

A University Beyond Aid: The Challenge to the Academic Freedom and Success of Ghanaian Universities of Over-reliance on Donor Funding

Joshua Sarpong, Sean Sturm, and Cathy Gunn

Abstract

In the era of the knowledge economy, universities are expected to contribute to the economic development of their countries. Therefore, their research agendas must be relevant to the local context and geared, though not uncritically, to the national educational agenda. To do this diligently requires research autonomy. However, due to the low government investment in research on the African continent, universities have had to rely on other sources of funding, which usually comes with strings attached. Our study investigates the case of Ghana, in particular, the University of Ghana, the leading research university in the country. We drew on resource dependence theory, which suggests that, despite external pressures on universities, they can enhance their autonomy through the implementation of strategic measures. Primarily, we analysed documents such as research reports, journal articles and speeches in the light of Clark's (1998) model of the "entrepreneurial university," which, if adapted with care and in a localised form in Ghana, may contribute to the research autonomy of its universities. We found that, although research autonomy in Ghanaian universities is limited due to their over-reliance on external donor funding, it is likely to be strengthened if the government of Ghana follows through on plans to increase research funding and universities continue with measures to diversify their funding sources.

Introduction

With the emergence of the knowledge economy, universities are seen as key actors in national innovation systems (Gornitzka, 2008), both in developed countries and in developing, formerly colonial ones like Ghana. The potential contribution of academic research to the Ghanaian economy is significant because the newly produced knowledge

could help to address social problems in critical areas such as healthcare, nutrition, sustainable energy, education and global warming (Cloete & Maassen, 2015). At the second *African Evidence to Action Conference* in July 2019, the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, noted that research outcomes could inform decisions on the best course of action to manage the country's resources for the benefit of the people (Government of Ghana, 2019a). However, research productivity in Ghanaian universities is low, due in large part to limited government investment in research (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen, 2015).

Because research can be expensive, it requires adequate support from governments. Adequately supporting research is a challenge for most universities in Sub-Saharan Africa. While a country like Malaysia invests about 1.3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in research and development, Ghana invests as little as 0.4% (World Bank, 2019), which requires Ghanaian researchers to secure research funding from non-governmental stakeholders. However, the involvement of such stakeholders in research funding means that researchers and their institutions sometimes no longer determine their research priorities (Rostan, 2010). For example, a study by Maassen and Musiige (2015) reveals that researchers at the Makerere University in Uganda, a country of similar status to Ghana, found themselves constrained to pursue donor research interests such as climate change and HIV/AIDS – important topics though these are – to the exclusion of their research interests. Because such projects often do not require scholarly outputs, researchers may end up becoming mere “reporters to donors” (Maassen, 2012).

Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the challenge to research autonomy in Ghanaian universities that results from an over-reliance on donor funding. The study it reports on was based on an analysis of documents such as research reports, speeches and journal articles, which revealed that, although universities in Ghana enjoy significant

academic freedom, the source and nature of their research funding poses a threat to their research autonomy. The study was guided by the following questions:

- Is the academic freedom of Ghanaian universities, in particular, the research autonomy of their academics, negatively constrained by the demands of macro-economic actors like donor agencies, and if so, how?
- If academics' research autonomy is so constrained, how can it be enhanced?

Academic Freedom in Ghana

There is no universally accepted definition of academic freedom (Altbach, 2001). It may be defined broadly as the ability of academics (and students) to inquire freely in their teaching and research. According to Thorens (1998), such freedom should be considered not the privilege of a caste, but a way of enabling members of the academic community to carry out the core missions of a university. It is essential to academics everywhere, though it may differ in its details and application, depending on the country or region. A body called the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) supports and publishes research, organizes regular local conferences, and monitors academic freedom on the continent. It places high importance on the academic freedom of African universities, defining academic freedom as the full autonomy of thought and practice in the service of knowledge production, in particular, knowledge production that explores the African condition (Nyamnjoh, 2016). It proclaims that “[e]very African intellectual has the right to pursue intellectual activity, including research and dissemination of research results, without *let* or hindrance subject only to universally recognised principles of scientific enquiry and ethical and professional standards” (CODESRIA, 2010, para. 2). Based on these considerations, research autonomy is defined in this chapter as *the ability to conduct research and freely publish the outcomes of that research*. To be able to do this diligently, universities and academics must be autonomous in their research because research autonomy is essential

to the performance of research (Enders, de Boer, & Weyer, 2013; Fumasoli, Maassen, & Gornitzka, 2014; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017).

