

Investing in Afropolitanism

Redefining Africa through education, research, people and practices



▶ The University of Cape Town (UCT) and its business school, the Graduate School of Business (GSB), have a vision of building a better Africa. This must be tackled both intellectually and in practice, and UCT has dedicated itself to both.

Attracting students from Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Congo, Uganda, Malawi, India, UK, the US, Canada, Australia, France and Germany, UCT is the only African university ranked in the *Times Higher Education* World University Top 200, while the latest Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings place it at number 156. UCT also remains in the top 300 of the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU).

The GSB, meanwhile, was crowned the top business school in Africa and the Middle East in the latest *QS Global 200 Business Schools Report*, and has ranked repeatedly in the *Financial Times's* Top 100 as the world's best value-for-money MBA.

As Africa attracts international attention, it becomes increasingly important to protect the continent's identity, practices and philosophies while embracing development.

Universities play a key role here and UCT, which celebrates Africa Month in May, is strongly committed to this goal.

"Internationalization with an Afropolitan niche is one of the university's six strategic goals," says deputy vice-chancellor Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo. "The Afropolitan vision is UCT's aspiration to embrace meaningfully and visibly our African identity, playing a significant continental role within our means and capabilities."

"We don't need Harvard in Africa," says Prof Walter Baets, GSB director. "We need something better. Our society is crying out for new ideas tackling entrenched social and environmental problems. Local universities must create this."

UCT believes doing intellectual business on the continent should be as mainstream as dealing with the developed north. Philosophically, it's about a "willingness to ask the hard epistemological questions about the role of the university in post-colonial society," says Nhlapo. "Committing ourselves to being an Afropolitan university lets us think about our position in the context of global movements and developments."

From course material to international collaborations and centers of excellence, UCT actively positions itself as an influential knowledge center. UCT is a member of the World University Network, a consortium of 18 leading research institutions from Europe, North America, south-east Asia, Australia and Africa; and is also one of eight south and east African universities in the Universities' Science, Humanities, Law and Engineering Partnerships in Africa (USHEPiA), which seeks to grow a network of African researchers addressing the continent's developmental needs. Furthermore, UCT is negotiating a 2013 summer school with the London School of Economics.

Flagship UCT initiatives include: the African Climate Change Initiative, a growing research and training hub; a reinstated degree in Astrophysics as South Africa bids to host the world's most powerful telescope; the H-3D Drug Discovery and Development Centre, for the early stages of the drug discovery innovation chain; and the Democracy in Africa Research Unit, which helps to build legislative capacity across Africa.

The GSB, meanwhile, has introduced the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship; the ethics-conscious Allan Gray Centre for Values-Based Leadership; and the Masters Programme in Development Finance, building a reputable knowledge center in this fast-growing field.

UCT's approach to understanding local challenges is future-oriented, based on the conviction that Africa is more than ready to take its rightful place in the world.

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Improving education

The introduction of modern technology to classrooms is boosting the education opportunities of young Africans

Raising education standards across Africa has been a long-cherished goal. Now it is moving closer to reality, thanks to economic growth and efforts from policymakers. Kate Nivison explains

“Education is Africa’s road to salvation. It is the foundation for realizing the African Union’s (AU) vision of a peaceful, prosperous Africa, driven by its own people to take its rightful place in the global community and the knowledge economy.” So said Ahlin Byll-Cataria, executive secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), prior to the February 2012 Triennial on Education and Training in Africa held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Few would disagree with him.

The task of educating an entire continent to global standards is daunting, but there is no shortage of organizations large and small, public and private, that are willing to address it. The ADEA itself is hosted by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and has nine working groups. It is also working closely with the AU, which invited all its member states to join the ADEA on the launch of its 2006 action plan, Africa’s Second Decade of Education. The AU’s Bureau of Ministers of Education (COMEDAF) has now merged with its ADEA equivalent, a good example of data sharing and duplication reduction in such areas.

When it comes to putting money on the table, and hopefully into the classroom, statistics on how and where aid would be most effective are provided by numerous groups, from UNESCO and the US Library of Congress, to dedicated education retirees collating information on their own websites.

The donor groups themselves range from international organizations such as the Global Fund, to private charities such as Harambee Schools for Kenya (HSK), a UK-based charity started by two gap-year volunteers with a real grassroots, ‘no-office’ approach. HSK funds volunteers to work on the construction and improvement of schools in Kenya’s impoverished north, and provides books, equipment, clean water and student bursaries.

Such efforts highlight the scale and scope of what is needed, and also the dilemma of prioritization. Certainly, raising basic literacy rates is crucial, and across the continent there is a determination to improve on the 20 percent rise in the adult literacy rates (1990-2000) noted by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

In that time, for example, Guinea doubled the number of girls in school, and boys’ attendance rose by 80 percent.

Zimbabwe still leads the continent with literacy levels of around 90 per cent – a clear example of how the effects of a good school system set up decades ago follows through the population. Then comes a cluster of other, mainly southern African countries in the 80 percent adult literacy range.

As to who is benefiting most from basic literacy campaigns, the AU’s 2005 Quality Education for Africa’s Sustainable Development study identified the need to focus on women’s education. The study concluded that two-thirds of Africa’s illiterate people were women; fewer girls than boys in the out-of-school youth range were engaged in life-skills acquisition; fewer women were taking literacy classes and a smaller proportion of these than men achieved functional literacy.

