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***Zeal, Agility and Benefaction in Cross Border Delivery: An African
Perspective.***

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Abstract

Internationalization and cross border higher education have received much attention in recent scholarship on the subject but the perspectives are largely those of the developed world. Internationalization and cross border delivery have distinct meanings for and are experienced differently by African scholars and administrators in African universities. I will address the most important of these differences in my presentation, examining in particular the impetus behind the rapid increase in cross border delivery on the African continent, how various institutions are faring, and the potential impact of cross-border delivery on higher education on the continent.

*However, the focus will be on the main theme ‘**Internationalization and Social Justice**’ for it is these latter concepts that are most cogently expressed in South African and African higher education debates at the present time. I will be using my own university as a reference point in this discussion and will focus on the particularities of a university that has taken as its starting point a zealous commitment to service and development in its internationalization and cross border education efforts on the African continent.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper touches upon the related issues of internationalization, cross-border provision and open distance learning. However, its primary focus is the link between internationalization and social justice and how this manifests in policy and practice at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

The issues will be discussed under the following headings:

- I. Internationalization and cross border provision: a developed world perspective
- II. Internationalization and cross border provision: an African perspective
- III. Internationalization and social justice: are they compatible?
- IV. A Unisa perspective

I INTERNATIONALIZATION AND CROSS-BORDER PROVISION: A DEVELOPED WORLD PERSPECTIVE

Globalization

Despite its detractors, the phenomenon of globalization has acquired legitimacy in all forms of discourse. However, viewed from a holistic perspective we find that most definitions or expositions of globalisation agree that it entails global interdependence, exchange, interaction and circulation of economics, politics, technologies, people, capacities, thoughts and ideas, with knowledge production at the forefront as the foremost driver of global growth and transformation.

Internationalization

Globalization has in turn given rise to internationalization. The two enjoy a symbiotic relationship, each sustained and driven by the other, which may well provide some explanation of the common conflation of the taxonomies.

Knight (2003:33) asserts that while globalization entails the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas across borders, it is a process that impacts on internationalization, and it is internationalization that is changing the world of education particularly through cross-border education. This view is supported by the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (UNESCO/OECD 2005), which defines cross-border higher education as:

...higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders. Cross-border education may include higher education by public/private and not-for-profit providers. It encompasses a wide range of modalities in a continuum from face-to-face (taking various forms from students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning).

In line with the so-called evolution of globalization, we find that internationalization has evolved similarly to incorporate the so-called “commodification” of knowledge, in terms of which higher education has become a very lucrative business.

The term *commodification of knowledge* implies that knowledge is transformed into consumable commodities such as textbooks, books, software, hardware, course offerings, and a host of other related products with the ultimate aim of generating a profit. Even OERs which are purportedly ‘free’ and which are impelled primarily by a social justice agenda, are concerned with taxing questions around licences, patents, password-access charges, amongst other issues.

Higher education has undeniably become a multinational export industry, to the extent that it merits its own category in the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). In GATS, trade in educational services is based on 5 sub-sectors of education as categorized by the United Nations Provisional Central Product Classification (CPC). These sub-sectors are: primary education, secondary education, higher education, adult education and other (UNESCO). UNESCO provides the rationale for education’s inclusion in GATS as follows:

Trade in higher education is a million dollar business. The demand for higher education, on the one side, is growing, while on the other side, trans-border education (e.g. private or for-profit higher foreign university campuses, IT Academies, twinning arrangements with other universities, corporate universities, virtual universities, open universities, e-universities etc.) is increasing. The capacity of the public sector has not kept up with this demand. This, coupled with the recent developments of ICTs and the ensuing growth in online learning has resulted in the creation of this very lucrative market (Varoglu, 2002).

However, it should be noted that education overall is one of the least committed GATS sectors. Only 44 of the 144 World Trade Organisation members have made commitments in education, and only 21 of these have included commitments to higher education: (UNESCO). Knight (2004: 61-2) notes that only three African countries made commitments regarding higher/adult education in the first rounds of GATS discussions in Uruguay in 1994, and that by 2004 no additional commitments had been made by African countries in a second round of discussions that began in Doha in 2000 and were expected to extend till 2005. Thus by 2004 only Congo, Lesotho and Sierra Leone had made commitments regarding establishing conditions for cross-border provision of higher education.

