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PUBLIC COMMENTARY

A Critical Look at Ghana's Human Capital Development Agenda: Where Do We Go From Here?

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Abstract

This lecture explores the extent to which Ghana has paid sufficient strategic attention to the development of skills, competencies and capacities which would propel consistent socio-economic development. It argues that many initiatives and efforts have been made in the area of education. However these have been unfocused, disparate, not strategic and wasteful. Five policy and implementation gaps are identified and five recommendations are proffered for urgent consideration by policy makers.

**A critical look at Ghana's Human Capital Development Agenda:
Where do we go from here?**

Lecture delivered by

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**At the 6th National Development Forum of Ghana's
National Development Planning Commission (NDPC)
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October 30, 2019**

Abstract

This lecture explores the extent to which Ghana has paid sufficient strategic attention to the development of skills, competencies and capacities which would propel consistent socio-economic development. It argues that many initiatives and efforts have been made in the area of education. However, these have been unfocused, disparate, not strategic and wasteful. Five policy and implementation gaps are identified and five recommendations are proffered for urgent consideration by policy makers.

Résumé

Cette conférence explore dans quelle mesure le Ghana a accordé une attention stratégique suffisante au développement des aptitudes, des compétences et des capacités qui favoriseront le développement socio-économique cohérent. Cette conférence fait valoir que plusieurs initiatives et efforts ont été déployés dans le domaine de l'éducation, cependant, ces derniers sont flous, sont disparates, ne sont pas stratégiques et sont inutiles. Cinq lacunes entre les politiques et leur mise en œuvre ont été identifiées, et, en conséquence, cinq recommandations méritant d'être urgemment considérées par les décideurs politiques ont été faites.

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Writers, scholars and practitioners have for many years noted that national growth, societal and institutional transformation are a direct consequence of appropriately deployed human capacity and the availability of skills and competencies which facilitate performance and productivity (Porter, 1998; Puplampu, 2016). These competencies are the means by which natural resources are transformed to serve human needs and thereby build societies (Smith, 1776).

Within the African and Ghanaian context, however, it is unclear whether policy makers appreciate the need to adopt a strategic and far sighted approach to the development of human capacity, competencies and productive skills for the country. If the evidence is accepted that national growth is related to, and a consequence of, developed and deployed human capacities, then the consistently poor performance of many African countries on various development and economic indices can be attributed (directly and/or indirectly) to weak attention to the matter of Human Capital Development.

The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is concerned about what Ghana will look like as a country by the time we –in 38 years – turn 100 (2057). Many of us will not be around at that time. However, the policies and choices we are making or not making today will be bearing fruit, forcing our present day 2–10yr olds to have to live with the consequences.

Human Capital Development (HRD)

Why is the Human Capital Agenda so important? In 1776, Adam Smith, in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Book II) identified four types of fixed capital which impact wealth generation. These are:

- machines and implements used for one's vocation
- buildings (profitable fixed assets from which one can procure an income or a return)
- land and its associated enhancements and
- human capital: defined as the acquired and useful abilities *of all the inhabitants or members of the society*. These abilities are secured through 'education, study, or apprenticeship', are domiciled in the person and constitute a fortune, asset, stock for both the individual in whom they are domiciled as well as 'of that of the society to which he belongs.

What is striking here is that over 243 years ago, Smith clearly postulated that the stock of skills and knowledge individuals possess cumulatively constitute the human capacity and capital of the society to which the individual/s belongs. Scholars have defined Human Capital development processes as: the set of activities designed to provide the people of an organisation or society with the necessary knowledge, skills, competencies and mind–

set for present and future job, organisational and societal requirements as well as economic transformation. The core object of any policy and intervention effort in this regard is to ensure that present and future competence and skill gaps are minimised (Garavan et al 2001).

Organisational scientists such as Cantrell et al (2006) have described a 4-tier Human Capital framework which could be adopted by national policy makers as they consider how to leverage skills and competencies for national growth. This framework suggests that the national results and outcomes we wish to see are at Tier 4. This has to do with GDP growth, reductions in debt, transformation of natural resources, institutional stability etc.

These overt Tier 4 outcomes are however driven by some key performance factors, which are Tier 3. These are actual competencies that are deployed by citizens in increasing iterations of synergy. For example, entrepreneurial acumen, analytical capacity, respect for institutional rules and procedures, sector specific functional abilities such as design, engineering, law, mechanical/technical ability etc.