Debates about the autonomy of Ghanaian universities date back to the colonial period (1943), when the British Government appointed Justice Asquith to investigate the principles that would guide the establishment of universities in the British colonies. The report of the Asquith Commission (1945) led to the establishment of some of the earliest universities in Sub-Saharan Africa, including the University of Ghana (1948). It states that “it was essential that the colonial universities should be autonomous in the sense in which the universities of Great Britain are autonomous” (Colonial Office, 1945, p. 34, cited in Wangenge-Ouma & Kgosithebe, 2018). However, it recommends that the new universities grant degrees from the University of London, which diminished their “substantive autonomy” (Berdahl, 1990). Even after independence from colonial rule, African political leaders endorsed this form of external control (Dlamini, 2002). Nowadays, universities in Ghana have greatly increased autonomy: almost all grant their own degrees and experience less interference from the Government (Appiagyei-Atua, Beiter, & Karran, 2016).

However, the ability of Ghanaian universities to define their research agenda remains a challenge for reasons such as high teaching loads, a lack of research funding and qualified researchers, poor remuneration of academics, and ongoing pressure from government. The high teaching load of academics leaves them little time to work on research, which hampers Ghana’s institutions in becoming research-intensive (Sarpong, 2016). A lack of research funding and qualified personnel results in little published research and a lack of research mentorship for graduate students. Poor remuneration leads researchers engage in non-academic activities such as consultancy services that divert them from research and publication to earn additional income (Musiige & Maassen, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2016). Finally, autocratic political leaders infringe on the academic freedom of researchers, as reflected in

this statement by the first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (quoted in Bentley, Habib, & Morrow, 2006, p. 26):

We do not intend to sit idly by and see these institutions which are supported by millions of [*cedis*] produced out of the sweat and toil of common people continue to be centres of anti-government activities. We want the university college to cease being an alien institution and to take on the character of a Ghanaian University, loyally serving the interest of the nation and the well-being of our people. If reforms do not come from within, we intend to impose them from outside, and no resort to the cry of academic freedom (for academic freedom does not mean irresponsibility) is going to restrain us from seeing that our university is a healthy university devoted to Ghanaian interest.

While Dr Nkrumah may have meant well in seeking to remind academics of their role in national development, his statement could be construed as a threat to academic freedom. However, since his time, government interference in universities has reduced considerably. A recent review of academic freedom in African universities listed Ghana among the few African countries where academics enjoy significant academic freedom (Appiagye-Atua et al., 2016).

Despite the constraints on academic freedom in Ghanaian universities, the most significant challenge to research autonomy there is the insufficient funding of universities by the government, which requires researchers to seek funding from elsewhere. The main source of non-governmental funding for research in African universities, including those in Ghana, is donor agencies (Cloete et al., 2015; Teferra, 2013). However, most of this funding (e.g. from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the United States Agency for International Development) comes with strings attached, affecting researchers' autonomy in pursuing their research interests.

