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Theme: The Role of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Sustainable Development

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Editor: **Prof. Olugbemiro Jegede.**

The Role of Private Higher Education Institutions in Sustainable Development: The case of the African Leadership in ICT and Knowledge Society Advancement program by Patty Swarts (PhD), Director of Programmes, GESCI (Global e-Schools Community Initiative)

Introduction: Envisioning a Sustainable Future

Imagine a society in which all present and future humans are healthy and have their basic needs met. Imagine future scientists, engineers, and business people designing technology and economic activities that sustain rather than degrade the natural environment and enhance human health and well-being. Imagine that all professionals understand their connections to the natural world and to other humans. Imagine a future in which we have stabilized the population at a level that is within the carrying capacity of Earth's ecosystems because we have increased the education, as well as the social and economic status, of women worldwide. Now, imagine that all current and future generations are able to pursue meaningful work (because they have the right skills and attitudes) and have the opportunity to realize their full human potential both personally and socially.

Our ecological footprint is largely invisible to most of us – we seem to be either blissfully unaware of the consequences of our actions or we just don't care about the destruction we cause. We need a fundamental, transformative shift in thinking, values, and action by all of society's leaders and professionals – HEIs have an important role in this respect.[12]

With the global call for Sustainable Development (SD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launched in September 2015, there is a need for all, including higher education providers, to step up and take a broader view of their role in society and the interconnection of societal success and academic and business success.

Sustainable development and the role of higher education

Sustainable development:

Sustainable Development (SD) is quite a complex concept with many different definitions. The World Commission on Environment and Development report *"Our Common Future"* (1987)[13]defines sustainable development as

> "*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*"

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[12]Adapted from Cortese, Anthony (2003): The Critical Role of Higher Education in Creating a Sustainable Future. Accessed from: http://www.aashe.org/resources/pdf/Cortese_PHE.pdf
[13] Accessed from: http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf

The concept of sustainable development can be interpreted in many different ways, but at its core is an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society. All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts. The focus of sustainable development is broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity. Sustainable development provides an approach to making better decisions on the issues that affect all of our lives.[14]

People concerned about sustainable development suggest that meeting the needs of the future depends on how well we balance social, economic, and environmental objectives--or needs-- when making decisions today.

Figure 1 below illuminates the balancing between social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
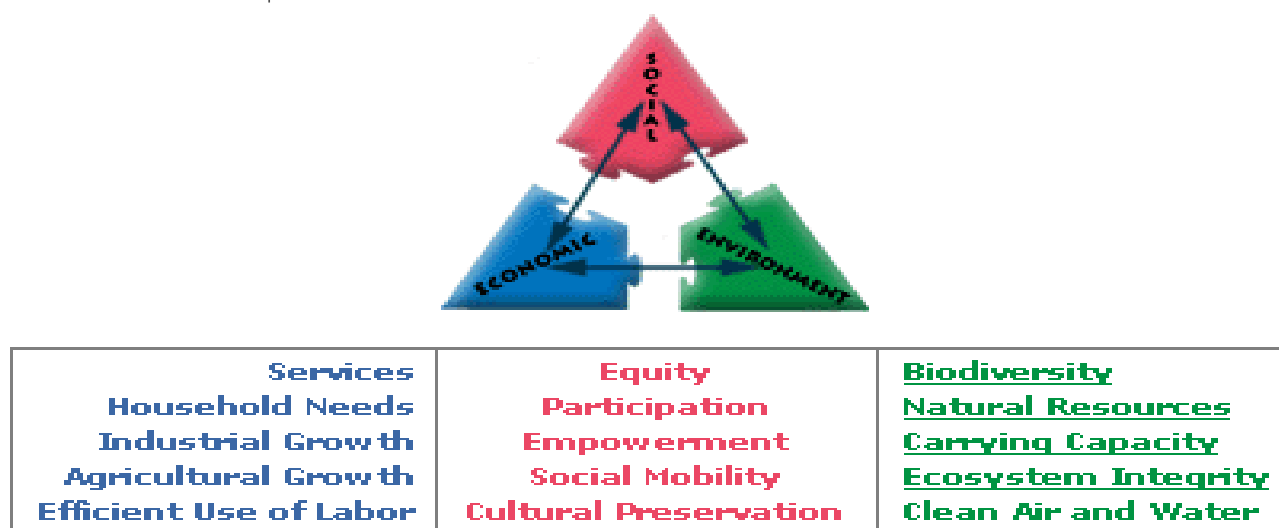