The Tier 3 factors noted above are in turn driven by Tier 2 processes: what Adam Smith called '*education, study, or apprenticeship*'. To drive Tier 2, we need Tier 1 – which is policy direction. I define this policy direction as: the nationally agreed and stated position on the Human Capital required over specific periods of time. A clarity about the skill sets, competencies, knowledge, values and mind-sets necessary to give us Tier 4 results; and the national processes by which such Tier 3 requirements are to be attained.

This tiered model shows that the overt and easily seen edifice of socio-economic outcomes and results actually sit on the not so evident foundation of clearly defined Human Capital policy and processes.

This is an important point that Ghana has missed for far too long.

Having laid the essential arguments about Human Capital development and its importance, I shall now turn attention to the present circumstances we find ourselves in where this matter is concerned. I refer to the policy gaps and implementation incoherence that characterises Ghana's efforts in this area.

PART II: NATIONAL POLICY GAPS

1. Lack of focused clarity on what it means to develop our Human Capital

A review of a wide range of national policy documents such as the '*Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II*' of the mid-2000s to the current range of documents such as the '*Long Term development plan of September 2017*', the '*Coordinated Programme of Economic & Social Development Policies (2017-24)*'; the '*Agenda for jobs (2018-21)*' show that policy makers, planners and politicians have routinely set the matter of

human capital development within the broader context of social and human development. Operationalized in this rather broad way – to include access to health care, malaria control and prevention of HIV/AIDS; population management; safe water and sanitation etc– the result is a reduction in the strategic focus and the monitoring and evaluation possibilities that would ensure that the nation can clearly track and follow the strategic implementations and results of a focused attention to HC development. In other words, if human capital development is about competencies and capacities, it is necessary for relevant policy documents to focus on development of same and decompose such efforts from other social indicators.

2. Numerous Initiatives & Mission Slack/Creep

Over the last 20–30 years Ghana has had many initiatives in the education sector. These initiatives and efforts have included:

- Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE)
- Phase out of Common Entrance and introduction of JHS/SHS
- Senior High School duration at 3 or 4 years
- Free Senior High School
- Colleges of Education linked in with Universities
- Polytechnics converted to Technical Universities
- New Universities such as UENR, UHAS and proposals to set up even more universities (Eastern Region; Open University etc).

By any measure, these initiatives (and these are not all) within a 20–30 year period are rather numerous. Further, the sheer number raise the question as to what focus or thread connects each effort and towards what end/s? It is instructive that at a November 2018 presentation of the World Bank Report on the Human Capital Index, World Bank officials suggest Ghana's education is of poor quality and in the next 18 years, up to 56% of the nation's human capital will go to waste as a result. If the report is to be believed or accepted (and there is no reason why not), one can only conclude that the many initiatives – while laudable – are actually a huge resource drain.

A related matter is what may be referred to as a 'mission-slack' in the educational and human capital development agenda of the country. This is the situation where an institution set up to pursue a particular educational, training or skill development agenda, changes course, and, without good reason, adds to or pursues efforts which were not initially planned. An example of mission slack may be found at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR); and to a lesser extent at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA).

The CSIR was set up by law: NLCD293 (1968); NLCD329 (1969); SMCD66 (1976) and Act 521 (1996). Its mandate covers coordination of various national research efforts and the

systematization of research production, dissemination and funding. The CSIR recently received accreditation to set up a College of Science and Technology – essentially entering the Higher Education space. It appears this move was in part a response to financial difficulties. This is classic mission slack. A venturing into domains that may not be considered core to mandate.

The Ghana Institute of Management & Public Administration (GIMPA) was set up in 1961 through a collaboration between the Government of Ghana and the UN Special Fund. Its initial aims were to focus on the training of public servants with administrative and public/policy sector competencies. Over the years and since major reforms in the early 2000s, it has grown into a full-service HE institution. While this is not mission slack, there is an element of mission creep. It must be said though that this was in response to government initiatives which removed GIMPA from subvention.

3. Proliferation of Universities, liberalization of Higher Education, Accreditation, & commercialization without attention to what Ghana requires

In Ghana, the National Accreditation Board continues to accredit university level institutions to offer business programmes when the national need appears to be in the areas of science, technology and medicine. Anecdotal evidence places graduate unemployment at about 15–20% and a little over 60% of graduates are from the business and humanities specialisms. Should not the country institute a policy review to hold in check the continued accreditation of institutions which seek to come on stream to offer those programmes that are already over represented in the HE space?

