

Educating for
Transformation:
Charting a
Prosperous Future
for Africa



EDUCATING FOR TRANSFORMATION: *Charting a Prosperous Future for Africa*

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September 11, 2001—New York City

On September 11, 2001, two jumbo passenger jets crashed into the World Trade Center Towers in New York City. In the United States, every media network preempted its scheduled programming to cover this tragic event. Around the world, people watched as skyscrapers blazed then crumbled to the ground. Building after building collapsed as people ran in every direction desperately seeking safety.

In the following days, the nation realized “September 11th” was one of the greatest disasters the United States had ever experienced. Great buildings were reduced to rubble in just hours and more than three thousand people died that day.

The city immediately began receiving assistance from across the country: firefighters flew in from Florida; people bundled blankets in Missouri; and the surrounding states shipped in food and water. Around the world, government leaders expressed their outrage and shared their condolences on the losses caused by this unprecedented tragedy.

In the United States, people mourned, buried the dead, and proceeded to appropriate and expend billions of dollars to restore the city of New York by re-establishing utilities, clearing away the rubble, rebuilding structures, and hiring the people who are essential to maintaining a society.

Food, water, and blankets helped New York *survive*; however, the city needed buildings, utilities, and trained professionals to help it *recover*.

September 11, 2001—Africa

That same September 11th was also a day of tragedy in another part of the world. Thousands of people died in Africa: children died from malaria, bacteria-laden water claimed thousands of lives, and malnutrition claimed thousands more. As the sun set in Africa on September 11th, millions of people fell asleep ill and malnourished, and tens of millions of people awoke the next morning and spent most of their day trying to get enough food and water to live one more day.

This tragic drama has been occurring for decades and it will continue. Food, water, and blankets will help Africa to *survive*; however, for Africa to *thrive* it must build the essential infrastructure and gather the critical mass of trained professionals

needed to develop and sustain a modern, productive society.

Education Creates Great Nations

Education is vital for stabilizing environmental, human, and cultural loss; education is the only process for strengthening a continent; and *only education will create a community of professionals who can advance a self-sustaining civilization*.

This paper proposes the creation of a university system that will serve the continent of Africa. To be maximally effective, this system should be modeled on the land-grant university system started in the United States of America by the Morrill Act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862. In the 145 years that have passed since that profoundly important event, the 105 land-grant institutions in the United States are among the world’s leading centers^B of education, research, and service in food production, engineering, medicine, and technology.

Across the United States, every state has a land-grant campus that serves as a flagship institution of higher education. These campuses have been at the forefront of development and progress in the United States. The faculty members teaching and conducting research at these campuses have been the major “movers and shakers” in the ascension of the United States from a sparsely populated frontier country in the late 19th Century, to the world power and commerce center that the U.S. is at the dawn of the 21st century. Land-grant colleges and universities are where people learn how to improve food production, strengthen healthcare, and design and deploy technologies that have raised the standard of living in the United States.

The land-grant colleges and universities in the United States are synonymous with the leading edge developments in science and technology around the world. These institutions have achieved their high stature through a combination of having a clearly defined education and research mandate, adequate sources of funding, the highest levels of administrative competence, and outstanding faculties who translate their institution’s ambitions into tangible realities.

A land-grant style university system is the central ingredient for ensuring Africa will move beyond surviving into the realms of thriving in the decades ahead. *This paper serves as a contribution to the planning, dialogue, and actions that must occur to chart a prosperous future for Africa.*

Education Stimulates Transformation

Education is an extraordinary process; it includes:

- 🌐 Communicating knowledge (teaching),
- 🌐 Acquiring knowledge (learning),
- 🌐 Applying knowledge (praxis), and
- 🌐 Discovering knowledge (research).