Services	Equity	Biodiversity
Household Needs	Participation	Natural Resources
Industrial Growth	Empowerment	Carrying Capacity
Agricultural Growth	Social Mobility	Ecosystem Integrity
Efficient Use of Labor	Cultural Preservation	Clean Air and Water

Figure 1: Sustainable Development – balancing of social, economic and environmental objective.
From: What is Sustainable Development?[15]

When we focus on the social aspects of sustainable development, we look at the issues that impact people directly and that either helps or hinders the process of improving the quality of life. When we focus on the economic aspects of sustainable development, we look at the system that determines how the limited resources needed to improve peoples' lives are distributed. We also examine how these limited resources are used.

When we focus on the environmental aspects of sustainable development, we look at the natural resources--both renewable and non-renewable--that make up our surroundings and help us to sustain and better our lives.

Social sector issues are closely linked to economic issues such as poverty. In any society, it is the poor who are least likely to receive adequate health care, education, and family planning services.

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[14]What is Sustainable Development, http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html; retrieved 07/07/16

[15]http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html; Retrieved 07/-7/16

Higher birth rates may result, making it difficult for these families to meet their basic needs and break out of the cycle of poverty. Social issues are also linked with environmental concerns. In many countries, contaminated water and polluted air are responsible for an increase in water-borne diseases and respiratory problems, all of which place an extra burden on local health care systems.

It is only when information about social conditions is combined with economic and environmental data that the full impact of development decisions on the quality of life can be understood. In order for countries to meet the needs of their people now and in the long term, governments must develop policies that balance social needs with both economic growth and environmental protection.[16]

The role of Higher Education:

It is being said that it is the people coming out of the world's best colleges and universities that are leading us down the current unhealthy, inequitable, and unsustainable path (Cortese, 2003). Sustainable development is comprised of highly complex and interdependent issues crossing over disciplinary boundaries. According to Cortese (2003, p 16)

> *Higher education is generally organized into highly specialized areas of knowledge and traditional disciplines. Designing a sustainable human future requires a paradigm shift toward a systemic perspective emphasizing collaboration and cooperation. Much of higher education stresses individual learning and competition, resulting in professionals who are ill prepared for cooperative efforts. Learning is fragmented, and faculty, responding to long-established incentives (e.g. tenure, research) and professional practices, are often discouraged from extending their work into other disciplines or inviting interdisciplinary collaboration.*

Cortese (2003) further states that other than education at other levels, higher education has unique academic freedom and the critical mass and diversity of skills to develop new ideas, to comment on society and its challenges, and to engage in bold experimentation in sustainable living. Why, then, is it so averse to risk and difficult and slow to change? Why then

What needs to happen is for Higher Education to take a leadership role in sustainable development and reflect new approaches to learning and practice and models integrating teaching, research, operations, and relations with local communities for transformative change by connecting "head, heart and hand".

The African Leadership in ICT (ALICT) and Knowledge Society Development – Response to New Leadership Requirements

Why new leadership skills? What are the new leadership skills?
African countries have made steady progress with gains in education, health and living standards. However, the pace of progress in human development varies by country and sub-region and is

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[16]Adapted from:What is Sustainable Development?http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html; retrieved 07/-7/16

insufficient to reach the 2030 Agenda targets for sustainable development. Progress is hampered by several factors: inequality weakens the impact of growth on poverty reduction, weak structural transformation limits work opportunities, and limited advances in gender equality hamper skills and entrepreneurial development. Ensuring human progress for youthful, rapidly expanding and increasingly mobile populations remains a considerable challenge in all African countries. Work is central to ensuring that Africa's current urbanisation pathways contribute to gains for all. Policy responses to rising exclusion, urban poverty and inequality are essential to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 goals for inclusive human development in sustainable cities and settlements[17].