In recent times efforts have been made to bring some changes into the tertiary education sector with the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission which will bring NAB and National Council for Tertiary Education together; the Ghana Tertiary Education Policy is out; the Ghana Universities bill is being considered. These notwithstanding, the core matter remains unaddressed: how/are we using the accreditation and licencing regime to address human capital development imperatives?

4. Lack of a strategic tie between national/natural endowments and skill consolidation

The country has not paid sufficient attention to aligning our skills and talent development efforts to our natural resource potentialities. We struck oil in commercial quantities in 2007. What are the skill and competence implications of this discovery? Many advocates of the involvement of indigenes in the extractive industries in developing areas suggest that often flashpoints of social unrest in the extractive sector arise because of the inability of indigenous people of an area to fully participate (across all levels) in the forward and backend of the process mineral wealth extraction – often due to low levels of literacy, education and absence of requisite skills. Some Universities have taken

programmes such as Oil & Gas Law at LLM level. On a balance of requirements, is that what we need on the oil fields into the future?

Ghana has an old problem with artisanal mining (ASM). It exploded during 2006–2016 (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017). The evidence available is that the majority of the Chinese miners who invaded this space with the active connivance of some politicians, traditional rulers, and public servants come from a number of regions in China where artisanal mining has been perfected. In total ASM employs some six million Chinese in China. That is 20% of our population. Over the 40 years of China's economic transformation, these ASMs (along with other endeavours) have come to be organised as Township & Village Enterprises (TVEs). In total the TVEs are said to employ up to 120 million people and have been the mechanism for producing factory products from toys to fabrics to processed metals. In a bid to sanitize their sector, the Chinese state closed down many small operations, putting close to 2.5 million out of work. This was in 2001. Any wonder therefore that within 3–5 years of those evens, we were seeing such a rapid rise in Chinese presence in the ASM space in Ghana?

In regard to ASM, one would suggest that a direct policy position should be to marshal our efforts towards three prospects:

- Forcefully tackle the menace – as the Akufo-Addo government to its credit began to do from 2017
- Task two or three HEIs to examine ASM into detail and work out means by which we would create a sanitized industry based on advanced skills and mechanisations
- Facilitate the institutional and market arrangements which would decriminalize the practice and build into it a respectable value chain for personal and national profit.

5. Failure to link/integrate specific Human Capital efforts into/with our development plans

An examination of various policy documents including:

- The Coordinated Programme for Economic & Social Development Policies (2017–24)
- An Agenda for Jobs: Creating prosperity & equal opportunity for all (2018–21)
- Long Term Development Plan (2018–57)
- Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I & II (2003–06)
- Draft Ghana Beyond Aid Charter & Strategy Document (2018/19)

show an absence of clearly articulated policy statements about the projected and required skills-sets which should guide our training, educative and apprenticeship efforts for the development and growth agendas.

This absence of clarity has in recent years manifested in the conversion of Polytechnics to Technical Universities. Instead of wholesale conversion of Polytechnics to Technical Universities (which has happened since Act 922 of 2016) Ghana could instead have decide on three or four key aspects of our present and future economy and identified the competence requirements for these areas. Subsequent to such a process, the educational

and planning system should identify three or four benchmark Polytechnics, convert these to Technical Universities and work with them over a 6–12yr period to make them into hubs/centres of excellence for the technical skills required for those areas identified as key for socio-economic development. The Technical Universities and the competence development process must then be aligned to specific local industry and multinational manufacturing firms through intentional collaboration.

It is interesting that in recent times the loud manifest evidence of the conversions have been disputes over pay and photos of induction of Vice Chancellors of such Universities. This is instructive.

It is time for this country to ask itself some searching questions.

- What competencies and capacities are absolutely critical for that growth? And what competencies are needed by this country – given its present internal and external circumstances – over the next 15–30 years?
- How do we build these competencies?
- What policy and implementation actions of ours are inimical to the development of these capacities?
- How do we synergise competency development, retention and deployment?
- At the present time we have an economy that is about 47% services, 31% Industry & manufacturing and 22% Agriculture. It is projected that in 10 years, the structure will shift to 50% services, 35% industry and 15% agriculture. For this to result in true improvements in the standard of living of Ghanaians, the shifts in the structure of the economy must be tectonic in character and should be driven by deployed competencies of Ghanaians who are actively participating in the economy – not as paid observers.

These questions need answers, for which I turn my attention to the matter of *focused Human Capital Development*.