Boosting opportunities for girls

A 2011 report by the Global Campaign for Education found that in 47 of 54 African countries girls still have less than a 50 percent chance of attending secondary school. Emphasizing the benefits of rectifying this, among which are that a child whose mother can read has double the chance of surviving beyond the age of five and that literate girls are three times less likely to contract HIV, the report will be brought before the Malawi AU Summit in June.

Meanwhile, the AU Commission itself has already declared its support for 50 percent representation of women and gender parity in the election of commissioners. When fully implemented, such initiatives should help suitably qualified African women to play their full role in the continent’s economic growth and development.

In 2009, the AU Commission launched a strategy for the harmonization of Higher Education Programmes in Africa. The move should go a long way towards avoiding duplication of efforts and expenditure, particularly given that so many organizations were working in the field, among them Regional Economic Communities such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and various francophone initiatives. The strategy has a number of identified goals, such as defining quality assurance and ensuring qualifications are comparable to facilitate the movement of Africans within the continent for employment and further study.

When it comes to the all-important question of attracting external large-scale funding, extensive ADEA field studies targeted a range of AU countries over the vexed question of who should control education finances. Previous studies had suggested decentralization to prevent ‘leakage’ in the system, with more power and funds given to local authorities, including headteachers and parents’ committees.



Jean-Pierre O Ezin

Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology

To help meet the daunting challenges faced by Africa's universities, the African Union Commission (AUC) has made higher education a focal point of its overall development strategy and lent its full support to the Pan African University (PAU) initiative.

Designed to restore the effectiveness and image of Africa's postgraduate education, the initiative involves the creation of regional knowledge centres directly linked to field units, creating a matrix that extends the reach of quality postgraduate teaching and research to the most remote areas of the continent. The PAU aims to facilitate the training of researchers, engineers, technologists and teachers in disciplines and professions that are likely to be essential to Africa's future success: water and energy; space science; earth and life sciences; technology and innovation; governance and social sciences.

The PAU will also seek to establish 'triple-helix' linkages with the public and private sectors to ensure relevance in the workplace. Three institutes have already been established – the Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences in Cameroon; the Institute of Basic Sciences, Technology and Innovation, in Kenya, and the Institute of Life and Earth Sciences in Nigeria. Two further institutes are under way: the Institute of Water, Energy and Climate Change, hosted by Algeria, and the Institute of Space Sciences in Southern Africa.

These facilities will play a key role in closing the disturbing gap both between countries and regions within the continent and between Africa and other continents. The PAU will promote excellence through rigorous and transparent competition, but the sharing of personnel, equipment and material will also be encouraged, facilitated by new information and communication technologies.

The PAU initiative is the current flagship program of the Education Division within the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology. Two other divisions are the Science and Technology Division and the Human Resources and Youth Division.

What the ADEA studies then discovered was that many of those consequently so empowered had very little experience of financial management, or indeed of keeping proper records, and that training in these aspects for school heads and their committees was essential for accountability in the use of funds. It was also found that up to 10 percent of parents had complained about having to pay illegal school registration fees.

With so many problems at classroom level, it is easy to take a pessimistic view. But the reality is more encouraging. To combat the drastic shortage of qualified teachers in many rural areas and to boost classroom-level support, open, distance and technology-mediated learning is increasingly being implemented. Charities such as Computers4Africa have been supplying schools with recycled computers for years.

The latest empowering gadget could be the mobile phone. About 70 percent of Africa's population are within range of a

mobile phone system, so the provision of cheap phones with suitable 'apps' could become part of the catch-up process.

Paying teachers' salaries regularly and putting the best teachers in front of the youngest classes have proved effective. Raising salaries to attract recruits also helps, particularly as this slows the exodus of teachers to other professions or overseas.

The fact that Africa has the world's highest rates of population growth is a constant drag on all those striving to achieve education for all, but some positive trends are evident. First and foremost, improving literacy rates among younger age groups should produce a new generation capable of tapping into the information and communication technology revolution.

Furthermore, since 2008, healthy economic growth rates in many sub-Saharan member states should allow more money for education, reducing the need for outside funding and furthering the AU's commitment to its members for a brighter future. ■

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With its vision of becoming *the* African university in the service of humanity, the University of South Africa (Unisa) confirms its commitment to a shared vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

Unisa is the largest university in Africa, attracting students from 130 countries in Africa and globally. It is the only dedicated open distance learning institution in South Africa.

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Unisa supports the African Union's Human Resources Development strategy and the goals of the plan of action on the second decade of education.

As Africa's most productive university, Unisa accounts for 12.8% of all degrees conferred in South Africa, and is proud to have former and current leaders of the continent as alumni, including:

- Former President of South Africa **Nelson Mandela**
- Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho **Pakalitha Mosisili**
- Archbishop Emeritus **Desmond Tutu**
- Thought leader **Mamphela Ramphela**

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Our teaching and learning, research, innovation and community engagement agendas are informed by the needs and aspirations of the African continent. To this end, Unisa has various flagship initiatives, among others:

- The **Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute** is dedicated to investing in new thought leaders for Africa's renewal
- The **Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Applied Social Policy**, which includes a research chair on social policy in the family, aims to enhance endogenous and Pan-African research for application in resolving Africa's social challenges
- The **Brigalia Bam/Wiphold Chair in Electoral Democracy in Africa** includes a training centre under whose auspices Unisa academics train electoral officers and commissioners from selected countries in Africa in democratic election procedures
- The **South African Research Chair in Development Education** engages scholars on how to bring indigenous knowledge systems into the ambit of university curricula
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