In order to find appropriate solutions for the increasingly complex and difficult challenges facing the continent, a new kind of mindset and leadership is required to accomplish that – visionary, competent , innovative and principled leadership. Leadership has a central role in any change process, more so to respond proactively and appropriately to the complex and multi-dimensional challenges, obstacles, dilemmas and opportunities posed by societies on the move. According to the BBC [18] "The middle class in sub-Saharan Africa is expanding rapidly. With the seemingly unstoppable growth of the mobile phone, greater access to the internet, and an increase in access to education, change is happening, and more people have more disposable income to spend."These developments and trends, coupled with rapid technological advancements, better informed citizens with higher expectations regarding governance and services and the ever increasing pace of change, demand much more from leaders. In this context leaders have to be prepared not only for the existing circumstances, but must be able to anticipate, analyse and understand emerging and future trends to position their countries for suitable responses and sustainable success.

ALICT model and how it responds to global/continental challenges and emerging issues

In GESCI's work with current and future leaders across Africa, we have realized, among others, that much additional work is needed to create favourable and coherent policy contexts in individual countries to bring about the desired development which will benefit all. The importance of science and technology, innovation, and even ICT, is still not well understood by many policymakers. Many African countries aspire to transform their societies into knowledge societies, yet their education and training systems do not reflect that aspiration other than in words. A key element of successful knowledge strategies is quality education and skills development. UNESCO (2013)[19] reminds us that knowledge is a means to achieve social and economic goals. While ICT has revolutionized the role of knowledge in societies, knowledge societies are concerned with much more than technological innovation and its impacts - knowledge societies fundamentally depend on comprehensive human development. African leaders, to attain development and

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[17] African Economic Outlook (2016) – Human Development in Africa.

[18]Fiona Graham (2013): Why the world's technology giants are investing in Africa. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-24524260?goback=%2Egde_4584512_member_5800860785307574276#%21, accessed 30 October 2013

[19]UNESCO (2013): http://en.unesco.org/post2015/sites/post2015/files/UNESCO-Knowledge-Society-Report-Draft--11-February-2013.pdf

prosperity for all, must facilitate the building of people-centered, inclusive and development oriented knowledge societies.

The top-down bureaucratic paradigms in the public sector institutions of the present and the past can no longer adequately respond to the demands of the new emerging economies and societies. Leadership literature posits that while we are in the Knowledge Age, our leadership, managerial and governance systems have remained stuck in the Industrial Age (Drucker, 1998; Manville and Ober, 2003; Uhl-Bien et al, 2007). According to Uhl-Bien et al (2007) in the Knowledge Age we need a paradigm of leadership "that focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems (CAS) within a context of knowledge-producing organizations."[20] This leadership paradigm facilitates adaptive outcomes, i.e. learning, innovation, and adaptability.

Inclusive and sustainable development

The ALICT course vision is "An Africa led by those with the skills, knowledge and vision to create an *inclusive* knowledge society for all" and the course objectives are to "Equip African leaders with a commanding understanding of the key elements in the development of knowledge societies, with a particular emphasis on new leadership approaches, and new skills for coherent policy development and to build a critical mass of leaders across the African continent, with the skills and knowledge to develop and implement policies, in the face of rapid change, that will advance national and regional *sustainable* socio-economic development. The course design focuses on:

1) Capacity Building: The ALICT capacity building model aims to build and enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of future leaders to manage transformation and change, to manage institutional pluralism, to enhance coordination, to foster communication, and to ensure that data and information are shared and used in planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and evaluation processes.

2) Knowledge Society: The ALICT model focuses on the role all facets of Information and Communications Technologies play in the building of the absorptive capacities of current and potential future African leaders to acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit the benefits of ICT and knowledge to produce a dynamic organisational capability through peer knowledge sharing and exposure to technology. The ALICT approach to Knowledge Society development focuses on the interconnection between leadership, policy development, and future-proof planning and how they contribute to Knowledge Society development through Education, Science Technology and Innovation, and ICT.