Perhaps the lack of commitment on the part of African countries can in part be ascribed to the cautions emanating from the ACCRA Declaration in 2004 (AAU 2004):

We therefore caution against the reduction of higher education, under the GATS regime, to a tradable commodity subject primarily to international trade rules and negotiations, and the loss of authority of national governments to regulate higher education according to national needs and priorities.

We therefore call on African governments and other African role players to exercise caution on further GATS commitments in higher education until a deeper understanding of GATS and the surrounding issues is developed and a more informed position is arrived at on how trade related cross-border provision in higher education can best serve national and regional development needs and priorities on the African continent.

In response to this, Sawyerr (2004:1) suggests that globalization and internationalization have led to a steady shift from the importance of acquiring a particular body of knowledge, to developing the skills for acquiring new knowledge and the capacity for using knowledge as a resource in addressing societal needs. He suggests that demands for new kinds of knowledge, new modes of knowledge production and dissemination, as well as greater possibilities for effective networking and partnership have resulted in a complete transformation of the environment of knowledge institutions such as universities and other higher education organizations.

Given the pace of massification and the ongoing demand for access to education, especially from students in developing nations, it is not surprising that the existing infrastructure cannot accommodate the demand (UNESCO 2009:1). In addition, as Saywerr (2004:1) asserts, the kinds of skills that are in demand may not necessarily be provided for in many traditional tertiary institutions. Add to this the various generations of students that now need to be educated, the relative inflexibility that characterizes many public institutions and the serious reductions in state funding for higher education in many countries (especially following the global recession), and the ever-present lure of profit, then it is not surprising that private education has emerged so strongly.

Private higher education institutions represent the fastest growing sector world-wide. These institutions range from the for-profit to the quasi-for profit and they currently represent approximately 30% of global higher education enrolments (UNESCO 2009:1). To some extent, the proliferation of private higher education providers is being driven via deliberate government strategies to spread, or share, the burden of higher education delivery to increasing numbers of students. And of course that has come with some dissent and even protest, as well as concerns around issues such as quality, appropriate learner support and longer-term sustainability. What is abundantly clear is that higher education is now a commodity, and that private as well as public education institutions are engaged in its trade.

Even while these forces have gained momentum, the demand for higher education has increased exponentially. Developing nations have seen the benefits of increasing numbers of highly skilled people and the impact they make on the economy. Government policy now routinely pursues the goals of increased access and wider participation. Many nations have been hamstrung by the prohibitive costs of establishing new residential universities. Open, Distance and E-Learning, more than any other mode of education has been seized upon by many as the panacea for demands for increased access and wider participation. It is easy to see why.

Knight [2007:137] elucidates six models for the delivery of cross-border education, namely:

1. Franchise. In this model of delivery an institution of higher education from another nation (A) authorizes an institution of higher education in the host nation (B) to deliver their courses in their nation or other countries. The credits for completed work are awarded by the institution A but the agreement must comply with existing regulations and accreditation standards in country B and regulations and coded in country A. For example, an Italian university (A) authorizes a Czech university (B) to offer courses in the Czech Republic or another country. However, the Italian university (A) awards the credits or degree.
2. Twinning. This model creates an articulation agreement and collaboration between the source country A and country B that allows students to earn credits in either country. Credits and the degree are awarded by source country A and comply with regulations and standards of the source country. For example, an American university (A) collaborates with a Hungarian university (B) and students may take courses in Hungary or the USA but earn credits awarded by the American university.
3. Double or Joint Degree. Providers in different countries form a collaboration to offer a programme where the students receive credits from each provider or a joint award from the collaborating institutions. For example, a French university collaborates with an Indian university and students complete courses at both institutions that may lead to a degree from the French university and a degree from the Indian university.
4. Articulation. This is similar to twinning but with a looser collaboration. Providers from different countries allow students to earn credit by completing work with a collaborating party. For example, a German university collaborates with a Chinese university and credits earned at either university are recognized and may lead to a degree.
5. Validation. This arrangement makes it possible for providers in different countries to allow the provider in country (B) the receiving country, to award the credits of provider (A) in source country. For example, a Dutch university may award the credits of a Canadian university in Holland.
6. E-learning or distance learning. Courses or programs of study are offered to students anywhere in the world through distance models. This may include face-to-face support for students through domestic study or support centers. This model may offer the greatest potential when coupled with face-to-face support to improve accessibility to education. This model has created the conception of virtual education, students, and institutions.