PART III: GHANA'S HUMAN CAPITAL AGENDA

The Human/intangible capital is the country's stock of labour, human capacities, the population's knowledge and skills, the level of trust in a society, the quality of its formal and informal institutions as well as its levels of literacy. A World Bank (Hamilton et al, 2006) study places the following percentages on the various types of resources and their cumulative contribution to a nation's wealth:

- Natural capital accounts for 5%;
- Produced capital accounts for 18%
- Intangible capital accounts for 77% of a nation's wealth.

The implication is, if we wish to tackle poverty, prepare our nation for the future, facilitate socio-economic development and ensure general institutional/organizational capacity, a

focused attention on developing the intangible capital is absolutely necessary. Such an intention requires a number of interventions. These are: firstly, a clear policy focus for the development of human capital. Second, we must decide the required competencies for socio-economic growth over a predetermined period. Third, we must set out how those competencies are to be developed. Fourth, we must create institutional and sector linkages among the relevant agencies. Finally, initiatives must be backed by law or supported by state level directives which would make it difficult for successive governments to ignore. Let us tackle each of these in turn.

POLICY FOCUS

Earlier this paper noted that from as far back as the days of the GPRS-II (in the mid-2000s), we had conflated HC with other equally important social and human development indices such as health care, population management, provision of water, urban development and housing etc. We must separate the two areas. When we do, it would then be possible to maintain the 'purity' of an HC agenda in terms of an articulated set of skills, literacy levels, organizational and human competencies, values and attitudes which are needed in significant proportions over the next 15-30 years (writers like Porter 1998, suggest that HC investments 'mature' in 10-15 year cycles). The country needs a National Policy Document tackling very explicitly, 'Human Capital required from now to 2057'. In other words, a clearly defined Human Capital Development Agenda. There are a number of advantages to this approach. A focused and strategic attention means the country can:

- track skill development across sectors
- evaluate the impact of skill sets on commerce, industry and wealth creation
- set up particular institutions dedicated to building particular skills and monitor these

There are a number of international examples for such attention.

International Examples

Operationalisation of a focused attention on human capital development is a matter of policy, law and institutional commitment. There are examples or precedents in history.

1. In 1862, the Congress of the United States of America passed the Morrill Act which was officially titled: *'An Act Donating Public Lands...to provide Colleges for the benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanical Arts'*. The result was 69 higher education colleges and universities including what are today Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and University of Wisconsin at Madison. These were the so-called 'land-grant' colleges. Backed by law and a clear understanding of what the United States needed to do (or wanted) with regards to its skill base, these colleges had a dedicated focus on training in agriculture, industrial skills and later military capacity. The law indicated that:

‘without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including **military tactic**, to teach such branches of learning as are related to **agriculture and the mechanical arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe**, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life’

These policy directions led to development of skills, knowledge and research paradigms that have facilitated many benefits for the USA – benefits derived directly from attention to intangible capital. Evidence suggests that within two generations of the law (approximately 80 years), the USA had witnessed: the birth of flight; the Model T Ford; food security and military prowess that ultimately led to the sharp dramatic end of the Second World War. They had a focus on three main areas: military skills, agricultural skills and industrial/manufacturing skills. It is instructive to note that the focus was not on job creation. It was on skill development.

2. Another example is worth mentioning. In 1978/9, Singapore decided that within 10–15 years it would become a financial powerhouse of the Far East. Their resultant strategy had a three elements to it. First the country identified the necessary skills for such financial capacity. Second, they then researched the way the financial system works globally. Third they sent out young Singaporeans to under-study the New York, London and Zurich systems. Fourth, they both incentivized and values-drove the return of these young Singaporeans back home.
3. A third relevant example is from the small South American nation of Costa Rica. For many years culminating in the 1990s, Costa Rica decided to adopt a mix of developing skilled high-end technical expertise as well as broad range of employee capacities with the appropriate work ethics so as to attract foreign direct investment. The nation went into close partnerships with a group of Experts known as CINDE, who drew on significant research on the country, its skills and competitiveness – with particular reference to electronics and software.

The country sought to position itself as the emerging electronics manufacturing centre in the Americas. This led to close collaboration with the software giant, Intel. The results or outcomes of these efforts included a string of forward and backward linkages and integrations which established the country firmly on the road to a skill-based economy (Rodríguez-Clare, 2001).