3) Leadership: A prerequisite for leadership development for knowledge societies is policy coherence between the three pillars (ICT, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation) that form the basis of any Knowledge Society. For future African leaders to be able to steer their countries towards that goal, it is essential for them to not only be well versed in management, leadership, project formulation and project management skills, but also to acquire comprehensive knowledge about the interrelationship of the three Knowledge Society pillars (Education, STI and ICT) and then be able to apply that knowledge in the African context.

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[20]Uhl-Bien, et al (2007). Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. Published in *The Leadership Quarterly* 18:4 (August 2007), pp. 298-318.

4) <u>Policy Coherence:</u> Policy Coherence is the development and implementation of conjointly supportive policy actions across all sectors of the economy and society, and more specifically across government departments and agencies. Policy coherence pursues the creation of synergies across policies that advance the achievement of shared and agreed objectives. Within national governments, policy coherence issues arise between different types of public policies, between different levels of government, between different stakeholders and at an international level.

5) <u>Futures Thinking:</u> Futures Thinking was first theorized by Jim Dator (Bezold, 2009). Among its many uses within complex and rapidly shifting economic and social systems is its relevance to policy development and implementation. Futures Thinking requires the revisitation of plans and policies at regular intervals in order to take into consideration any new signals that appear in the environment that may affect a sector or number of sectors.

The ALICT model does not focus on a particular organisation (or Ministry), but rather on the capacities needed by a range of people across a number of public sector organisations working in the same environment addressing a common concern. The model builds leadership capacities at the three levels appropriate for sustainable system change at the individual, organisational and stakeholder levels, as demonstrated in Fig. 2 below.
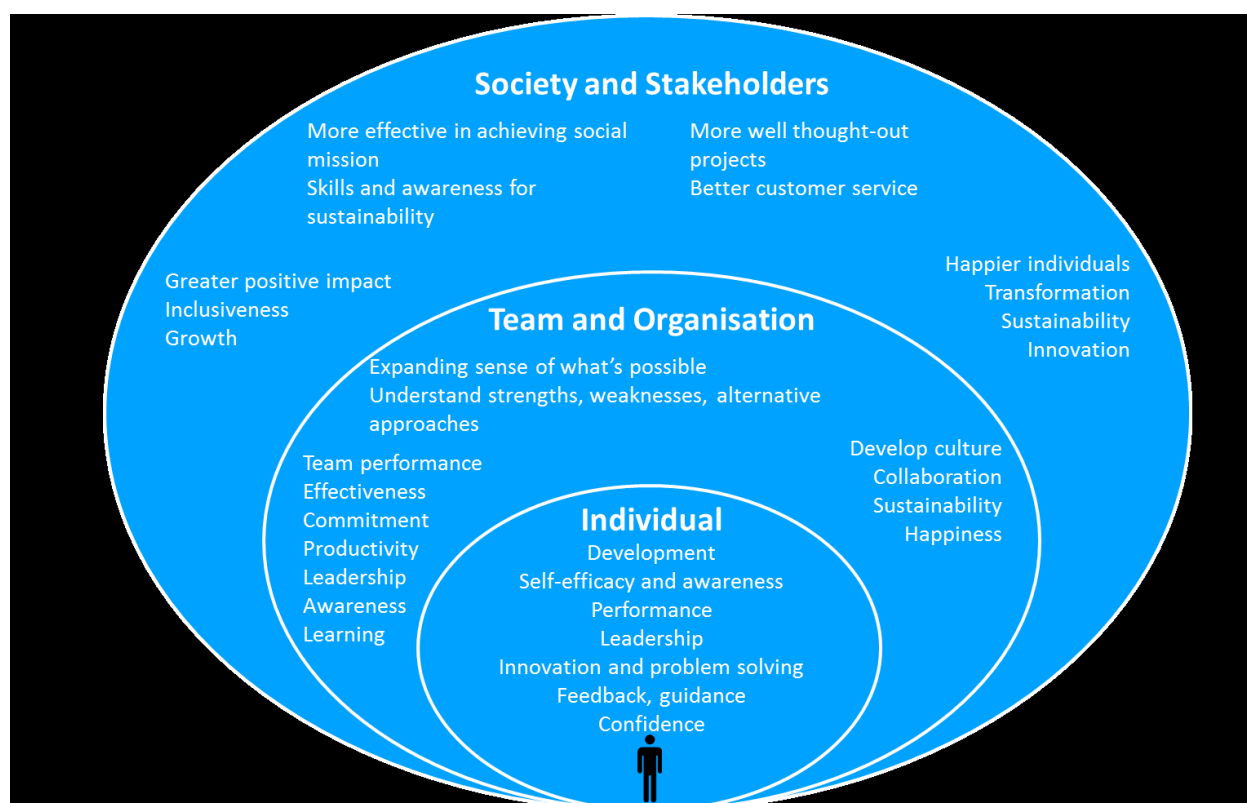

