



Today's Investments in Science, Technology and Innovation driven Higher Education will define Africa's success in 2063



A new narrative has been crafted about Africa, “the land of opportunity defining the future of the world”. Africa is now at its transitions from ‘a problem to be solved to a voice to be heard’ in the international and global conversations. In a twinkle, everything seems to be positive on the several streets, board rooms and international conferences. Are the Africans in these spaces seeing the same patterns at local level or have ‘curtain blinders’ with ‘colourful’ windows for African elites to commence another century of praises. It is now 58 years since the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union was formed by the African Heads of State. Primarily, the OAU was a political outfit for independence liberation and perhaps fortifying leadership and governance in the early stages of States formation. It had limited economic as well as scientific aspirations for a projected true independent Africa.



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The African Union in the last decade has attempted to provide bold decisions to make Africa a competitive continent. In these; political, social and economic aspirations, their achievement will rest on key critical investments. True political independence is attained when the people led have meaningful economic progress. But, doing this requires real investments in science, technology and innovation; this is the game changer of competitiveness and expanded economic progress. In the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew documented in The Singapore Story book; he made an important observation on how he went by organizing the country; speaking at a rally he made this remark “In ten years we will breed a generation of Malays, educated and with an understanding of the techniques of science and modern industrial management²”. For the earlier part of his memoir recognizes the great observations he earlier had with Harold Wilson at the time he contested for the Office of the Prime Minister of the UK; for his resolve to get Britain going again by

¹ Alao, A. (2019). A new narrative for Africa: Voice and agency. Routledge.

² Yew, L. K. (2012). The singapore story: memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew. Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd.

using her lead in science and technology was an important part of his campaign.

These illustrations may seem to be far-fetched at the risk of even being sidelined as the usual narratives that have been told, spoken about and reviewed in various policy dialogues as well as conferences. However, I reiterate here that unless there is a strong political will and commitment from the African leadership to invest in science, technology and innovation not from pronouncements of good will but in getting things done fair and square will real progress take shape in the continent. Currently, there are several of economic stimulus and investments under implementation trying to get economies working across the continent but most of these are reacting to the unemployment challenge, breeding necessity entrepreneurs and entrenching import-based commerce as well as imported technologies and solutions. In another book; *From Third World to First World, the Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, Lee Kuan Yew articulated that “*after grappling with the problem of unemployment for years since we first took office in 1959, all of us in the cabinet knew that the only way to survive was to industrialize*”³. But, to do that, science, technology and automation had to drive the process. This has continued to underpin development progress to date. In fact, innovation and entrepreneurship are inseparable for achieving competitive advantage.

The African Union undertook a mapping and assessment of the requisite capacity for the New African Vision Agenda 2063 - “*The Africa We Want*”. Four capacity sets; operational capacity for organisations, change and transformative capacities, critical, technical & sector-specific skills, and composite capacities are recognized as needed for the achievement of Agenda 2063. The strategy document further points out that technology and innovation capacity is the new capacity frontier especially because the fast-rising ‘positive’ disruptors will likely change human life and overall social capacities. The most important consideration from this strategy is the call for increased investment in massive training and education for critical, technical, and sector-specific skills, including in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)⁴. At the center of driving STEM is Africa’s higher education but focus should not only be given to the higher education, the translators of innovations into products and other services that are often groomed in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector are part of the requisite innovation ecosystem. If this vital artery is sidelined, it will take even a longer time to have competitive output of innovation products and services in the continent.

Perhaps the current global positive outlook of Africa as the continent that will shape the course of the world in the near future is twisted but premised on its largely unexplored, under exploited and barely value-added natural resources. As the world continues to reshape discourse on what products and services have value, even the value of natural resources will systematically be diminishing except for those that are really required to drive the fulcrum of industrialization. Adversity leads to innovation for resilience building; as such countries with limited natural resource base are

³ Yew, L. K. (2012). *From third world to first: The Singapore story, 1965-2000*. Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd.

⁴ AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063 Capacity Requirements for the New African Vision Agenda 2063 – “*The Africa We Want*” Capacity Requirements for the New African Vision. African Capacity Building Foundation.



continually engineering new systems and processes to keep afloat. Africa must follow suite to; firstly, raise the quality of its human resources in skills and innovation capacity, secondly, utilise these skilled and innovative personnel to transform its abundant natural resources into competitive products and services and thirdly, renegotiate its space in the world as a resource base of quality human and natural resources. Because Africa is not one country but 54 Sovereign States at different development trajectories, political inclinations, alliances and counter alliances. Achieving the dream contained in Agenda 2063 will be defined how well investments will be made in science, technology, and innovation driven higher education that will help shape performance of economies through the conception or creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems, as well as in their management⁵ will remain critical for the continent's progress. Failure to do this will be condemning the continent to another 50 years of promises with limited progress.

About the Author:

Dr. Egeru Anthony is the Manager for Training and Community Development, where he heads an eight-year project funded by the Mastercard Foundation to strengthen the effectiveness of university contribution to development through skills development particularly entrepreneurship of talented, motivated and disadvantaged youth in Africa. He is distinguished academic with 65 publications. He has multi-faceted experience in research including in systems ecology with a focus on management of dryland ecosystems, early warning system, rangeland health monitoring, land use planning, pastoral livelihoods, agro-forestry systems, climate change, adaptation and resilience programming and analysis.

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⁵ Global Innovation Index 2021: Tracking Innovation through the COVID-19 Crisis.
https://www.wipo.int/global_innovation_index/en/2021/