Major firms which operated from Costa Rica (for many years) as a direct consequence of available locally possessed skills were DHL, Intel, HP, Bayer. By the late 2000s Costa Rica had one of the largest middle classes in the region by population size and a relatively equal distribution of wealth. Their STEM and engineering orientation has led to many things including 98% of power generated by renewable means. Costa Rica spends 7% of budget on education against a global 4%. Ghana spends close to 23% but

what is our result? Evidence suggests that in some Scandinavian countries, the State mandates higher education institutions to produce a certain number of PhDs in certain skill areas due to the projections of what the country needs – and State funds are then appropriately channelled to those institutions which take up the challenge.

DETERMINE REQUIRED COMPETENCIES

In the examples noted above, the countries took time to decide the types and levels of competencies required. From Adam Smith's earliest propositions to date, when we refer to competencies in the HC formulations, we are speaking about skills – practical and theoretical knowledge – but also, the mind-sets, attitudes, institutional arrangements, coordinating mechanisms which provide the 'software' for the policy and implementation efforts in this area to be synergised.

Tackling human capital and its development requires that nations have a clear sense of their future economic and social imperatives. They must carry out a full analysis of the potential contributions from their natural/possessed resource endowments; a full analysis of the attitudinal gaps; a full analyses of the institutional gaps. These must be placed in the context of the comparative advantages within the region, trade blocs, global trends and the institutional and productivity challenges. All this must then be used to determine the stock of knowledge, skills and values orientations needed for the future in predetermined periodic cycles.

What has been the biggest disabler of our national progress to date? Corruption and waste. The Ghana Beyond Aid process has identified that the country needs to build values of patriotism, honesty, respect for each other, our laws, our institutions, and the natural environment; discipline, hard work, punctuality, responsibility and civic engagement. In addition, volunteerism community mindedness; self-reliance on Ghana's own resources (as the primary driver of our development); wise and efficient use of Ghana's resources and safeguarding the public purse; transparency and accountability are critical values that cannot be ignored. Why have we not mainstreamed these into our educational agendas?

A September 2019 publication of the British Psychological Society goes with the caption: 'Schooling the Good Citizen'. In essence it is possible to build into curriculums various aspects of good citizenship and progressively enable citizens to appreciate what it takes to respect one's own country.

In this regard, we need to set up a deliberately crafted and intentional policy development system which does three things:

- Researches the competencies and values required
- Identifies how we will develop these and
- Proposes a legal framework to embed the process.

This is a most important process that cannot be over stressed. At the present time Ghana has

- a doctor/patient ratio of 1:7,196 (1:20,000 in Upper East) WHO 1:1000
- a poor lawyer density outside of Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi
- 26 psychiatrists; 1500 known suicide cases annually and rising, but only 1 known clinical psychologist with focused interest in the area of suicide

A Ghana Health Service report in 2018 suggests we need 158 clinical psychologists: 30 are at post; we need 26 doctor anaesthetists: 7 are at post. Of 114 nurse anaesthetists who responded to a survey, 70% practice without the supervision of a consultant anaesthetist; we need 37 neurosurgeons: 6 at post.

Future Work Skills

A 2011 Report by the 'Institute for the Future' of University of Phoenix, Arizona considered the skill sets required from 2020 onwards. They identified a number of drivers of change including the rise of smart machines, a world driven by new media and global connections. From their research they identified 10 competencies that are absolutely critical. These include: sense making, adaptive thinking, cultural and institutional competence, design mind-set, collaboration. Another publication from the Council of Christian Colleges argues for preparing for the workforce of tomorrow. A deep study by the global consulting firm Ernst and Young, asks whether universities of today can lead the way for the learning required for tomorrow.

I am less interested in the findings as I am in the process. We need to get our act together and engage a determined and intentional process of identifying what we should be spending our 23% of budget on regarding education, learning and training.

MECHANISMS FOR BUILDING HUMAN CAPITAL/COMPETENCIES

Now we come to the matter of education and training. The Ghanaian system is organised into primary, secondary (junior/senior) and tertiary, with a range of other technical offerings typically in the space between post-secondary and tertiary. The Council for Technical & Vocational Training (COTVET) handles technical training issues. The National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABTEX) handles the professional and technical examinations. The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and National Accreditation Board (NAB) handle the policy and regulation within the tertiary space. We have several specialized institutions dedicated to teacher training, nursing, agriculture and so on.

The educational/training system within a country represents the single most verifiable factor or metric which accounts for Human Capital efforts. This has to do with a number of very important elements such as: number and types of schools; access/enrolment regimes and systems to ensure protected completion; inclusiveness; levels of schooling—primary, secondary, tertiary etc; years of schooling; gender representation; national

spread and resource allocation; resultant literacy rates; apprenticeship systems etc and systems of regulation and responsive policy innovation. The extent to which a nation synergises these elements and ensures a strategic interlink with socioeconomic imperatives and natural endowments, is the extent to which that nation will recognise significant Human Capital benefits.

