Community-Oriented Education: The University for Development Studies (UDS) Experience and Future Perspectives

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Introduction (1/2)

Formal education, especially in African countries, has been traditionally elitist as a result of:

- history of education in the countries
- high cost of education
- perceived forgone income from the labour of children

Thus formal education in the rural areas and for vulnerable groups in many African countries has been a challenge.

In Ghana, there has clearly been an urban-rural divide, a male-female divide and a south-north divide with regards formal education.

A digital divide has followed from these gaps.
Another problem arising from the elitist nature of education is that research for development in rural areas has not produced expected results.

There is generally inadequate knowledge by many researchers on:
- how rural community members view or perceive development and
- how they think the problems of underdevelopment, deprivation, exclusion and others should be tackled.

These are some of the key problems the University for Development Studies was established to tackle.

It was established with a mandate to “blend the academic world with the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of northern Ghana, in particular, and the country as a whole” (PNDC Law 279).
University for Development Studies, (UDS)

UDS is a community-oriented multi-campus University located in the northern savannas of Ghana, West Africa with a “new thinking in higher education which emphasizes the need for universities to play a more active role in addressing problems of the society, particularly in the rural areas” (Effah, 1998).

Two aspects of the University’s mission are relevant here:

- promote equitable and sustainable socio-economic transformation of communities through; practically oriented, community-based, problem-solving, gender-sensitive and interactive research, teaching, learning and outreach programmes.

- develop its ICT infrastructure as the driving force for; the education of more people more rapidly, and the improvement of efficiency, and academic quality in order to advance community and national development.
The training and research in UDS thus have strong community orientation.

With respect to training, the University has a trimester system where the third trimester is used for an integrated field practical training in rural communities.

Groups of about 10 to 15 students from diverse disciplines are sent to rural communities to stay there for eight weeks to interact, learn, dialogue, plan and execute development initiatives with community members.

The programme, and indeed all our community engagement initiatives, are based on a simple principle, which we term the Plug-In Principle (for community engagement and development).
Activities of farmers, marketers, processors etc. (using mainly IK)

Amalgam of IK and intervention (SK)

Plug-in by “bettering” agents (mainly SK)
Illustration of the “Plug-in” Principle (Social)

Cultural practices of the people (indigenous knowledge and practices)

Mixture of culture (cultural practices and new ideas)

“Plug-in” (new ideas affecting practices)
Salient points of Plug-In

Scientific knowledge cannot replace existing knowledge or situation, it only “betters” it. Thus “scientists” (researchers and interventionists) are at best “bettering” agents not change agents.

- The plug-in (intervention) is narrower as compared to existing knowledge (in any society or community).
- To successfully plug-in, there is need to thoroughly understand the existing situation. Thus researchers and interventionists need to spend time in the communities and with community members.
- Community members will accept a message if they accept the messenger.
- The amalgam of IK and SK is very much dependent on the degree to which interventionists understand and appreciate the existing situation.
- The understanding and appreciation of the existing situations help to modify intervention strategies to suit particular situations.
Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

- In the area of health education, the emphasis by UDS was to be on preventive rather than curative medical care.
- It was also to be based on the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) methodology which is quite popular in several developed countries.
- Through NUFFIC, UDS was able to obtain assistance from Maastricht University, the Netherlands and other universities in Africa to establish the PBL method of medical training in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences. It is yet to be extended to other areas of training.
- The emphasis on preventive medical care is however a challenge.
Community-Based Research

As a university for development, it follows that its research must focus on research for development (R4D).

Also as a university located within relatively rural communities and with a focus on community development research has generally focused mainly on rural and development and community service.

How can science (particularly applied science) and technology serve rural communities better?

There has been significant collaborative research with universities and research institutions all over the world.

The community-based research methodology has been largely participatory and clearly based on the plug-in principle. We have regarded community members as research partners rather than clients or beneficiaries.
Participatory Assessment of Development (PADev)

PADev is a holistic and participatory evaluation method that was developed jointly by three Dutch NGOs (ICCO, Woord en Daad and Prisma), the University of Amsterdam/African Studies Centre, the Royal Tropical Institute, the University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana and Etudes Action Conseils in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, for the purpose of assessing development interventions.
PADev (2/3)

It was developed over a period of 5 years (2008 to 2012).

- Northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso were chosen as research areas because of the long tradition of foreign development cooperation there (Dietz et al. 2013).

- The PADev methodology comprises several participatory (community-based) exercises that are run in field workshop formats. Each exercise can be run for about three days.
PADev (3/3)

- PADev has been used mainly for ex-post assessments of community development interventions but it can clearly be used for developing community and district action plans.

- The emphasis is for communities to assess in a systematic way development interventions that have been most valuable, why they are considered valuable and which category (groups) of persons benefit. That gives direction as to what future development interventions are needed.

- PADev Guidebook has been published by the African Studies Center (Leiden) and the Royal Tropical Institute.
SCI-SLM was a UNEP/GEF funded project involving four African countries from North, East, Southern and West African countries and the Netherlands.

The Centre for International Cooperation of Vrije Universiteit (CIS VU) was the Dutch collaborator.

Morocco, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana were the African countries.

The project was based on a premise that ‘there are local community innovations succeeding where formal research recommendations have often failed’.
SCI-SLM thus aimed at identifying, improving and upscaling community innovations in sustainable land management in the drylands of Africa.

SCI-SLM recognized that communities have (indigenous) technical innovations as well as social innovations that have been developed through experiences over time.

Community members continuously look for ways to solve their own problems and do often succeed.
Community members and scientists from the four African countries and scientists from CIS VU interacted and learnt from each other using a unique SCI-SLM methodology that stressed on good understanding of innovative technical and social SLM initiatives by communities.
A book “Community Innovations in Sustainable Land Management: Lessons from the Field in Africa” will soon be published.
UDS has also been collaborating in the on-going Web Alliance for Regreening in Africa (W4RA)/ICT for Development (ICT4D) initiatives of the Network Institute of VU, Amsterdam.

- UDS is very much at home with the initiatives mainly because of their rural community focus.

- Development initiatives in developing countries must necessarily emphasize rural and community development as well as ICT if very remote areas have to be reached.
ICT is gradually proving to be the most realistic and cost effective method for reaching rural communities with innovative ideas, extension and marketing services and fast changing technological advancements.

That however throws up great challenges.

How can community members without formal education and with very little ICT infrastructure benefit from ICT? That is exactly the challenge the Network Institute has taken up in W4RA/ICT4D.
Using ICT to support rural development, especially in disseminating vital development information in appropriate forms, in cost effective ways is key to sustainable rural development.

Tailor Made Training in ICT for Food and Water Security in Ghana was held for UDS staff members in Walewale, Ghana by the Network Institute in 2014/2015 with visits to Guabuliga, “a living lab”.
Other Collaborative researches (1/2)
Other Collaborative researches (2/2)
Future Perspectives

Development is about people and about communities.

- Appreciation and use of the knowledge of main stakeholders, namely local farmers, gatherers, processors, marketers, mothers, fathers, caretakers, herbalists etc by researchers and interventionists is critical in the pursuance of sustainable development.

- ICT4D is key to reaching people, especially rural people in developing countries, and appropriate ICT tools have to be continuously improved upon, based on continuous interaction with the people.

- UDS, a community oriented University, with its location in the heart of the West African savannas, between the coastal forest areas and the Sahelian zone and surrounded by French-speaking West African countries, is an ideal regional (or even continental) training, research and outreach center for community development and community service in West Africa and beyond.
Thank you and God bless you