Figure 2: Three Levels of Capacity Building

The ALICT capacity building model emphasizes the importance of teamwork in which collaborative learning is valued, respect for others exists, and where critical questioning is allowed in the spirit of open and respectful communication. The pedagogical model draws on and incorporates the African principle of *Ubuntu:* 'I am what I am because of who we all are'- emphasising the idea of

community as one of the building blocks of society. It has also adopted principles from the *Yenza leadership framework of action learning*. The Yenza leadership framework embodies both the spirit of African leadership and developmental and change leadership which are required to enable learning and the creation of knowledge in learning organisations of the 21st century.

The ALICT pedagogical model combines abstract principles with practical experience, allowing course participants to bring theory and practice together. It also combines theory and instruction phases with more practical experiential phases where participants implement tasks and plans and apply newly acquired skills and knowledge. Through the sequence of practice, experience, debriefing, theory and feedback participants are being guided into more reflected leadership practices. Fig. 3 below provides an overview of the components of the model.
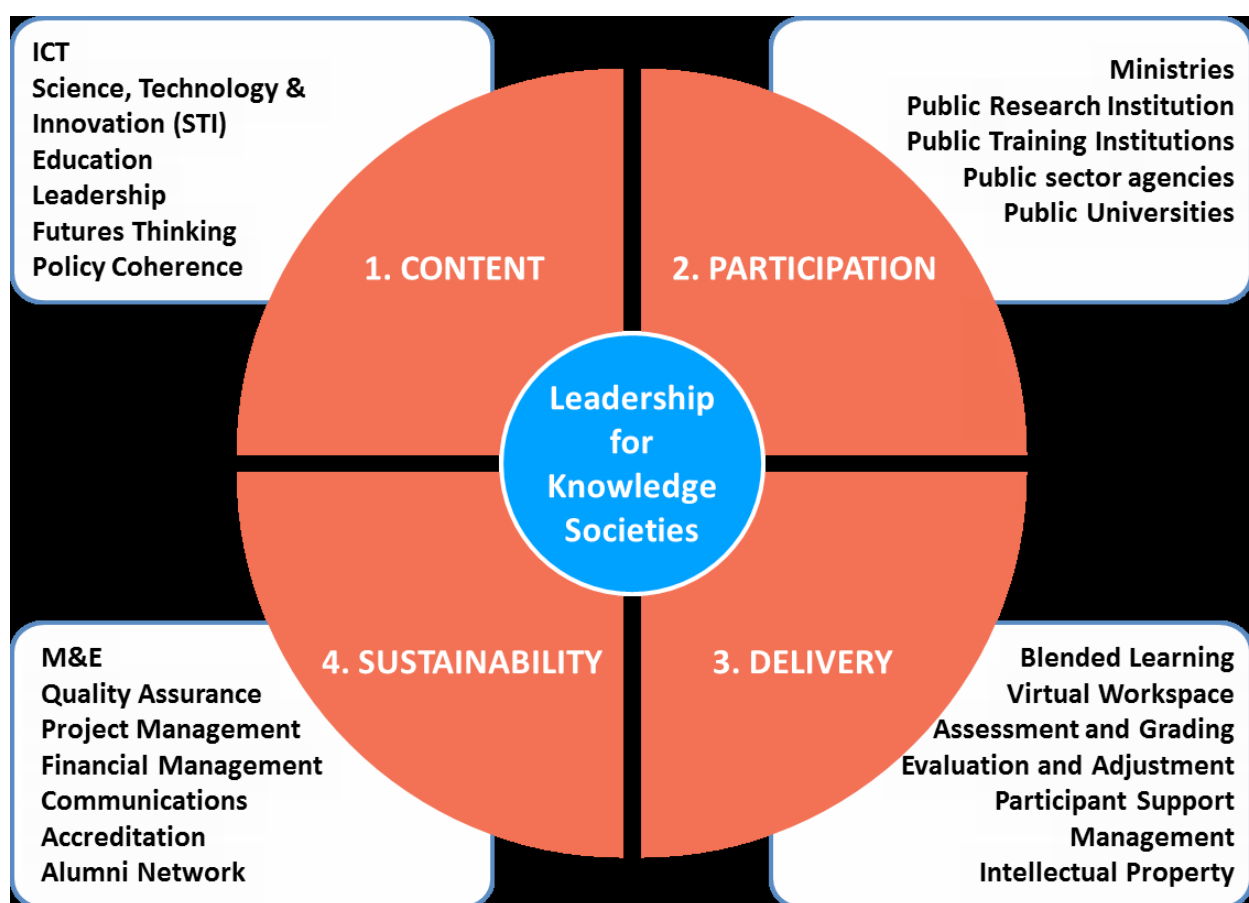

