence hinges on their ability to create value to Kenyans.

Ten pillars

Shaw (2013) advanced 10 pillars on ways universities in the United Kingdom can stimulate economic development. These tenets are relevant to Kenyan universities.

1. Focus on internationalizing higher education.
2. Ensure that the soft and hard skills base is world class.
3. Measure and explain the impact of research.
4. Collaborate more with business community.
5. Focus on local economic impact.
6. Never lose sight of commitment to excellence and academic freedom.

Conclusions

The development of societies and economies is interlinked with the growth of education.

Kenyan universities must cultivate excellent academic deliverables and a conducive academic environment to grow talent. Superior academic deliverables will make Kenya a regional hub as an academic destination—which will see university enrollment of non-Kenyans rise. A focus on teaching quality and professional development frameworks—that focus on boosting regional capacity—will go a long way to lift the country's academic record.

Kenyan university education needs to be seen as an investment for the future by central and county governments, which should prioritize spending on education and research that will subsequently

address the country's social, political, environmental, and economic problems.

Universities should be encouraged to share core resources and foster reciprocal partnerships with other educational institutions at home and abroad. They should do the same with technical institutes, community polytechnics, and community development centers to identify “real life” challenges. Ideally, community development participation should be made mandatory for all universities (public and private) and the rating of universities should include their development impact in the community they operate in.

The Ministry of Education and the CUE should work to ensure effective use of public funds at public universities and root out undeserving satellite campuses and nepotism in the sector. These agencies should ensure that all universities focus on creating an entrepreneurial culture among graduates by establishing business incubation centers, encouraging partnerships between industry and academia, and setting up career counseling offices that contribute to the intellectual and professional development of graduates and community members.

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This knowledge series intends to summarize good practices and key policy findings on managing for development results (MfDR). African Community of Practice (AfCoP) knowledge products are widely disseminated and are available on the website of the Africa for Results initiative, at: www.afrik4r.org/page/resources.

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