Research in Ghana

Universities play an increasingly significant role in improving the quality of life of our societies (Boulton, 2009). According to Castells (2001), universities perform four key functions: the promotion of ideology, the selection of dominant elites, the generation of new knowledge, and the training of a skilled labour force. These functions are in line with what Trow (1970) describes as the autonomous and popular functions of universities. The autonomous functions are the transmission of high culture; the selection, formation and certification of elite groups; and the creation of new knowledge through pure scholarship. Research-intensive universities place emphasis on “the generation of new knowledge,” often because of its importance for national development (Scott, 1998). Unfortunately, research productivity in Ghana is relatively low, which disqualifies the universities from being classified as research-intensive (Cloete et al., 2015). However, most universities are putting strategic measures in place to improve the quantity and quality of their research output. For instance, the University of Ghana (UG), which is the country’s flagship university, aims to become a research-intensive university by 2024 (UG, 2018), which will require increases in research funding, research publications and research degree completions. However, the current focus is reported to be more on the promotion of ideology, the selection of dominant elites and the training of skilled labour force, than on the generation of new knowledge (Cloete et al., 2015). Cloete and Maassen (2015) argue that there is more emphasis in universities on direct service to the community than on the role of being an “engine for development,” that is to say, on knowledge production and fostering innovation.

It is said that, in Africa, universities were needed to educate professionals to occupy key positions after the departure of the colonial administrators, but that they were slow to promote such national interests because they had originally been set up to serve the colonial administrations (Cloete & Maassen, 2015). Because of the limited financial support of

universities by consecutive governments, it became clear that universities would not be up to the task. This led the World Bank to conclude that development efforts in Africa should concentrate on primary education (Cloete et al., 2015). However, it has since embraced the idea that universities also have a significant role to play in the knowledge economy in developing countries like Ghana. Claudia Costin, an academic and economist who was also a senior director at the World Bank told an African Higher Education Summit, “I was very happy to discover that the World Bank now believes that higher education is central for development because, being a professor myself, I share this strong belief” (Costin, cited in MacGregor, 2015).

Research funding in Ghana

Funding is key to the research function of a university, not least because it is used to acquire the appropriate laboratories, libraries and other infrastructure that supports research at the highest possible level (Altbach, 2013). But universities tend to use the little funding that comes from governments to support the immediate priority of teaching, hence the high teaching loads, rather than promoting research (Jongbloed, 2000; Sawyerr, 2004). To compensate for their under-investment of government funding in research, universities often engage in different types of public-private partnerships with employers, businesses and alumni in order to safeguard them from an over-reliance on government funding (Jongbloed, 2000). At the UG, most research funding comes from private donors and foreign development agencies (Vice-Chancellor of UG, 2014). The nature and sources of research funding are significant in determining the research output of a university. For instance, if we compare the research outputs of the University of Makerere (MAK) in Uganda with that of the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa, UCT produced 1,517 research publications as against the 382 of MAK in 2011 (Bunting, Cloete, Wah, & Nakayiwa-Mayega, 2015). One reason for this disparity is that most of UCT’s research funding came

from research councils and other competitive sources, while about 80% of MAK's research funding came from donor agencies (Musiige & Maassen, 2015).

UG considered adequate funding crucial for it to achieve its goal of becoming a world-class research-intensive university. For this reason, it instituted the UG Research Grants Scheme in the 2008–2009 academic year to encourage academics to conduct research and thereby enhance the research profile of the university (ORID report, 2013–2014). The university's research funding is from two sources: one is the university's Internally Generated Fund (IGF), drawn from tuition fees, consultancy and administrative charges. It uses the IGF to promote effective teaching and research. The second source is foreign donor agencies, from whom, for example, UG received EUR 11,654,195 during the 2013/2014 academic year. The agencies included the following:

- Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA);
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF);
- Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA);
- Department For International Development (DFID);
- European Union (EU);
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO);
- International Display Research Conference (IDRC);
- LeverHulme-Royal Society;
- National Institutes of Health (NIH);
- Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD);
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID);
- World Bank; and
- World Health Organization (WHO). (ORID report, 2014/2015).

To understand the impact of these research funds at the UG, it is important to note the difference between external research funding coming from a research council and donor agencies. Funds from research councils are distributed on a competitive basis and are directly for research, whereas donors usually have their own research agendas, which may be different from those of individual academics or institutions (Maassen, 2012; Musiige & Maassen, 2015). Such funding is expected to contribute to increasing research outputs, which funding from donor agencies does not. Also, donor funding is not distributed through a competitive process with peer review to select the projects that are of the greatest academic value (Musiige & Maassen, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that, despite an increase in UG's research funding, it still lags behind the universities in the North and even its counterpart in South Africa, UCT, in its output of research publications. This deficit would probably not be a problem if there were strong institutions to renegotiate the terms of donor agency funding to factor in university and national objectives.