Let us look at some elements of the Ghanaian situation. We have about 1 million in SHS enrolment. In the first year of the Free SHS, an additional 90,000 joined. This is projected to grow to about 140,000 (additional) year on year. Despite having about 196 Senior High Technical Schools, their total enrolment is not more than 40,000. We have something in the region of 600 Technical and Vocational Institutions, with an abysmal completion rate of 1.6% of enrolled persons.

From the NAB and other records, Ghana has:

- 5 chartered private universities (eg Central University)
- 8 Technical Universities (eg Accra Technical University); 2 Polytechnics – Wa and Bolgatanga yet to be upgraded to Technical University status)
- 7 private colleges of education (eg St. Ambrose College of Education)
- 39 Colleges of Education (eg Ada College of Education)
- 10 private and 28 public Nursing training colleges (eg Western Hills)
- 10 Public Universities (eg University of Ghana)
- 88 Private tertiary institutions (eg Anglican University College)
- 8 foreign institutions (eg Webster University)
- 11 Tutorial Colleges (eg Institute of Business Management and Journalism)
- 7 specialized degree awarding institutions such as NAFTI, Survey School and Armed Forces Colleges

There are several other institutions. At the present time there are also over 40 pending institutional applications to the NAB. Total HEI enrolment stands at about 450,000. Of this the public universities account for about 55%, Private Universities almost 25% and the rest shared across. The Technical Universities have more than twice the number of their students pursuing humanities programmes as opposed to STEM. The available information suggests we have a rather crowded and strategically uncoordinated space.

Let me give us some statistics about the HE space in some countries.

- Germany, a 1000 year (AD962) old nation of 87 million people has 380 universities
- Canada, a 150 year (1867) old nation of 37 million people has 96 universities
- The USA, a 243 year (1776) old nation of 327 million and perhaps the leading HE county in the world, has about 3500 main universities with several more community colleges
- The UK, a 1000 year (AD927) old nation of 67 million people has 130 universities
- South Africa, a 25 year or 80 year old (depending on how you calculate) nation of 57 million has 26 universities

- Kenya, a 48 year old nation of 50 million people has 49 universities

Ghana a 62yr old nation of 30m people has over 120 universities; many more colleges and specialized training institutions –and counting. To what end one may ask? Why this proliferation of institutions and colleges and where is the central strategic intent driving all the efforts?

Just by way of example, this lack of clarity in policy direction is hurting the private university sector specifically and Ghana's human capital prospects generally. 20 years ago the private universities entered the terrain and offered much needed respite to the State. It offered higher education opportunities to many citizens at a time when access to the three universities existing then -- University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology -- was a real challenge. Today, the over enthusiastic expansion of the public HEIs means there is untold and detrimental stress on the private universities to the point of elimination. This is rather unfortunate. There are issues with the accreditation/affiliation/charter process. There are issues with the huge enrolment growth in the public university space.

The ultimate test of any education policy and the structures and implementation parameters which arise from such policy is its success in delivering for a nation:

1. Increased capacity of the citizens to actively and knowledgeably design, amend, modify and participate in the governance process and in affairs of the nation
2. Increased ability of the citizens to transform natural resources (or lack of same) into socio-economic capital and thereby improve the existence and welfare of the country
3. Increased capacity of the citizens – having achieved the above two points – to position and reposition the nation towards progressively enhanced competitive standing amongst comparable countries, taking due note of emerging trends and general direction of global/regional socio-economic development.

For the education system and its ancillaries to achieve these intents, it must determine those capacities which must be developed. It must decide which institutions would be responsible for development of which aspects of the required competencies; and what synergies necessary across the entire system. It is only on the back of such determination that you can truly talk about access, quality and relevance within education.

Why do we keep accrediting humanities and business HEIs? Why have we converted Polytechnics to Technical Universities? Why are we continuing the opening of new Universities? Why have we politically weaponised the matter of whether high school should be free or not free? Why do we allow some primary schools to operate under trees and euphemistically refer to same as 'less endowed' while the endowment is supposed to be provided or moderated by the same State hand?

The questions are many and must be asked because the fundamental aim of building Human Capital is to facilitate sufficient innovation and creative solution to societal challenges in a progressively improving manner.