Figure 3: ALICT Capacity Building Model

Building partnerships for sustainable development

At no time in history have we needed system leaders more. We face a host of systemic challenges beyond the reach of existing institutions and their hierarchical authority structures. Problems like climate change, destruction of ecosystems, growing scarcity of water, youth unemployment, and embedded poverty and inequity require unprecedented collaboration among different organisations, sectors, countries and continents. Sensing this need, countless collaborative initiatives have arisen in the past decade—locally, regionally, and even globally. Yet more often

than not they have floundered—in part because they failed to foster collective leadership within and across the collaborating organizations.[21] Within this context and having successfully implemented and fine-tuned the ALICT capacity building model, GESCI is seeking partners for building a critical mass of leaders with new mindsets and the skills and knowledge to lead their countries and the continent in engaging proactively and in informed ways with the challenges. GESCI seeks to engage with university and government partners through what is called a wider access model whereby the ALICT course at Graduate/Post Graduate level (level 9) is delivered in partnership. GESCI signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the University of Mauritius and St Mary's University (Ethiopia). GESCI also signed MoUs with ESMT and MOUs with other higher institutions are currently being negotiated. These partnerships could lead to other opportunities for building strategic capacities for sustainable African development.

Conclusion

According to Intel, 8 out of 10 jobs require technical skills or ICT training. "All these demand a different way of education. Instead of us teaching students theoretically, let us use ICT to give them the skills sets that will empower them to confront the job market," said John Galvin, Intel Vice President for Sales and Marketing and General Manager for Education and Government.[22] It is very clear that no single entity can fully provide for the skills sets needed for the 21st century job market and that HEIs, governments, the private sector and NGOs need to work together in partnership to achieve that. There is also a need for partnerships and resources to advance technology and innovation. In many African countries Higher Education institutions are perceived to be expensive, elitist, and bureaucratic, slow in changing, and not able to match their curricula to the high level skills required for knowledge economy and knowledge society development. They are also not seen to be able to inform and influence policy formulation.In concluding, a few questions to HEIs: First, are these perceptions true and how are HEIs addressing them? Secondly, do HEIs in Africa really make use of the new technologies in order to deliver better quality and more cost-effective programmes with much wider reach adequately responding to the challenges of the countries in which they operate? What do HEIs in Africa contribute to the development of new technologies and new skills? Are HEIs really informing and influencing national and continental policy formulation? These are questions that HEIs, including private HEIs, must address in order to be sustainable institutions in the 21st century.

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