Analytical Framework

To analyse how over-reliance on donor funding affects academic freedom in Ghanaian universities and how the situation might be remedied, we use resource dependence theory and the concept of the entrepreneurial university as analytical lenses.

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT)

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) describe Resource Dependence Theory as a structured way to consider how the resourcing environment of organizations constrains them and how they respond. The theory aims to guide the design and management of organizations that are externally resource-constrained (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. xxxi). It is premised on the notion that organizations survive as long as they are effective, which depends on the successful management of demands from groups upon which the organization depends for resources and support. The survival of an organization largely depends on the ability to

secure resources and respond to changes in the resourcing environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Doing so would not be a problem if organizations were in control of all the resources required for their operation. Unfortunately, no organization exerts such control. They exist in a particular environment alongside other organizations, on which they depend for the many resources they require (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Three main assumptions underpin the theory (Lipnicka & Verhoeven, 2014):

1. Every organization needs resources to survive, which leads to their interdependence with other organizations;
2. This interdependence leads to uncertainty;
3. In order to reduce this uncertainty, organizations alter their strategy to enable them to survive.

Universities work this way (Lipnicka & Verhoeven, 2014). External factors such as government policy and economic conditions, as well as internal factors such as their strategic priorities and mix of disciplines, influence universities' responses to their changing environment. Davis and Cobb (2009) argue that, if an organization is overly dependent on a single source of resources, then they need to find and maintain alternative sources. The government of Ghana is the primary source of research funding for universities there, but it does not provide sufficient funding for universities to maintain their research autonomy. The universities are pushed to find alternative sources of resources to support their research goals. To do so without comprising their core academic values, they could become entrepreneurial (Clark, 1998).

The Entrepreneurial University

The entrepreneurial university is a response to the way in which higher education institutions are “pushed and pulled by enlarging, interacting streams of demand,” which tends to put pressure on universities to “change their curricula, alter their faculties, and modernize

their increasingly expensive physical plant and equipment – and to do so more rapidly than ever” (Clark, 1998, p. xiii). The terms “entrepreneurial” and “innovative” can be used synonymously in this context. According to Clark (1998), the concept of an “innovative university” is more appealing to many academics, but the choice of words was intentional: “I have chosen ‘entrepreneurial’ over ‘innovative’ ... because it points more powerfully to deliberate local effort, to actions that lead to change in organizational posture” (Clark, 1998, p. 4). His five case studies – Warwick in England, Twente in the Netherlands, Strathclyde in Scotland, Chalmers in Sweden and Joensuu in Finland – exemplify how institutions that were in a similar state to where Ghanaian universities are today have become entrepreneurial, and more autonomous as a result. Though still recognized as public universities, these universities enjoy enough autonomy through their financial independence to discharge their core academic mission of teaching and research, and are placed among the top-ranked universities in the world. Clark (1998) outlines five elements of the entrepreneurial university: a strengthened steering core, an expanded developmental periphery, a diversified funding base, a stimulated academic heartland, and an integrated entrepreneurial culture.

1. A strengthened steering core

Universities that have traditionally had a weak capacity to steer themselves become weaker as their complexity increases. Instead, an entrepreneurial university acts positively to become more agile, flexible and focused in order to be able to respond positively to changing demands from society. To do so requires a strengthened “steering core,” driven by managerial values that can be reconciled with traditional academic ones, a core that works to find resources for the university as a whole.

2. An expanded developmental periphery

Universities have traditionally been inwardly focused, despite their often strong transnational research networks. An entrepreneurial university fosters the growth of units that reach

beyond old university boundaries to link up with external bodies. To ensure that this trade continues to grow, its infrastructure must develop as well. This new periphery of non-traditional units can generate income to help diversify funding, but if not guided by academic values, they risk turning universities into business centers.