Since it is e-learning that holds the most promise to expand access and widen participation especially in other jurisdictions, it is this 6th model of cross border education to which I now turn.

ODL is a mode of delivery that constantly reinvents itself and is capable of being adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the institution or country that adopts the model. For example, despite the giant strides that have been made in technology, correspondence systems, which originated at the end of the 19th century, are still the most widely used, particularly in less developed societies. And where sophisticated facilities exist in these less developed societies and are quite easily harnessed in the service of innovative and creative programmes that enjoy international recognition and endorsement, the status quo remains. This reinforces the notion that ODL is flexible and that its application is constrained only by externally imposed constraints or limiting mindsets, and perhaps even reluctance to move away from reigning orthodoxies into new territory.

Within this context it is not surprising that the interpretation and application of ODL differs from country to country. In some countries in the developed world, particularly in the USA, ODL is characterized by virtual classrooms, in which teacher and students are able to interact in real-time, via computers, or by diverse forms of blended learning. However in the developing world, where there are severe constraints around access to broadband at national level (although this is improving), where students' access to technology is far more limited, where infrastructure may also be limited or even nonexistent, where learners are widely dispersed and often in deep rural areas, and where there may only be access to occasional satellite lectures and contact sessions (depending on their location and financial means), teaching is mostly asynchronous and takes place through the assessment of assignments that are submitted by students (digitally or manually) in line with the requirements of the courseware that is sent to them (also digitally and manually) (Unisa 2008: 306).

But, irrespective of the interpretation and application of ODL, the ubiquity and flexibility of increasingly sophisticated technologies have opened a goldmine of potential in higher education particularly with the promise of providing access to teaching and learning for vast numbers of students. This promise, however, may still be a future dream for many students in developing countries, so at this point I will change lenses, and discuss the topic from an African perspective.

II INTERNATIONALISATION AND CROSS BORDER PROVISION: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The commodification of knowledge has far broader implications for higher education than mere financial considerations. This is doubly true for higher education institutions in developing nations. Once knowledge enters the global arena as a commodity, considerations such as quality and benchmarking of courseware content, teaching practice and assessment assume a fresh significance, and demand rigorous scrutiny. Pursuing this line of reasoning, benchmarking and measures of quality would extend to the calibre and *graduateness* of students produced by higher education institutions, thus impacting on the reputation of both the institutions and their graduates.

In line with prevailing practice, the best resourced and most reputable universities will be used as benchmarks (as we find in the current flood of university ranking tables) thus perpetuating and entrenching the privileged status they already enjoy and possibly establishing quality norms that are beyond the capability of lesser endowed institutions to achieve. In such an environment, networking and partnerships between higher education institutions also assume a growing significance in terms of the sharing of knowledge, skills and resources, as well as building up a support framework to assist higher education institutions, especially those in developing nations, to navigate the growing complexities of higher education provision in a globalized world.

It would not be too controversial to suggest that the more privileged and powerful institutions benefit from, and drive, the internationalization agenda, especially in terms of their research, but also in seeking to cream off the affluent fee-paying students in the developing world.

The types of research required to support the growth and development of the globalized world are extremely costly and have given rise to a relatively small and select, but highly influential group of universities whose funding streams are diverse, whose focus and reach are global and whose aim is to produce innovative, cutting edge research. These universities have been named the *Emerging Global Model* (EGM) research institutions by Mohrman, Wanhua and Baker (2007:1). Geiger, cited in Mohrman et al (2007:146), claims that at the heart of the EGM is an expansion of the older functions of teaching, research, and service into an organization that can best be described as a “knowledge conglomerate.” EGM universities include Harvard, Cambridge, Stanford, California-Berkley, MIT, Caltech, Columbia, Princeton, Chicago, Oxford, Yale and Cornell.

