



International Development Select Committee Inquiry

DFID's Programme in Nigeria

Submission by The Association of Commonwealth Universities and The British Academy

Executive Summary

1. The following submission is made jointly by the British Academy and The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). Both organisations are active in promoting and supporting research in African universities, and in supporting research collaboration between the UK and Africa. The ACU works extensively with its 89 African Commonwealth members, while the Academy operates various funding schemes which assist overseas scholars to undertake research in the UK, and enable collaborative research between African and UK scholars.
2. There is now widespread recognition that higher education (HE) and research are a critical part of any national development strategy; this has been noted in a number of reports in recent years, including those of the Commission for Africa, World Bank and UN Millennium Project¹. This is particularly true in an era where societies and economies are now increasingly defined by their ability to access and contribute to the global pool of knowledge. Responding effectively in the long term to political, economic, social and cultural challenges in Nigeria, and in other developing countries, will require a strong national research capacity. UK development programming also stands to benefit from a well supported and responsive research sector in the countries in which it operates.
3. The state of HE in Nigeria, and in that of African HE as a whole, has seriously deteriorated over the past twenty years. With 50 billion dollars in its reserves, it is likely that Nigeria will be able to make significant investments in its public university system from its own resources. Government commitment to do this is still needed, however, and there is still an important role for the international donor community to play. Good research now depends more and more on international collaboration. Designing good projects, accessing the most up-to-date literature, disseminating results as widely as possible and ensuring research is sustainable all require that researchers are actively and closely linked to their colleagues around the world.
4. Structures and networks to support international and regional research links already exist in some areas, including in Nigeria the recently established West African Research Management Association. The UK can play a key role in funding and facilitating research by supporting Nigerian universities to enhance their participation in international networks. Furthermore such interventions often have a disproportionately catalytic effect by helping universities to access internationally available resources, and thereby ensuring long term stability.
5. The enclosed report, *Frameworks for Africa-UK Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities: African University Perspectives*, which forms the basis of this evidence, begins a

¹ Commission for Africa. (2005) Our Common Interest: Report Of The Commission For Africa
www.commissionforafrica.org

Task Force on Higher Education and Society. (2000) Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise. (World Bank) http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079956815/peril_promise_en.pdf

World Bank. (2002) Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education
<http://go.worldbank.org/GX5J0A0KK0>

UN Millennium Project. (2005) Investing in development. A practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. (UN Millennium Project / Earthscan) www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/fullreport.htm

process of identifying impediments to improving the quantity and quality of research in African universities. DFID has already engaged positively with this debate through its own research framework consultation, and with its commitments to increase funding and improve delivery. The structural changes that are needed will, however, take time to achieve, and will require new approaches and initiatives. Given DFID's substantial planned commitments we believe that this is an agenda with which DFID could productively deepen its engagement.

Higher education and research in Nigeria

6. DFID has already acknowledged the importance of HE in its 2006 paper *The Importance of Secondary, Vocational and Higher Education to Development*². Support for HE is currently implemented through its research funding programme, its funding for the Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DeLPHE) programme³ and Commonwealth Scholarship Commission⁴, and through contributions to the work of other multilateral agencies. DFID has recently made a grant of £3.5 million to the Association of African Universities, part of which will be used to assist the development of effective sub-regional HE networks on the continent, although at this stage it is too early to establish the impact that this will have.
7. A further acknowledgement by DFID of the contribution of research to development is made by its commitment to double research spending to £220 million by 2010, and by its co-founding in 2007 of the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS). With the DFID research budget also now formally untied, active measures which would help universities in developing countries to take up this opportunity would be particularly welcome.
8. We fully support DFID's important educational work in Nigeria, on primary and girls' education in particular, but believe that the Committee should also take into account the relevance of HE and research, and DFID's potential contributions to these, when considering the various issues which are framed in this inquiry.
9. Higher education and research are critical features of any national development strategy. Through teaching and research, universities develop the people and the knowledge that are needed to tackle complex and inter-related problems. Nigeria's 27 Federal, 31 State and 34 private universities⁵ offer considerable potential, and already contribute valuable research. The challenge for Nigeria is therefore to more effectively harness this for national development. While HE enrolments have risen in recent years (from 7 to 10 per cent between 1999 and 2005⁶), a long-term decline in the level of public funding for Nigerian universities has led to deteriorating infrastructure, and poor terms and conditions for staff. This has in turn meant that many good researchers have been lost to external contract research organisations. Declines in quality have also fuelled the rise of a private HE system, which while offering a way to meet the demand for increased enrolments, often does so in competition with the under-funded state system. Private universities are also unlikely to address vital but non-commercial research problems.
10. Large scale infrastructural support is needed to revitalise the Nigerian public university system. While Nigeria, with its substantial reserves, will be able to make significant investments from its own resources to fund this, national commitment to do so is still needed. Donors can help to encourage this investment to be made. In order to undertake research effectively, research capacity and practice need to be improved. If any university is to do this successfully it must increasingly collaborate with other institutions internationally. Scholars, the problems they address, and the knowledge they produce, move increasingly beyond national boundaries. In an ever more connected world, international collaboration is essential to producing good research in any country; this is particularly true of Nigeria where the level of existing participation in international research is much lower. The role for donors may depend as much on creating and enabling good connections to international research networks,

² www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/post-primary.pdf

³ www.britishcouncil.org/delphe.htm

⁴ www.cscuk.org.uk

⁵ National Universities Commission www.nuc.edu.ng

⁶ UNESCO Global Education Digest 2008 www.uis.unesco.org

and encouraging the sharing of knowledge and experience, as it does on funding for research projects.