3. A diversified funding base

Universities have traditionally relied heavily on governments for funding. Since governments over time have funded an ever-lower proportion of universities' income, an entrepreneurial university seeks other sources of resources. It raises income from research councils; industry partnerships and commercialization of intellectual property; as well as campus services, student fees and alumni endowments. Such diversified funding is a key to them remaining autonomous and being able to focus on their key functions.

4. A stimulated academic heartland

In universities, it is the disciplines that are the heartland of research. It is they who must take up the concept of the entrepreneurial university because it is they who carry out the research and will be affected most directly by the merging of the new managerial values with traditional academic values. And they will likely be uneven in their adoption of the entrepreneurial university model. For instance, "hard" disciplines like science and technology are likely to become entrepreneurial first, while "soft" disciplines like the Arts and Humanities may lag behind. There are certain characteristics of these knowledge fields that may affect the nature of research support. Research in hard disciplines tends to be expensive, which gives rise to the need to look for external funding. With the soft disciplines, the outside world tends to view much scholarly work as lacking any social relevance and not deserving of significant financial support (Becher, 1994).

5. An integrated entrepreneurial culture

Despite these lasting disciplinary differences, universities today have increasingly strongly integrated cultures because the current trend in university management is to seek to achieve internal and external consistency in strategy, policy and practice in order to streamline internal processes, and construct a coherent (and, in most cases, marketable) identity and reputation for the institution. In “developed” countries, managers bank on a receptivity to entrepreneurialism in governments, academics and other “stakeholders,” as well as financial and policy “incentives,” to achieve this integration. In “developing” countries, however, “universities suffer from poor, inefficient, and highly bureaucratic management systems” (Teferra & Altbach, 2004, p. 31). They are thus unlikely to achieve an integrated entrepreneurial culture. Only with proper planning and effective leadership can Ghanaian universities become successful.

We adopt the entrepreneurial university model as the right strategy for Ghanaian universities because it focuses, first and most importantly, on strengthening the steering core to lead the universities. It is essential to put in place all five of Clark’s elements because if a university implements only the first three without engaging with the academic heartland and developing an integrated entrepreneurial culture, it may lead to mere marketization (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), that is to say, to straightforward commercialization of its teaching and research, rather than entrepreneurialism in Clark’s more than economic sense of the term (Taylor, 2012; see Marginson & Considine, 2000). A university that applies such an entrepreneurial model with care and in a localised form can harness the synergies of the “triple helix” research system of university, industry and government to enhance its research autonomy, in particular, by better securing its funding (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). In doing so, it can avoid the dangers of neoliberal entrepreneurialism as a new form of colonialism (Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016).

Methodology

The chapter relies mainly on document analysis. Although there are potential flaws with this approach, such as not providing enough detail to answer a research question, it is efficient and cost-effective (Bowen, 2009), particularly in cases such as ours where conducting “on-the-ground” research is difficult and prohibitively expensive. We draw on documents such as research and policy reports, journal articles, books, speeches and online resources by national and international actors. The documents meet the four criteria for assessing the quality of documents, as given by Scott (1990, p. 6, cited in Bryman, 2012). These are as follows:

1. *Authenticity*. Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
2. *Credibility*. Is the evidence free from error and distortions?
3. *Representativeness*. Is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its typicality known?
4. *Meaning*. Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

All the documents used in this study met Scott’s quality requirements. For example, they were authentic because they were the documents of the government of Ghana and UG, which have been made accessible to the general public. As they were written for public consumption, they were likely to be low in errors and distortions, and highly representative. Also, their language was clear and thus comprehensible to the intended readers. We adopted an analytical framework to explain the main themes to be studied and the relationships among them (Miles and Huberman, 1994) from the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa’s (HERANA) project. This project, initiated by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) in 2007, involved an empirical study of eight “flagship universities” in Sub-Saharan Africa, including UG. We aimed to understand the factors affecting knowledge production in African universities, which lags behind other comparable

territories (Cloete et al., 2015). Our study was designed to investigate the case of Ghana, in particular, UG, the leading research university in the country and ranked as the seventh-best university in Africa by the *Times Higher Education* (Bothwell, 2016).