Implicit in this view is that lesser endowed universities will never be able to compete, and that research that cannot be accommodated in the globalization paradigm, will experience an inevitable decline, mainly because of perceived irrelevance and a concomitant lack of funding. I would suggest that this is particularly true in developing nations, and especially on the African continent, which has experienced a steady decline in research outputs as well as available funding.

So, clearly, for many higher education institutions in the developing world, the commodification of knowledge has introduced a slew of dynamics which, rather than alleviating their already onerous burdens, have added yet another layer of complexity to the pressing demand for higher education provision. Many of us, especially in developing nations, need to deal simultaneously with additional challenges posed by internationalization, including the embedded reality of dominant canons of knowledge competing with the concomitant need to protect, grow and develop our indigenous and alternative knowledge systems.

In 2005, Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalić-Trumbić (2005) noted that cross-border education up to that point had had very little impact on education provision in developing countries. They surmised that part of the reason might be a concern around “cultural imperialism and loss of sovereignty”. A further worry is the

potential loss of indigenous knowledge systems in the drive for the massification of education.

Issues of quality remain high on the agenda. Middlehurst and Campbell (2004: 8, 9) note, for example, the need to build on national quality assurance arrangements and to address the often very high costs of international accreditation.

The phenomenon of the brain drain, as well as the now openly strategic and deliberate targeting of not only foreign students but also of the most talented students, remain ongoing challenges. The OECD and the World Bank (2007: 12) argue that cross-border education can help with the rapid expansion of higher education systems in countries whose domestic capacity cannot cope with demand, provided issues such as quality, local capacity development and appropriate costing, amongst others, are taken into account. However, where students move physically across borders to pursue educational opportunities not available in their own countries, there are often high stay rates in the countries in which these students have graduated. In such cases there is no return on investment for the home country, unless the now expatriate citizen repays a loan (presumably with interest in lieu of some kind of national service) and/or remits payments to the home country in support of family left behind. In addition, programmes of study generally cannot simply be supplanted from one context to another: there is always need for some adaptation and contextualisation.

The first of UNESCO's guidelines for institutions offering cross-border education seems particularly pertinent to the current discussion. UNESCO recommends that institutions offering higher education across borders should:

Ensure that the programmes they deliver across borders and in their home country are of comparable quality and that they also take into account the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of the receiving country. It is desirable that a commitment to this effect should be made public. (UNESCO 2005: 15)

It must simultaneously be asserted that in the absence of a Bologna-type harmonisation in Africa, achieving "comparable quality" will remain exceedingly difficult. It is therefore incumbent upon developing nations, and African ones in particular, to increase impetus toward the regional harmonization of initiatives that have already begun, with a long-term aim of achieving continental harmonisation. This will contribute immeasurably to more equitable and efficient cross-border delivery. In Africa we find that this is a particular focus of the African Council on Distance Education and I am aware that in Southern Africa, for example, SARUA is doing some sterling work in this regard.

More pressingly, African scholars and educators have tended to be consumers of services and materials rather than producers. Obviously the foremost challenge must be to grow local capacity whilst addressing immediate short-term needs to enable African institutions to become exporters of education content and services in a truly global endeavour.

Even where institutions in developing Africa form partnerships with institutions in other developed countries, the partnership is often not an equal one given the superior resources usually available to the institution operating in a developed context. If African institutions are too inward-looking they run the danger of becoming parochial and moribund but unless they can engage with other providers from a footing of equality, Africa potentially runs the risk of succumbing to a new wave of cultural imperialism.

Swanepoel and Mays (in press) contend that in seeking to provide an African focus to the curriculum, it is necessary to consider both the **content** of the curriculum and the **processes of engagement** with that curriculum in the form of an **intercultural conversation**. This would seem to be a productive engagement worth pursuing.

So while the solutions abound in theory, there are multiple factors that need to be taken into consideration in their application if we are to give expression to our understanding of social justice. Evans (1995:258) correctly observes that "Globalization presents nations with a dilemma: they access the world, but the world invades them." This speaks directly to the question of social justice.

III INTERNATIONALISATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: HOW COMPATIBLE ARE THEY?

The conceptualisation and meanings of *social justice* continue to be contested. A number of important theorists such as Fraser (1997, 2003) and Young (1990) underscore two fundamental dimensions of social justice: recognition and redistribution.¹ (In Vrasidas, C., Zembylas, M and Glass, GV 2009: 4).

Cochran-Smith (2004) asserts:

Social justice is about eradicating the socio-economic disadvantage that impedes individuals and whole communities from equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres, and in everyday life. Education for social justice then, entails those pedagogies and education policies that improve the quality of learning and life opportunities of typically marginalised students.

Building on the diverse work of Miller (1999), Young (1990) and Nussbaum (2000), Pendlebury and Enslin (2004: 40) suggest that a socially just system of education is one that "takes human agency seriously and enables the self-development and self-determination of all citizens". Through a series of case studies, Pendlebury and Enslin illustrate the gap that sometimes exists between policy and practice, concluding that "political and educational inclusion are interdependent and lie together at the heart of social justice." (Pendlebury and Enslin, 2004: 46, 47)

Sen (1999) argues that education can promote development and prevent the "unfreedoms" that prevent individuals from satisfying their basic needs and Rumble

¹ ICT for education, Development & Social Justice. Vrasidas, C., Zembylas, M and Glass, GV. Information Age Publishing. USA.

(2007) argues the position that education is a fundamental human right and an essential component for a better life.

There is therefore clear agreement that education is fundamental to promoting social justice, but on the African continent education remains an unattainable dream for far too many of its citizens, and the various challenges raised above in regard to internationalization seem to be the almost exclusive preserve of the “typically marginalized,” especially in the developing nations and in Africa in particular.

In acknowledgement of this, well known initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) (1990), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (2001), and The Commission for Africa (2004/5) have been active on the Continent for almost two decades, with varying degrees of success. All of these initiatives include education either as a driver, or prerequisite for socio-economic development and, concomitantly, social justice.

Clearly ODL and, by extension, educational technologies, have the potential to promote higher education institutions’ strivings towards social justice. But in the context of equitable access to ICTs, educators need to examine critically not only *who* has ICT access in education, but also *how* ICTs can be used to promote a fair and just education for all students (Vrasidas,C., Zembylas, M and Glass, GV 2009: 4). In other words, educators need to ground the use of educational technologies in ideas of social justice and not, as is sometimes the case, on a technical foundation alone. Gorski & Clark (2003: 30) offer an considered response to the so-called digital divide:

[Education] critiques technology related inequalities in the context of larger educational and societal inequities, keeping at the fore of the discussions the fact that those groups most disenfranchised by the digital divide are the same groups historically disenfranchised by curricular and pedagogical practices and other aspects of education (and society at large).

In a similar manner to internationalization, and given the preceding rationale, digital technologies can also be deemed to have economic, political and cultural impact and effects and it is suggested that the use of ICTS in ODL will only evidence their intended benefits if they are applied appropriately and with awareness of the sociopolitical, cultural and economic contexts in which they are applied. So, while ICTS have the potential to promote access to education (especially through ODL), promote awareness of the importance of education, and build learning environments (Vrasidas,C., Zembylas,M and Glass, GV 2009: 4), they need to be accompanied by the political will to overcome existing social and economic inequalities.

Given these contextual challenges, one of the most pressing goals for higher education is to rethink curriculum and pedagogical practices, to accommodate digital technologies in this reconceptualization, and to provide a quality learning experience with increasing access for success for all students. In a recent report for the Center for American Progress, ‘Disrupting College: How Disruptive Innovation Can Delivery Quality and Affordability to Postsecondary Education’, Clayton Christensen et al (February 8, 2011, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/02/disrupting_college.html)

[accessed 6 September 2011]) call online learning a 'technology enabler for higher education', which is 'for the first time disrupting higher education' (2011:2). In their report, they quote some astounding figures: in 2003 approximately 10% of (American) students took at least one online course; in 2008, that percentage rose to 25% and increased to 30% by 2009. Working on a reasonable projection, by 2014, 50% of students will be studying online. But not, perhaps, in Africa.

