

Ensuring inclusive, equitable quality tertiary education

• Alabi speaks at the Baraka Policy Institute

LAST week Thursday, 23rd February 2017, the Baraka Policy Institute (BPI), held its 3rd Anniversary Lecture at the Academy of Arts & Sciences, Accra, with Prof Joshua Alabi, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) as a principal speaker. BPI is a think tank established in January 2014 with special focus on promoting social justice and national development through advocacy and research. Its core values focus on Justice, Independence, Progress and Compassion.

It was an honour for me to have been invited to deliver the 1st Anniversary Lecture on the theme of practical education for Ghana's development, at the British Council in 2015. The 2nd lecture was delivered by Prof Mohammed Salifu of National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), and Dr Frank Bani of Pantang Hospital, in 2016. The following are edited extracts from Prof Alabi's presentation this year:

"For long, tertiary education was relegated to the background with the then Millennium Development Goals that focused more on primary and secondary education. Tertiary Education is strategic for national development, and therefore should not be treated as the tail, if Ghana is to entrench its gains as a middle-income country."

"The question is, have we been able to adapt Ghana's tertiary education to the needs of its people? Our tertiary education is stranded around the tight ropes of its colonial roots. Ghana's education system is not distinctly Ghanaian in a global context, from curriculum, to requirements for teaching in the tertiary sector, to textbooks, cases and examples. The system is wound around what we have been made to aspire to be and not who we are and what we should be."

"This delivery is about: 1. Inclusiveness or Access; 2. Quality; and 3. Inclusiveness or Access. Access to Tertiary Education is a Right and must

be accessible to all who desire to have it and are willing and able to cope with tertiary level education. After all basic and secondary education should not be ends in themselves."

Self-imposed barriers to inclusion and access

"The lack of access to tertiary education is an unfortunate loss of talent and valuable contribution to nation building. In Ghana, it is reported that we have a Tertiary Gross Enrollment Ratio of 12 per cent against a global average of about 30 per cent and 70-80 per cent for developed countries. This means only about 12 per cent of those willing and qualified to access tertiary education have access to tertiary education in Ghana."

"There are many self-imposed barriers that contribute to the restricted accessibility to tertiary education in Ghana. Entry Requirement are among the strictest in Africa according to Prof. Golam Mollahmedbhai a former Secretary General of the AAU.

Mohamedbhai notes that 'Ghana is an example of another Anglophone country, with the phenomenon of rigorous selection process which restricts access to the higher institutions of learning'. However, Ghana's rigorous entry requirements can best be described as specifications and not standards as it is not clear what forms the basis of our entry

Education Matters

With Anis Haffar



requirement into tertiary institutions as we have it now."

"It is very sad to note that applicants with D grade or lower in any core subject cannot enter a university in Ghana irrespective of their performance in other areas. However, other countries - even the UK that introduced Ghana to tertiary education - accepts them. For Sub-Saharan Africa, not only has the increase in the enrollment ratio been insignificant from 1991 to 2005 but also the ratio is by far the lowest than any other region of the world

(Mohamedbhai, 2008). Do we in Ghana want to suggest that those who go through tertiary education in, for example, the UK with the same grades we reject here are not good enough when they graduate?"

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Inadequate infrastructure and resources

"The second key issue that restricts access to tertiary education in Ghana, is inadequate infrastructure and resources, which limits space. As a result the public institutions are not able to take more qualified students. Many of the public universities turn away students not because they are not qualified but because of the lack of space and resources.

We definitely need to prioritise tertiary education to provide more resources to enhance access. Yet we cannot build more and more brick and Mortar Universities to expand

access. So Open and Distance education is one sustainable option."

"Also, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process to help people get formal recognition for what they learnt through their experiences and for what they can do, know and understand. The RPL process enables a person to gain qualifications and credits. The contexts within which RPL are practiced are as varied as the

learners seeking credits for learning achieved. RPL can be used across the formal and informal sector as well as from pre-tertiary, workplace-based education to tertiary levels."

Lack of a National Qualifications Framework

"Another issue of access is the Lack of a National Qualifications Framework. This makes it difficult to use other routes, like the TVET system for progression, making TVET unattractive. Though TVET system under COTVET has developed a qualifications framework, it is not sufficient to allow for the needed progression. There is need for a comprehensive national qualifications framework and this has been on the drawing board for unduly too long. I wish to call on the NCTE and the Ministry of Education to expedite action on this very important tool for quality and equitable education."

"Though the introduction of Technical Universities can partly address progression of the TVET system it not sufficient because without the requisite policy recognising the TVET as a normal route for progression to higher levels, there may still be gate keeping as usual. I call for a national comprehensive qualification framework for recognition of qualifications and establishment of equivalences of other qualifications to allow for progression."

The poor ability to pay

"Another issue that restricts access to the poor is ability to pay. Though contribution of students have proven to enhance both access and quality, like the case of UPSA, I must say that it is sad, really heart breaking to see some students struggle to pay fees. I therefore recommend a national mechanism to support the needy to access tertiary education in the form of scholarships and grants. In this respect, there is the need to look again at GETFUND's role in this process. We would have look at the operations of GETFUND vis-a-vis the law establishing it. Such an assessment is most timely and recommended."

To be continued.

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• From left: Prof. Joshua Alabi, Alhassan Andani (MD of Stanbic Bank; Chairman of event) and Salem Kalmoni