Discussion

Is the academic freedom of Ghanaian universities, in particular, the research autonomy of their academics, negatively constrained by the demands of macro-economic actors?

To understand how macro-economic actors constrain academic freedom in Ghanaian universities, it is useful to understand the macro-economic factors that reduce the government's ability to allocate adequate research funding. Since 1983, Ghana has been undergoing a World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). But, according to a report of the European Network on Debt and Development (Kovach & Lansman, 2006), like other developing countries, it has been burdened with a rising number of unacceptably demanding conditions in return for access to World Bank and IMF loans, conditions that reinforce a neoliberal (global market-driven and financialised) world economic order. The report states that:

the conditions often push highly controversial economic policy reforms on poor countries, like trade liberalisation and privatisation of essential services. These reforms frequently contravene developing countries' wishes, an acknowledged prerequisite for successful development. They can also have a harmful impact on poor people, increasing their poverty not reducing it, by denying them access to vital services. (Kovach & Lansman, 2006, p. 3)

Furthermore, Ghana has been required to apply aid to purposes and projects determined by the lenders that may not be aligned with Ghana's needs. For example, in 2008, Ghana was advised by the IMF to consider a freeze on public sector appointments in order to contain the

wage bill and reduce public sector expenditure; advice that Ghana's government complied with (Modern Ghana, 2015). In 2015, Ghana applied for an Extended Credit Facility (ECF) of USD 918m from the IMF. This was granted with certain conditions, one of which was "[s]tructural reforms to strengthen public finances and fiscal discipline by improving budget transparency, cleaning up and controlling the payroll, right-sizing the civil service, and improving revenue collection" (IMF, 2015). The World Bank and IMF justify such loan conditions as necessary stimuli for economic development. However, such conditions have negative effects on economic growth (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006). They also require governments to cut spending on education, healthcare and the environment (Cavanagh & Mander, 2003).

These structural reforms affected the university sector by continuing the freeze on appointments and requiring cutbacks in existing employees, limiting universities' staffing autonomy. They echo similar reforms three decades ago that have had a direct impact on the research autonomy of universities ever since. The introduction of SAPs in the 1980s had a huge impact on funding for basic research by drying up the internal research funds of universities (Manuh, Gariba, & Budy, 2007), which undermined both the research autonomy of academics and the capacity of many universities to support basic research. Academics had to rely on external funding sources to support their projects, leading to consultancy taking the place of basic research (Manuh, Gariba, & Budy, 2007), a situation that continues today and has been worsened by university research committees allocating most of their limited research funding to conference travel, rather than research projects (Maassen, 2012). Hence, Teferra (2013) argues that the problem may not be about lack of funding, but the lack of capacity to manage resources and competing priorities.

Resource dependence theory would suggest that universities that can avoid the risks of dependence – or rather, that avoid over-dependence on too few sources of funding –

should be more successful than those that do not. For instance, though most top universities in the world like Harvard, Oxford and Warwick are publicly funded, a high percentage of their research funding comes from other sources (Clark, 1998). This is what world class universities do, as Stølen and Gornitzka (2019, in *University World News*) argue, “[t]he possible restrictive impact of single source financing of major initiatives is obvious and a diversification of universities’ sources of revenue should be sought” (para. 12).

If the academic freedom of Ghanaian universities is negatively constrained by the demands of macro-economic actors, what is the role of donor agencies in this process?

The HERANA project (2015) suggests that there is a weak level of institutionalization of externally funded projects because the main actors involved in the network of university governance – university leaders, the Ministry of Education and external donor agencies – all have different visions of universities’ role in development (Cloete et al., 2015). According to Maassen (2012), donor agencies see universities as a tool for reducing poverty and improving living conditions in rural communities. The Ministry of Education sees them as playing a key role in the implementation of national agendas such as improving healthcare and agricultural policies. University leaders see them as dedicated to more purely educational goals.