Speaking about the link between social justice and education, Makhanya and Ryan (2010) argue as follows:

We understand promotion of social justice within an education context, therefore, to refer not only to the need to respond to the South African constitutional imperatives of access, equity and redress in terms of student and staff demographics but, more profoundly, to what is taught and how it is taught and the extent to which these choices are directed towards achieving a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources in a sustainable way. Open and distance learning approaches can contribute to these imperatives but only if interventions are designed explicitly for this purpose.

These understandings inform the leading concerns of this paper - zeal, agility and benefaction - and I would like now to turn to these three informing principles.

Zeal: It is difficult to be present in our times and not be acutely aware of the gross inequalities that exist between the developing world and the developed: between privileged elites and the have-nots, between opulence and squalor, and between abundance and scarcity.

Nowhere has the concern for social justice been infused so deeply and with such zeal within the fabric of legislation, national policy, planning, organizational structures, in practice, and in foreign policy than in post-apartheid South Africa. Mindful of the support enjoyed by the struggle for liberation in many parts of Africa, foreign policy, especially on the African continent is driven by a real concern to promote development.

Aid from the developing world has consistently been driven by the same concerns to promote development, build infrastructure, alleviate poverty, instill good governance, and ensure self-sufficiency. I believe that in most cases, the impulse to altruism has been genuine. More recently, though, at a global level, socio-economic and political trends and evidence suggest that more than ever before, nations are doing whatever they can to protect their "turf" and that includes education. In the bigger scheme of global politics and economic exchange, with their inevitable trade-offs, concerns for social justice lose their zeal.

Linked directly to zeal, is the question of **Benefaction:** who benefits from the educational decisions we make, and if so, to what effect? Have success and throughput rates kept pace with increasing student numbers? Are we in fact reaching the poor and the marginalized? To whom are we giving the benefaction of higher education?

The demand for higher education is predicted to expand from 97 million students in 2000 to over 262 million students by 2025 (UNESCO 2009:10). Furthermore, in 1970, almost every second tertiary student in the world studied in North America or Western Europe, but recent figures indicate that it is now just one out of four students. This means that their regional share of global enrolment is now one-half of what it used to be, falling from 48% to 23% between 1970 and 2007. On the other hand, East Asia and the Pacific's share of global tertiary education students now exceeds 30% of global enrolment (which is up from 14% in 1970) and the share of enrolment in Latin America and the Caribbean doubled from 6% to 12% between 1970 and 2007. Although the growth was low in comparison, the share in South and West Asia increased from 10% to 12% in the same period (UNESCO 2009: 13).

Today, a great majority of tertiary students live in low-and middle-income countries while just three decades ago the opposite held true: the majority of students lived in the small group of high-income countries. In 1970, 57% of tertiary students were from high-income countries even though these nations accounted for only one-fifth of the global population within the tertiary age range. The shift was apparent by the 1990s when the pace of enrolment accelerated in lower middle-income countries. In 2007, these countries accounted for 42% of tertiary students compared to 22% in 1970. Nonetheless, low-income countries cannot sustain the same pace of expansion, causing their share of tertiary enrolment to grow more slowly than their share in population (UNESCO 2009:13).

While enrolment ratios are indicating decisive new trends, participation continues to reflect more traditional patterns, with high participation continuing in the developed world. However there can be no doubt that participation rates are on the march in the developing world, with China as the leader of the pack, contributing substantially to figures that are up from a mere 3% in 1970 to a very significant 26% in 2007 (UNESCO 2009:14).

Despite the quite radical change in the global enrolment ratio between the developed and developing nations, education remains firmly in the hands of the developed world. This is, perhaps, understandable given our respective histories, but we must then ask ourselves whether, in this global environment, we are overcoming unnecessary barriers to access and providing quality learning opportunities that are empowering, affordable and sustainable? Are we truly helping to make people's lives better? How real is the potential for new hegemonies over and above those that already exist?