Education is profoundly valuable: it is the foundation of society and it prepares people for the future. *Education is the basis for transformation in Africa.*

Education simultaneously preserves and advances African culture. Education preserves Africa by ensuring a shared understanding of the meaning of language & writing, and by identifying and valuing the important aspects of African culture (laws, the arts, music, history, business, etc.). Education advances Africa, in that educated people are articulate advocates of change, knowledgeable planners, and capable managers. As the American educator and philosopher, John Dewey noted:

Any genuine teaching will result, if successful, in someone's knowing how to bring about a better condition of things than existed earlier.

Education is the most important, most enduring, and most reliable method for improving human well-being throughout Africa.

All educational activities are based on assumptions about the future. If a culture believes technology will be important, then technology becomes an important feature of education. If a culture believes healthcare will be important, then healthcare becomes an important feature of education. As the futurist, Alvin Toffler noted:

All education springs from some image of the future. If the image of the future held by a society is grossly inaccurate, its education system will betray its youth.

To be maximally effective, education must prepare students for the future; however, the future is a projection based on the information available today. Our planning to strengthen higher education in Africa must be guided by the best possible information on the future demands Africa will face.

Effective education transforms students. This transformation requires understanding, not memorization. To be effective, education must help stu-

dents reach an understanding and this is best achieved in engagement. A Chinese proverb notes:

Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.

Good education arises from superior teaching, and superior teachers create the inviting, engaging, transformative learning experiences that help students meet high standards of performance.^c

Finally, the educational needs of each generation change as a function of the successes of the prior generation. Educational systems and the curricula they support must effectively meet the most pressing needs of the present and the near future. When food is scarce, education must champion the preparation of people knowledgeable in food production. When food is abundant, then employment opportunities may shift to housing and civil engineering. As the American revolutionary, John Adams wrote:

I must study politics and war, that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain.

Education must be designed to be practical for Africa's current realities and respectful of Africa's future. It must engage students to promote understanding; thereby nurturing a generation of people who will "bring about a better condition of things than existed earlier." Education will lead the transformation of Africa.

Africa

Africa is a land of contrasts. Africa has vast deserts and dense rain forests. The continent has towering mountains and vast flat valleys. Africa has both the richest biodiversity in the world and the least inhabitable land on the planet. Africa is a land of great scarcity and enormous abundance.

Africa is two major regions on one continent. Northern Africa is familiar to everyone as Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. Northern Africa is the land of the Sahara desert, pyramids, and oil. South of this area is the land of sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is the land most popularly associated with the great continent of Africa; it is a land of lions, elephants, zebras, and jungles.

Throughout history, sub-Saharan Africa has been a land of many resources that have been the interest of other nations. These resources substantially advanced the countries that exploited them and became the basis for the emerging world trade that strengthened economies in the United States, Europe, and the rest of the developing world.

Today, most of the counties in sub-Saharan Africa have agricultural economies and many of these countries have standards of living that are significantly lower than the rest of the world. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa are among the least developed of the world's underdeveloped countries. The people of sub-Saharan Africa often face significant challenges in securing safe drinking water, adequate food, and good healthcare.

Education will lead Africa's transformation. The process begins with clearly identifying the needs that will be met, drafting continent-wide plans with country specific initiatives, establishing achievable outcomes, deploying the support structure necessary with timelines and milestones, and providing the resources colleges and universities need to meet their new, ambitious missions.

It is time to launch a university system in Africa: the World is ready and Africa is ready. The planet must seize this important opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of tens of millions of people.

The World is Ready

We live on a planet that grows smaller with each passing moment. Dramatic improvements in information collection and distribution, and equally spectacular changes in our ability to communicate with each other, have compressed space and time. A message or picture can cross ten thousand miles at the speed of light, and extensive medical information on fifty million people can be stored on a digitized micro-cassette that fits easily in a child's hand. Satellite imagery and global positioning system mapping have taught us many facts about our world; yet, the most important fact is that we all share a common destiny. Planet Earth is a single ecosystem and we are all one people—one family.

In September 2000, leaders from 189 countries met and set an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives around the world. The report of this summit^D details the United Nations' priorities.