11. If African universities are to undertake more research, and to provide real answers to African problems, the support of external agencies will be needed. This is required to fund and to facilitate research, to help train new researchers, and to improve the dissemination of the knowledge that is produced. Currently the growth of research in African universities is impeded by a number of obstacles, some of which relate to the way in which donor research funding is deployed and managed. Some of the major issues are presented below.

Improving research capacity and practice

12. The ACU/British Academy report (enclosed) sought to clarify the major obstacles to undertaking and communicating research successfully. While this commented on research and collaboration in African universities as a whole, many of its findings reflect the situation in Nigeria.
13. Changing the structures to enable greater collaborative research, such as those identified by this report, is a longer term project and can only be achieved with the active engagement of our African partners. A working conference organised by the BA and ACU and scheduled for September of this year. is one of the initiatives we are already undertaking to contribute to this process. This will provide an opportunity to take this to its logical next stage, and to formulate more practical and policy relevant measures. We hope that DFID, or this Committee, will take up our invitation to be represented at this conference and involved in the discussions which take place. In the interim, therefore, we do not make firm recommendations here, but instead highlight a number of questions which are relevant for further discussion.

Understanding existing capacity, cultures and processes

14. Research funding is often separated from projects designed to provide ongoing institutional support. The result is that, in many cases, the funding available for specific projects does not take into account the practical and infrastructural needs of researchers in African universities.
15. While it may not always be possible, or appropriate, to provide additional funding for basic resources, such as computing equipment or scientific literature, it is nevertheless imperative that these constraints are acknowledged, and that so too are the implications these may have for research planning, achievement and delivery schedules. Direct assistance to meet these additional needs in the context of a particular project may not be possible, but it may be appropriate to consider ways in which these obstacles can be overcome through forging links with other initiatives or support mechanisms.
16. A second and related issue concerns understandings of the cultures and processes of research in African universities. The ways in which donors fit programmes together often do not conveniently map the structures already in place in universities. This can limit the extent to which universities are able to access and make use of donor support, and can present obstacles to achieving the outcomes required by donors. For example, while universities can and do deliver high quality research, they often operate through committee structures which make them less responsive to donor funding modes. Better and continuing forums for discussions between the major research funders and researchers themselves, to explore how improvements might be made to the basic mechanics of research funding, would be valuable.

Donor collaboration and the flexibility of funding

17. University research often draws on funding from multiple donors in a relatively piecemeal fashion. While money for research may nominally be included in university budgets, the pressures on HE financing mean that research is often an early casualty of budget cuts, and the majority of funding is therefore likely to be sourced from external funders. The complexity of the donor landscape is one of the greatest challenges to research, and one of the greatest areas for improvement is therefore through more effective donor collaboration and through better coordination both within and between agencies across programme areas.

18. DfID already works innovatively to fund UK-based development research in collaboration with other donors, through the newly established UKCDS, and through joint funding with the UK research councils and foreign agencies such as IDRC. However, greater coordination in HE and research funding to African universities still needs to be achieved. Support which is deliberately aligned with and seeks to complement funding provided by another donor may help to lever greater research output. For example, the Wellcome Trust in the UK has recently announced a new initiative to strengthen research capacity in African universities, while the US foundations and other country agencies such as the Swedish Sida are also particularly active in African HE. By exploring the potential complementarities with these and other funders DFID might usefully reinforce existing initiatives and make the most of its own funding. There is also greater scope for the UK to work with and through African research councils, agencies and other African-based research networks. Having formally untied research funding, DFID could also take more active measures to encourage African applications to its schemes.
19. Valuable research often falters when funding runs out in the later stages of a project. While research budgets and schedules need to be agreed from the start, the reality is that the level of support offered, and the terms of the arrangement, are more often dictated by the funding agency, and may be unrealistic from the outset. Where full economic costs are not offered, this invariably leads to universities undertaking externally funded work at significant cost to themselves. DFID and the UK research councils have a good record in ensuring full economic costs are made available, and could play a valuable role in influencing other donors in this regard. Making funding more flexible and responsive to the specific needs and challenges of particular universities or research centres could help to improve outcomes. For example, contingency support, which could be released to a worthwhile project which encounters reasonable additional challenges, may help to raise research completion rates. Separate funding streams could be designed which make specific provision for publication and dissemination to ensure that good research can be properly and fully communicated on completion.

