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Knowledge-Oriented Development: A Fresh Start for Africa

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Fresh Insights for Informed Action

Something is Lacking

- Evidence of widespread failure, despite renewed donor support and natural resource booms;
- In all regions, economies have failed to provide decent employment for young people;
- Poverty has worsened across the continent;
- All forms of infrastructure are grossly inadequate in most countries.

Emerging Knowledge-Based Framework

- Lessons from successes and failures in development are leading to a return to basics;
- The consensus is that institutional and individual capacities determine the outcome of development efforts of countries;
- That markets and governments fail when certain framework conditions are absent or inadequate;
- That development should be people-centred.

Framework Conditions and Momentum Strategies

- Framework Conditions: mainly natural resources, human capital, institutions and infrastructure (Triggers);

- Momentum Strategies: mainly good governance, innovation policies and practices, market and competition-oriented policies (Sustainers)

What is Knowledge?

The capacity to recognize actionable value in existing or new information or events, and to use such information efficiently in various ways, including the ability to use information to innovate - that is, to restructure things and processes so as to produce new and useful effects, products and services

Why is Knowledge so central here?

- Because knowledge is the catalyst that makes the triggers move in the right direction, that is, creates the framework conditions, natural resources, human capital, institutions and infrastructure (Triggers);

and

- is needed to devise effective momentum strategies: good governance, innovation policies and practices, market and competition-oriented policies (Sustainers).

Knowledge is Key

This is to say that (as a catalyst) knowledge kick-starts development with the endowments of a nation, and ensures that development is sustained in the right direction (growth, cultural renewal and freedoms);

- Knowledge is the basis of capacity
- Knowledge is the basis of innovation, competitiveness and good governance

How is a Nation's Knowledge Base Built?

- The expansion of a national knowledge repertoire takes place by internal generation of knowledge through learning, and acquisition of knowledge from outside;

- The use of knowledge ensures the emergence and growth of an endogenous knowledge base.

Why are Libraries so critical, mundane as they appear to be?

They are pragmatic knowledge institutions – the repertoire as well as purveyors of knowledge with long public goods traditions

The Hidden Factor in the Economic Growth Equation

- Economists are now waking up to the crucial role of knowledge and libraries in economic development;
- An economist at the United Nations University recently wrote in a discussion paper that his research had uncovered Total Factor Productivity (TPF) as the primary culprit underlying the persistence of poverty in Africa (Fosu, 2009: UNU-WIDER Discussion Paper 2009/2):
- He found that on average when TFP decreases in African countries the poverty rate increases.
- I had demonstrated with a standard equation in a chapter in a book that the hidden factor called TPF by economists was largely the contribution of libraries in national economic growth (Azubuike, 2007: In: *African e-Markets…*)

What is Total Factor Productivity?

- Total factor productivity (TFP) is defined as output growth not accounted for by the growth of inputs. It is attributed mainly to intellectual input, and significantly higher in developed economies than in developing ones.

- A key element of a country's innovation strategy is to tap into global knowledge base to increase TFP.

- Neo-classical economists advise us to import goods to increase TFP, since goods embody technological know-how.

Libraries and Information Services in the Economic Growth Equation

- If goods embody technological know-how, then information on how the goods are produced is the real entity for which goods are proxies;
- Hence, a country may pursue increases in Total Factor Productivity - higher economic output - through the importation of technological and production information instead of their proxies (goods);
- This would place information in its rightful place in the economic growth equation, and
- As information can be shared widely and converted to knowledge on how to make the same and similar goods, the importation of information should contribute significantly more to economic growth and development than the importation of goods.

Important implications:

- Libraries and information centres are the main repositories of information resources and hence the core source of the fundamental stock of knowledge.
- An effective system of national library and information services for economic, scientific and technological development is therefore one of most important elements of a national knowledge system.
- For real development to start and continue, countries must have effective libraries in every place where they ought to be located.
- Sustainable knowledge-based development strategies must be based on effective libraries and a strong reading culture, and widespread information literacy.
- Libraries must facilitate the bridging of knowledge gaps and the prevention of ignorance and information poverty, which are the basis of underdevelopment.

Active Knowledge Services are needed

- For now, the recognition of the centrality of knowledge in development and poverty reduction is merely at the theoretical level, with buzzwords such as “capacity building” and “knowledge strategies” dominating;

- Development professionals should change this by leading the move to action-oriented programmes:

  action learning, action research, achievement-based learning and outcome/impact-oriented engagement with communities, supported by information intensification.

How may “Knowledge Mainstreaming”, be defined?

“Knowledge mainstreaming” may be defined as a strategy for making the provision and effective application of relevant knowledge and information resources and services an integral dimension of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres of development, so as to ensure deep, beneficial and lasting outcomes and impact in all sectors of the economy and society. Mainstreaming should occur at the point of planning, implementation and evaluation

Aspects of Knowledge Mainstreaming Include:

- Raising the relative status of libraries and archives as economic, cultural and social infrastructure;
- Laying emphasis on the contribution of libraries as wellsprings and purveyors of knowledge
- Recognition of relevant knowledge input as the necessary catalyst in any mix of economic and social policy, programme and operation;
- Recognition of the watershed impact on the success and sustainability of every development intervention.

What Knowledge Mainstreaming means in practice

In practice, knowledge mainstreaming means:

- Identifying gaps in capacity that are necessary for success and sustainability of programmes; development of indicators and integration mechanisms;
- Allocation of sufficient resources for associated or neighbouring knowledge institutions, attention to universal and equitable learning, and information access for all sections of the community;
- Focusing knowledge on issues and projects;
- Extending ICT-related facilities and equipment to libraries and other knowledge institutions; and strong political commitment and will.

We Need A Fresh Start

We need a truly knowledge-based development approach in Africa

We need a fresh start

Thank you for your attention