Agility: The necessary rapid expansion of access to post-schooling and higher education opportunities of high quality, coupled with the need for lifelong learning, means that institutions need to be increasingly agile and able to cope with diverse demands while taking advantage of opportunities often chased after by many competitors.

Opportunities arise, hover fleetingly, then dissipate. The internal processes of universities, buttressed by cautious, protracted decision-making, and often straight-jacketed by labyrinthine regulatory prescripts, aren't exactly conducive to agility in purpose and in action. The need to move with agility in the complex terrain that is

now higher education has never been more pressing. Fundamentally it requires that we have a very sound understanding of the environment in which we operate, both nationally and globally, and equally, a comprehensive understanding of those who we target to teach, buttressed by modes of delivery which reach and support students, and mediate their learning in educationally defensible ways. . This will ensure that when agile responses are demanded, institutions are well positioned to take best advantage.

In practice, as ODL providers, we should be in a position to offer self-contained learning resources that can be accessed in multiple ways (print, on CD, downloadable from the internet, delivered online) at multiple sites (including, increasingly, on mobile devices), at multiple times (implying among other things more flexible registration) and for multiple purposes (from non-formal engagement to address an immediate need or interest, to formal engagement with integrated assessment and accreditation) in line with our students' needs. We should offer levels of learner support that will result in desired levels of graduateness amongst our students. We need to ensure that our research and community engagement focii have relevance and effect. But equally, we need to strategise and plan our institutions in such a manner that sufficient space and resources are available for us to adapt in good time to our swiftly changing environment (socio-economic and political) and the challenges that this poses.

Put simply, agility means the capability, competency and will to adapt to our environment no matter how uncomfortable this may be.

IV A UNISA PERSPECTIVE

South Africa's National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) is based on the policy framework and the goals, values and principles that underpin that framework, as outlined in the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (DoE 1997: 1.14). These are intended to develop a higher education system that will:

- “promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- meet, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order;
- contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality”.

The new Unisa was founded in 2004 from the merger of the former Unisa and the Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) and the incorporation of the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC): three very different institutions, with different organizational cultures and ways of working. The formation of the new Unisa provided an opportunity to reimagine the role that ODL could play.

The former Unisa had played a leading role in establishing the credibility of correspondence education as a way of providing educational opportunities to those who would not otherwise have been able to access them – ranging from workers in full-time employment; to those confined to home through disability or other reasons; to those confined in other ways – such as the political prisoners of the apartheid era and the current needs of prisoners generally for whom access to educational opportunities is critical to their rehabilitation as productive members of society. The younger TSA and Vudec had shown how their reach of ODL could impact meaningfully in the fields of technical, vocational and teacher education.

In its core institutional strategic document *Unisa 2015 Revisited* Unisa reiterates its commitment to social justice and equity in its values: *Social Justice and Fairness*, and *Excellence with Integrity*.

Inspired by the foundational precepts of our transforming society, social justice and fairness remain the values that animate our strategy, guide our efforts and influence our imagined future.

Upon further reflection it is felt that the pursuit of excellence for its own sake could be sterile. Excellence and integrity are therefore combined to suggest that excellence cannot be pursued as an end in itself and aloof from the major challenges confronting higher education. Therefore, excellence must be pursued with integrity, to have value.

Finally ethical conduct is viewed as a critical element of integrity. In practice, it requires correct action and decision-making even in the absence of oversight and scrutiny. (Unisa 2010)

In line with its vision to be *the* African University in the service of humanity, Unisa includes in its institutional goals, to “Position Unisa as a leading ODL institution.” It will do so by advancing ODL on the African Continent and internationally; positioning Unisa’s Institute for Open Distance Learning at the cutting edge of ODL research and training; and leveraging strategic partnerships to increase ODL staff capacity (Unisa 2010). I am sure that you will agree that in terms of its higher education mandate Unisa has articulated very clearly its commitment to social justice in its core institutional documents.