Researcher development and training

20. Training individuals and funding research projects are often seen as separate concerns, but it is important that the two are properly and consciously aligned. Scholarships which enable early-career academics to undertake research training abroad are an effective way to build research capacity, and make important contributions to national development, as recent alumni tracer work by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has demonstrated⁷. DFID already helps to develop links between research and scholarship funding, including between the Commonwealth Scholarships and DFID's Research Programme Consortia. Ensuring specific elements of support for researcher training are included in overall project funding, or seeking to align scholarships with other research programmes might further assist here.
21. To harness the contributions that scholarship programmes can make, it is important to build on these links in the immediate post-return period. This is undoubtedly a critical time in shaping early careers of alumni, and the contributions that they are able to make to their universities and countries. Without sufficient support to develop subsequent stages of their careers, scholarships can become islands in a career, offering a one-off opportunity, but not supporting the longer-term career development needs of emerging researchers.
22. Research capacity might be more strongly supported by new modes of funding individual research training. For example, the split-site PhD model employed by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission offers support for high quality training as a partnership between a UK and home country institution. Other funding modes which provided ongoing support over a longer period, possibly offering a number of shorter UK-based placements over several years, might further help to support the development of proper research career structures. This could also encourage researchers to stay at their home institution, and in doing so make a more substantive contribution to local research capacity.

⁷ Unwin, J., S. Humphreys (2007) Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Preliminary Country Report – Uganda. Available from alumni@cscuk.org.uk

23. The level to which any scheme is successful in building future research capacity will depend on the extent to which experienced researchers are encouraged to actively develop their junior colleagues. A more structured degree of mentoring between senior and junior researchers might be improved by incentives which encourage experienced academics to involve younger colleagues in the design, management and execution of their research. Mentoring might also be built into some of the scholarship and training modes discussed above.

Communicating research

24. A considerable amount of valuable research is produced in Nigerian universities and in African universities in general, but much of this is not disseminated as widely as it should be. Traditional publishing routes through academic journals often present considerable obstacles to African university researchers. Familiarity with the latest debates in a particular field or even in a specific journal may be limited where accessing academic literature is difficult. The work of organisations such as INASP to increase electronic access to scientific information are particularly noteworthy, including their African Journals Online programme⁸, but problems are often compounded by a lack of basic internet connectivity and network infrastructures.
25. Where English is a second language, or where English language instruction at earlier levels of education has been inadequate, researchers may require greater assistance from editors to ensure that good research makes it to publication. Funding which concentrates explicitly on supporting researchers to publish their 'back catalogue' of existing work or which includes additional provision for publication to each piece of funded research, might help to do this. DFID's support to INASP to test the AuthorAid mentoring concept is a positive recent contribution here⁹.
26. High quality African research is often published locally. The relatively small reach of these titles means that good research is frequently unavailable outside of its country of origin. While local publishing is extremely important in itself, it is imperative that this research also enters the realm of international academic debate. Support to disseminate African research publications more widely, including enabling better use of the internet to do this, would ensure local publishing capacity was not undermined or bypassed, whilst also ensuring African research gains the level of circulation that research from other regions already enjoys.
27. A considerable amount of valuable knowledge has been generated from previous research, but universities often lack the systems, expertise or resources to ensure this is disseminated to wider society and to ensure new knowledge can be practically implemented. While community engagement is often a core mission of universities, and while some good examples exist of where university led extension work has transformed research knowledge for the benefit of local communities, support which enabled them to do this more comprehensively could help to raise the development impact of HE research. Nigeria is one of the principal countries to benefit from the Research into Use programme, funded by DFID, which aims to better understand how knowledge contributes to innovation, and to scale up the results of existing research. Some of the lessons of this project might usefully be applied to university-based extension; the ACU has also begun work to help improve the extension capabilities of member universities.

Concluding comments

28. The issues highlighted above are by no means the only challenges facing HE and research in Nigerian universities and in African universities as a whole. They do, however, raise a number of important questions which are relevant to further discussions about the ways in which research and collaboration can best be supported. A more detailed discussion is provided in our enclosed report *Frameworks for Africa-UK Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities: African University Perspectives*.

⁸ www.inasp.info, www.inasp.info/file/121/african-journals-online-ajol.html

⁹ www.inasp.info/file/413/authoraidinasp.html

29. Improving the capacity of African countries to undertake high quality research, and thereby their ability to produce African answers to African problems, which are incorporated into international debate, is undoubtedly critical. Nigeria, with the many complex challenges which it faces, is no exception. The university sector is critical to delivering this, and if good research is to be achieved in an increasingly interlinked world, greater international collaboration will be vital.
30. DFID, and the UK research community as a whole, can make a potentially significant contribution to Nigerian research; indeed they already do in a number of ways. Improving the way in which UK support for research is delivered, particularly through supporting collaborative frameworks with the UK HE sector, and by working with foreign agencies to encourage others to do the same, is firmly in the UK interest and should be an important part of DFID's overall programme in Nigeria.
31. The Association of Commonwealth Universities and The British Academy would be happy to provide further comment on these issues to the Committee. Our enclosed report can also be accessed online at www.britac.ac.uk/reports/miscrep/africa-rep.pdf

The Association of Commonwealth Universities
The British Academy
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