The following list summarizes these eight goals and the target dates for accomplishment.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger—Target for 2015: Halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education—Target for 2015: Ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women—Targets for 2005 and 2015: Eliminate

gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

4. Reduce child mortality—Target for 2015: Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five
5. Improve maternal health—Target for 2015: Reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases—Target for 2015: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability—Targets: a) Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources; b) By 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water; and c) By 2020 achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
8. Develop a global partnership for development—Targets: a) Develop further an open trading and financial System that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – nationally and internationally; b) Address the least developed countries' special needs, and the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States; c) Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems; d) Develop decent and productive work for youth; e) In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries; f) In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies.

As these goals so clearly indicate, poverty, disease, hunger, and education are global priorities. Africa represents a major opportunity to develop and implement solutions to these pressing problems. Goal 8 clearly articulates the need for a world partnership to respond to these challenges. A pan-Africa university system will be a world response to reducing hunger, poverty, and disease in Africa.

Africa is Ready

Africa is a united continent. The African Union serves as a voice for Africa and the New Partnership for African Development represents one of Africa's most important new organizations. Operating under the auspices of the African Union, the new partnership is a "vision and strategic framework for

Africa's renewal."^E The new partnership has four primary objectives:

- * To eradicate poverty;
- * To place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development;
- * To halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy; and
- * To accelerate the empowerment of women.

Africa is ready for a continent-wide university system that will make substantial contributions to reducing poverty, contributing to sustainable growth, and halting the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process.

East Africa is Ready

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development is an East African organization representing Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, and Uganda. This organization sets as one of its important objectives: Initiate and promote programs and projects to achieve regional food security and sustainable development of natural resources and environmental protection, and encourage and assist efforts of member states to collectively combat drought and other natural and manmade disasters and their consequences.^F

Speaking through its voice of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, East Africa is ready for a university system that will contribute to regional food security and sustainable development.

We Cannot Delay

Africa—especially sub-Saharan Africa—continues to suffer the consequences of failed global policy, devastating changes in climate, and a history of exploitation. Poverty, disease, and the loss of hope within a people is a fertile breeding ground for the values, thoughts, and actions that culminate in geopolitical terrorism. Higher education in Africa will better equip Africans with the knowledge and skills that create economic opportunity, build businesses, and support communities—these actions reduce the likelihood of desperate people turning to terrorism in search of relief from their pain and despair.

For the past few years—and especially during the past six months—the world has been preparing to chart a new history for Africa, creating a land that nourishes its people, reduces poverty, improves health, and prospers as a full partner in the world economy.

The time is right for a pan-Africa university system that will rise to meet the many, substantial challenges to strengthen food security, improve healthcare and well-being, promote education, and facilitate technology transfer.

End Notes

^A To learn more about PRAXIS ETHIOPIA, our emphasis on community-driven, science-led poverty reduction, or our role in championing education in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa, please visit us at www.PraxisEthiopia.org.

^B A short list of this illustrious group includes: Kansas State University (Manhattan, KS), Colorado State University (Fort Collins, CO), Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK), University of Missouri System (Columbia, MO), University of Nebraska System (Lincoln, NE), Auburn University (Auburn, AL), Clemson University (Clemson, SC), Iowa State University (Ames, IA), Oregon State University (Corvallis, OR), Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN), Texas A&M University (College Station, TX), Cornell University (Ithaca, NY), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, MA), Rutgers (New Brunswick, NJ), The Ohio State University (Columbus, OH), University of Wisconsin-Madison (Madison, WI), and the University of California System (Oakland, CA)

^C Young, W. A., Blankinship, D. A., & Arounsack, S.S. (2001). *Voices for academic excellence: Honors students, faculty, and senior academic affairs administrators at comprehensive universities describe superior teaching*. California State University, Stanislaus, Journal of Research, Fall 2001.

^D The *Human Development Report 2003 Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty*, <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/>.

^E <http://www.nepad.org/en.html>

^F http://www.africa-union.org/Recs/IGAD_Profile.pdf