Since 2004 the new Unisa has been committed to re-imagining its ODL mission and mandate. Among many other policy and practice initiatives this drive has seen the development of a draft ODL charter that commits the institution to the following:

- Unisa provides open, caring and stimulating, centrally and distributed, working and distance learning environments in which employees and students flourish and achieve their career and study goals.
- Unisa's admission requirements are appropriately open and provide students with a range of supported pathways to reach their potential. Students have access to a range of online, printed and F2F opportunities to assess their own potential and readiness for ODL study and in specific disciplines.
- Unisa embraces, optimizes and supports the affordances of a range of technologies for effective registration. Online registration is easy and supported through well-designed registration processes, generic admission requirements and clear qualification structures.
- Students have access to all study materials in digital or print format.
- Unisa embraces, optimizes and supports the affordances of a range of technologies for well-designed and technology-enabled teaching and learning.
- Unisa has an efficient and world-class profiling and tracking system which follows all student activity and through which interaction with the institution provides actionable intelligence for lecturers, tutors, administrative and support staff.
- After graduation, Unisa's alumni become part of a pool of qualified and experienced professionals from which F2F, etutors and full-time employees are sourced.

Unisa is also engaged in a number of other initiatives that show quite clearly our active commitment to our vision, mission and goals. For instance, Unisa hosts the UNESCO Chair of ODL, attached to the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) which has a strong mandate to encourage research into ODL generally and to foster developing Africa's engagement with ODL research in particular.

The new Unisa has to provide for a much wider range of needs than in the past. It offers a comprehensive curriculum, to a wider range of ages (as in other parts of the world, Unisa is experiencing growth in enrolment of younger students straight from school), in diverse circumstances ranging from the highly connected urban and sometimes working youth to the rarely if ever connected deep rural, often unemployed, mature adult. A large and increasing number of students are also based in other countries of Africa so Unisa is also already a cross-border provider of higher education.

Unisa's work with other countries in Africa is driven by the African Relations Office of its International Directorate, which focuses on UNISA's strategic position and the promotion of open and distance learning through partnerships with African governments, tertiary institutions, national and regional institutions, donor agencies and international organisations that have a special focus on African issues (African Union, Association of African Universities, NEPAD, SADC, the African Development Bank, UN agencies, and the African Council for Distance Education) in ways that take forward the institution's commitment to its social justice mandate.

Unisa has sought to give practical expression to the concept of being in the service of humanity through innovative projects that transcend traditional academic, political and geographical boundaries. Key initiatives and projects include:

- [DFA-GOSS-UNISA Capacity and Institution building project for the Southern Sudan](#)
- [Unisa Regional Learning Centre in Ethiopia](#)
- [African Council for Distance Education \(ACDE\)](#)
- [Commonwealth Youth Programme](#)
- [International Fellowship Programme](#)

I should also make mention of our notable community engagement initiatives which include the award-winning Bright Site of Sunnyside project aimed at uplifting inner city communities and migrants through self empowerment initiatives and assistance with resettlement; our much lauded fog-harvesting project that is being managed in conjunction with colleagues from the University of Pretoria; and our Chance2Advance programme, which takes informal learning to the poorest of communities in South Africa.

VI CONCLUSION

It is said that we are on the cusp of a new world order: one that is increasingly facing off what we presently understand as globalization. One needs only think of the huge emphasis on sustainability in all of its forms and the global efforts to conscientise our world's citizens around environmental issues that will affect our collective future. One can already see how this is having an impact on internationalization. Many universities have chairs in environmental studies, and ethics is now offered as a compulsory module in many instances. At Unisa, we are signatories to such bodies as the United Nations Global Compact and we not only abide by the provisions of the King III report, but we actively infuse them into our models of governance and our institutional policies. Increasingly, in this emerging order of internationalized higher education, we will all need to align our sights on the most appropriate, efficient and beneficial use of technologies in ODL to promote social justice. Greater collaboration and interaction between various stakeholders in the pursuit of shared approaches to the identification and solution of shared challenges at national, regional, continental and global levels is entirely consistent with African philosophical traditions, which emphasize the belief that a person's very humanity is defined by our relations with other people as well as with our environment and historical legacy. However, we need to balance this admirable world-view against the skewed balance of wealth and power in the world and the very real danger that north-south, developed-developing 'partnerships', with the best intentions in the world, create developed- developing dependencies and a new wave of cultural imperialism.

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