Accordingly, the donor agencies and the Ministry of Education fund projects that fit their views of universities, with universities losing out because they have very limited sources of funding and must rely on donor agencies. The Ministry does not redress this situation because it has limited funding and is constrained by macro-economic actors and factors. (Its goals could also be said to broadly agree with those of the donor agencies because the goals of both are non-educational.) This weakly institutionalized environment gives rise to perverse outcomes:

In practice, while most externally funded projects in an African university are led by senior academics, the knowledge basis of the project is typically only indirectly

related to the academic area of the project leader. Many involve consultancies rather than actual academic research. The consequences, as expressed in the interviews undertaken in the HERANA project, are often that senior academic staff spend most of their time leading one or more externally funded projects. These projects rarely produce academic publications in the framework of the externally funded projects, and there are no incentives to use the projects in educational degree programs.

(Maassen, 2012, p. 251)

Though donor agencies may mean no harm, they thus effectively reduce the academic freedom of Ghanaian universities. They implement their own countries' development aid agenda, not those of the countries that they seek to support. To enable universities in Ghana to define their research agendas and consequently improve their research productivity, they need to reduce their dependence on external donor agency funding or renegotiate the terms of such funding to allow educational objectives also to be considered.

If the academic freedom of Ghanaian universities is compromised by the role of donor agencies in the funding of research, how can their academic freedom be strengthened?

Perhaps we need to look back to go forward. On Independence Day in Ghana, 6 March 1957, Dr Kwame Nkrumah declared: "At long last, the battle has ended! And thus, Ghana, your beloved country is free forever!" (Pan-African-Quotes, 2019). Ghanaians pride themselves on being the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from colonial rule. But over sixty years after independence, the question remains: is Ghana really free? The answer is emphatically No. The country's over-reliance on foreign aid for its development is neo-colonial because the conditions attached to the aid have hampered its ability to manage its affairs. Malaysia, which gained independence in the same year as Ghana, is ranked 25th in the Global Competitiveness Index (a measure of national competitiveness, defined as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level

of productivity), while Ghana occupies the 106th position (Global Competitive Report, 2018, p. xi). The difference between them is that, while Malaysia has relied on a high density of knowledge-based industries and the adoption of new technologies for economic development, Ghana continues to rely on foreign loans and grants, despite the country's wealth in natural resources like gold, cocoa and timber.

However, at long last, Ghana has realized that reliance on foreign aid is holding it back, as the current President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, has argued:

We want to build a Ghana beyond aid; a Ghana which looks to the use of its own resources. We want to build an economy that is not dependent on charity and handouts, but an economy that will look at the proper management of its resources as the way to engineer social and economic growth in our country. (Government of Ghana, 2019b)

What if universities in Ghana were to pursue “a university beyond aid” agenda by reducing their reliance on government and external donor agencies? An entrepreneurial agenda may be the way for the universities to take control of their own destinies and to recover their lost academic freedom (Clark, 1998). The leading research university in the country (UG) is putting in place measures that reflect Clark's transformative vision of the entrepreneurial university. An induction speech by the Vice-Chancellor of the UG, Professor Ebenezer Owusu Oduro, on 1st August 2016, outlined various measures the university is putting in place to address their financial challenges. He believes that in the face of insufficient government funding and increasing financial demands on the university, it must take a number of urgent steps.

Firstly, the university must itself seek broader sources of funding to *diversify its funding base*. It must secure a substantial share of the increase in research funding of universities from the current 0.4% to a minimum of 1% of the nation's GDP recently

announced by the government of Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2019c) and of the recently announced National Research Fund with its seed funding of USD 50m (Graphic Online, 2017).

Secondly, it needs to manage the financial resources from government, donor support and grants to ensure prudent debt utilisation and management, and thereby *strengthen its steering core*. Therefore, the VC will “lead the management team and motivate a strategic team of achievers from various segments of the university and the country to plan, raise resources, implement concrete actions and evaluate their contributions to the advancement of the UG as a ‘go to’ teaching, research and development-oriented university” (University of Ghana. 2016, p. 12).