INSTITUTIONAL, POLICY AND SECTORAL LINKAGES

Let us now touch on the many actors – within our education/research/training policy and implementation space – that need to be synergised for effective delivery of Human Capital development.

We have the Ministry of Education (MoE), GES, NAB, NCTE, COVET, NABTEX, TVET. Apart from the education policy actors, there are research institutes with the mandate to carry out research that may be directly applicable to solving human and social issues. There are public and private universities. The universities are the direct frontline actors in getting higher education delivered and appropriate skills built up within the country. We have the youth for who the future beckons and who will pay dearly for policy gaps and implementation mishaps. We have industry players such as firms and trade associations (Association of Ghana Industries; Ghana Employers Association; Association of Bankers; National Board for Small Scale Industries etc).

At this point we cannot say that these different actors converge on a near common policy intent to facilitate development of any particular sets of needed skills or competencies.

Scholars show that within an economy we have communities of creation, production and consumption. While the consumption community specialises in the use of finished products or services the communities of production ‘make’ the required services and products. The communities of creation include the organisations and groups which create knowledge, share ideas, develop thinkers and skills, and facilitate the turning of ideas towards problem solution.

It is imperative that the communities of creation, production and consumption come together in an intentional manner to build national talent and appropriate skill sets through mechanisms that bring researchers, academia, industry policy makers, industry and commerce together in a synergistic flow. It seems, however, that at the present time, there are several disjoints and disconnects in the current policy, structural and institutional arrangements.

Ghana should wake up to the fact that human capacity is the solution to social problems and that human capacity is built through education and related activities such as apprenticeships and technical training regimes. The education system which does not progressively lead to problem solution is ‘*education for its sake*’ not Human Capital

Development. We need to look at this matter holistically and from end-to-end. Our educational investments must create strategic linkages to result in resourceful innovators who would bend their efforts towards problem solution. Integrated country level systems and frameworks are necessary to give operational voice and reality to the human capital-education-economic development nexus. This is what may be known as a stakeholder model of Human Capital Development.

In this regard, I call for a *Committee of Experts* to develop a Human Capital policy framework for Ghana. Their primary remit would be to engage the communities of production, consumption and creation; government, industry, youth, academe in discussions on what skills and knowledge the country truly needs over the next 10-25 years and therefore in 5-10 year iterations. This body of experts should commission and use research findings on global high-end industry and commerce/corporate movements and innovations; regional market and political realities; comparative and competitive advantages and behavioural imperatives; perceived competency requirements. The Committee may be domiciled at the National Development Planning Commission – given the NDPC's constitutional mandate.

One important argument for such a body of experts relates to the fact that it would rise above sectoral, parochial and institutional mandates and agendas. By so doing it should be in a good position to propose an overarching set of competencies and an inclusive regime tackling how required competencies may be developed, how the nation may retain developed talent, how competencies link in to different facets of the economy and society. Its work may enable that nation facilitate labour, social laws and directives which engender a nation that is conscious of what Adam Smith described more than 200 years ago; a nation possessing:

the acquired and useful abilities *of all the inhabitants or members of the society*...abilities secured through 'education, study, or apprenticeship', and domiciled in the person; constituting a fortune, asset, stock for both the individual in whom they are domiciled as well as for and of the society to which s/he belongs.

GIVE INITIATIVES LEGAL BACKING

Policy direct which emanate from the four points articulated above must be given governmental and legal backing to mandate execution. Let us look at a couple of examples which buttress the need to use directives or enact legislation to concretize the Human Capital Agenda.

The first example is from China. On a visit to explore institutional collaborations, I learnt that their technical colleges don't bother with humanities. Instead, they focus on mid-to lower level technical skills and strenuous efforts are made to attach Technical colleges to major industrial/manufacturing/heavy production facilities.

I learnt that the State indicates very clearly to the institutions the competencies the country needs (eg the type of civil construction approaches to be adopted over the next 20 years, and by implication, the skills needed). The educational system is therefore linked and locked into the human capital development agenda for 20 years or more (into the future) with the stated needs in mind. Is it any wonder that China is taking the world by storm?

The second example is from South Africa. Central University was visited by officials from an Institute in South Africa for collaboration discussions. Their focus is the Electronic Media. They shared an initiative that is much like what has been driving China. The Institute is being linked in with a number of Universities by a bill that is going through parliament and will ensure that the practice and theory element in four distinct areas: digital literacy, professional skills, ICT usage and e-leadership are massified and embedded in the country by 2030. Each of the participating Universities have been given one of four focal areas: e-government, tourism, e-health, social inclusion & business development. Each has specific targets designed to attain the massification desired by 2030.