Thirdly, “each College, Institute, School, Centre and Department will be tasked to examine, for implementation, concrete actions inspired by their strategic plans to improve research and training, and to attract funding” (pp. 12–13), and thereby *stimulate the academic heartlands*. Knowing that some departments are more capable of attracting funding than others because their research is in practical fields or more easily applied, the universities should strategize to support research in the departments less capable of attracting funding as a way of building universities that are comprehensive and future-focussed.

Lastly, it will initiate collaborative ventures with the private sector. Knowing the research mission of the university cannot be achieved without the necessary financial resources, the VC considers it a priority to lead a comprehensive, transparent process of financial planning and sourcing, aimed at making UG financially viable over the next five years through vigorous engagement with private sector and industry leaders, government and donor partners. The university has set up units including the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST), as a nexus between industry and academia, thereby to *enhance the developmental periphery*. In his own words:

Furthermore, Mr. Chancellor, my administration will strive to increase the University's income by engaging investors in Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements. Such an arrangement will ensure, for instance, that our three Agricultural Research Centres (ARCs) will be able to discharge expected responsibilities as academic and research units. This will require separating the academic and research functions of the ARCs under the School of Agriculture from the newly established Commercial Incubation Units involving PPP arrangements and external business management. (VC, 2016, pp. 15–16)

If the various units of the university (the academic heartlands) accept this *idea* of change, then it can be adopted as an institutional *belief*. Successful beliefs stressing a will to change can then become the new *culture* and, later, a unifying *identity* (Clark, 1998; 1983).

Taking these bold steps will no doubt come with challenges since, unlike as in most Western countries, there are few capital-rich industries in Ghana (Sarpong, 2016). Although securing greater research funding from industry could reduce universities' reliance on government and donor agencies, it may result in their becoming adjuncts of corporations, including the multinationals fostered by the neoliberal global economy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 2000), and their research autonomy being eroded. To preclude this outcome, universities in Ghana must do as follows. First, they must guard against industry partnerships with too many strings attached. Secondly, they must ensure that when research is supported by industry, this does not unduly influence the design and outcomes of the research. Thirdly, they should not sign research contracts that suppress the publication of findings from the research. Finally, they must support the government and other stakeholders (including external donors) to ensure that research aims meet the needs of the Ghanaian people. Only then can universities in Ghana become financially independent, and exercise their academic freedom fully and in the service of the country (de Sousa Santos, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the negative effects of an over-reliance on donor funding in Ghanaian universities and proposed a solution that could protect their research autonomy. We suggested that the University of Ghana could pursue “market” and “market-like” activities on the model of “entrepreneurial universities.” In the era of the knowledge economy when universities are expected to contribute to the economic development of their countries and with the limited government funding available for research in Ghana, Ghanaian universities have little option than to compete for external research grants to remain economically and intellectually viable. It is critical, however, that this pressure to compete does not undermine standards of academic freedom and integrity. Moreover, because government and industry elsewhere have proven themselves more likely to invest in research that has immediate application to policy or practice, it is essential that disciplines with less applied research not be allowed to suffer in comparison.

The question is, how can Ghanaian universities maintain research autonomy while continuing to raise the funding that is so essential to their survival? We argue that, despite the inevitable challenges associated with implementing Clark’s (1998) concept of an entrepreneurial university in Ghana, it entails a pragmatic approach to research funding that has been shown to protect autonomy, independence and academic integrity elsewhere. As such, it may help to ensure that Ghanaian universities continue to prosper and produce research outcomes of which the government and society can be proud. We ask government, donor agencies and industry to trust academics to make well-informed choices about research, and to accept that the strict implementation of a research impact agenda and the explicit direction of research to meet policy aims do not foster real innovation. Instead, they should allocate funding to broad research themes and negotiate the focus and outcomes of studies with the research community. Such collaboration is likely to foster real innovation,

and, because it enables researchers to exercise their agency, to increase their motivation and research autonomy.

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