Universities and Polytechnics should be required to engage in a focused interrogation of the range of programme offerings and track the impact of same on national wealth creation. Technical Universities should be legally restricted in respect of the ratio of STEM to Humanities programmes, intake and general direction. HC growth does not occur as a matter of course. It requires specific interventions.

PART IV: CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Without sounding alarmist, I would like to note that Africa's woes are often directly related to its unpreparedness to tackle urgent, real, present and future dangers. Reader's (1997) book 'Africa: Biography of the Continent' amply demonstrates that we have often assumed we would have the benefit of slow evolutionary response to changing circumstances. Time and again over the last 1000 years, this has proven a false assumption.

As we race into the mid-21st century, we are confronted with many dangers and opportunities which will crystalize over the next 15-30 years. These dangers and opportunities include:

- Colonization (once again), but this time from the Far East
- Risk of irrelevance of natural resources due to what I call substitution economics by the metropolitan north (innovations and technologies which render directly sourced natural endowments irrelevant; the electric vehicle is a case in point – soon to render oil an irrelevance)
- Internet of things
- Devastation of our natural environment as we have witnessed with galamsey

- Medicine without the medical doctor
- Fracturing of the place of Universities in society
- The continuing menace of corruption, questionable payments, rent seeking and subversion of State without the use of guns
- Citizenship, patriotism, active citizenship, volunteerism, schooling the good citizen through the arts
- A Ghana that is beyond aid: but tackled from a behavioural angle.

We must prepare for the future, but that can only be done if we have people who can envision that future and possess the skills with which to harness it. I end with a six-point call to action.

1. After 62 years of nationhood we need to engage in deep reflection about our HC efforts: a truth commission about how we have prepared to be unprepared
2. A stakeholder driven *Committee of Experts* housed at the NDPC. Their work should guide regulatory bodies and implementing agencies in the formulation of the next line of action on skill development
3. We must identify and set legislative backing for the development of particular skill sets in areas such as:
 - a. Disruptive technology
 - b. Agricultural value chain
 - c. Production engineering
 - d. Citizenship, ethicality and institutionalized integrity
4. We must develop an embracing strategic stakeholder approach to retention of talent. Anecdotal evidence has it that there are more Ghanaian trained doctors practising abroad than practicing in Ghana.
5. Technical Universities must be legally bound to be truly so; with specific targets to develop specific types of capacities over a specific period of time. Research Councils must be mandated to be research councils and mission slack must be arrested
6. We must have legal frameworks which enable us to be more intentional about Human Capital. For example:
 - a. SMEs must have tax breaks if they employ 5 or more graduates from certain disciplines
 - b. Some Universities, Polytechnics and Technical Universities must be linked to particular industries and factories
 - c. Major corporates must have tax incentives for taking on interns
 - d. HEIs which dare to go into unchartered but desperately necessary skill areas must receive supportive grants for the first 5 years of such an effort
 - e. Curriculums from Primary, Secondary, Post-Secondary & Pre-Tertiary through Tertiary must be developed with a socio-economic goal in mind. The stakes are far too high to leave things to evolve on their own.

The point has been made that it is difficult – if not almost impossible – to correct in 3–4 years at the Tertiary level what it has taken 12 years at the Primary and Secondary levels to consolidate. This is why an education policy is not the same as a Human Capital Policy or Agenda. In an ideal environment, the Education Policy must be derived from a human capital policy framework.

Clearly, if we are to attain any measure of sustained and distributed wealth, we need to place the HC debate front and centre and list the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, institutional capacities, processes and arrangements which synergise all our efforts. In this we must remember that one of the critical elements that Adam Smith articulated in respect of human capital is the level of trust and integrity within society. Behaviour is governed by one's level of knowledge, capacity for data/information as well as intellectual and analytical enlightenment. The deployment of competencies therefore requires attention to as well as consolidation and an annexation of the mental space and attitude frames. We must work to expunge the disorderliness, disregard for law and the growing institutionalization of greed and questionable payments which plagues our society from deep within our psyche.

In other words, we must educate the mind and psyche; entrench a set of values which enable us to synergize our capacities by respecting order, rules, and fair play. We must see personal and societal returns as directly linked with personal and Societal productivity.

Can we please work towards *'Agenda 2057: The competent Ghana we need'*?

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