

The Tanzanian Experience in Initiating And Sustaining Tertiary Education Reforms

by

Matthew L. Luhanga

Vice Chancellor
University of Dar es Salaam
Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

A historical sketch on educational reforms at the University of Dar es Salaam is provided covering the initiation of the reforms, strategic planning and the implementation of the reforms and the strategic plan. Measures ensuring success in the transformation process are described.

INTRODUCTION

At the time of its independence from British colonial rule in December, 1961, there was no university education available locally in Tanzania. The newly independent state depended heavily on expatriates to staff the middle and upper cadres of the civil service. This was unacceptable to the young, nationalistic leadership of the new nation and, therefore, an aggressive training programme, leading to the Africanization of the workforce, was embarked upon. It is in this context that the University College Dar es Salaam, established in 1961 as a college of the University of London, was born. Many other tertiary level civil service training and technical training institutions were established around the same time.

The University College Dar es Salaam became a constituent college of the University of East Africa in 1963 and eventually, in July, 1970, it became an independent university, the University of Dar es Salaam.

THE ORIGINS OF THE REFORM PROCESS

In the 1988/89 academic year, the then Faculty of Engineering of the University of Dar es Salaam embarked on a major review of its activities in order to:

- address the brain drain at the Faculty
- improve the professional productivity of staff
- improve remuneration of staff
- enhance linkages with industry and society at larger
- enhance and expand research and postgraduate training.

The review resulted in the setting up of new units and a new organizational structure for the Faculty. Enhanced contract research and consultancy activities resulted into considerable additional resource flows to the Faculty and to its staff through a performance-based incentive scheme. Staff retention was improved.

While the Faculty of Engineering was implementing its transformation program, two other major changes were taking place at university level which would later prove to be crucial in its transformation process.

- The three topmost leadership positions in the university were, for the first time, all assigned to academics. Previously only one of the positions – not that of Vice Chancellor – was reserved for an academic
- Many studies were commissioned to understand and recommend solutions to the problems facing the university.

In order to facilitate discussions of the problems facing the university, a report, the **Management Effectiveness Review** [1], was prepared. This report synthesized all previous studies and recommendations related to problems facing the university. The main issues were classified under:

- organizational matters
- financial matters
- governance policy and procedures
- infrastructural matters
- student welfare

Discussions of this report showed that the problems facing the university were of such magnitude and were so inter-twined that only a total transformation of the institution could address the problems. The process of transforming the institution was reached in discussions which were concluded in 1991 and it was code named “the Institutional Transformation Program”, “ITP”, “UDSM 2000”, for short. The argument behind this decision is aptly captured in one document of the Programme Management Unit (PMU), which was specifically set up to oversee the implementation of the ITP [2].

“Since its inception first as a University College in 1961 and later as an autonomous national University in 1970, the University of Dar es Salaam had never had the benefit of systematically reviewing the consistency and relevance of its mission; yet so many things had happened and so many changes had taken place that what seemed to have been a clear and firm message about the expectations of the University and its role and function in 1961 and the 1970s was already at extreme variance with the realities of the 1990s and the potentials of the 21st century.”

Initial Implementation Efforts

The initial implementation efforts of the university-wide reforms focused on two areas: setting up an organizational framework and a steering committee.

Although the university did have a Planning Unit, its leadership was weak, lacked initiative and the Unit was poorly staffed. Integrating the reform process in this planning structure, it was felt, would most probably result in failure.

A decision was, therefore, taken by the university management to set up a Program Management Unit (PMU) to manage the transformation process. The PMU was headed by a Program Manager.

A committee, called the Program Steering Committee (PSC), was set up to oversee the transformation program. The PSC is chaired by the Vice Chancellor and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the program has been set up.

The program has also been subjected to an external review [8].

Strategic Planning

Among the first activities which the PSC initiated was to direct the PMU to embark on two important and interlinked tasks:

- preparation of facts and figures on the University of Dar es Salaam as a basis for creation of a database which is crucial for planning purposes
- draw up a draft Corporate Strategic Plan and subject it to wide discussion with all stakeholders.

The facts and figures booklet was first published in 1995. Since then it has been updated annually.

The first draft of the Corporate Strategic Plan (CSP) was first presented to the University community in 1992. Members of the Donors to African Education, who had just completed a meeting in Dar es Salaam, were invited. The meeting and subsequent meetings generated heated debates and exchanges which led to numerous revisions of the CSP to take account of the views of staff, students and other stakeholders. Eventually the tenth (10th) version of the CSP received a consensus and was approved by the University Council in August, 1994. The CSP spelled out fundamental guiding principles of the reform process in five areas [3].

- Vision and mission relevant for the twenty first century
- Objectives and functions of the University in the light of the new vision and mission
- Corporate set-up [ownership, autonomy, governance and administrative structures]
- Inputs [management styles, policies, planning, finance, back up services, personnel and student welfare]
- Outputs [relevant to academic activities].

As originally conceived the reform process was to run for 15 years (i.e. from 1993 – 2008). The CSP is currently (2003) being reviewed and revised. The Planning Unit and the PMU have been dissolved and, following the new organization structure for the University which was approved by the University Council in 2001 a Directorate of Planning and Development has been created which integrates strategic planning, traditional planning, budgeting, mobilization and control of development partner resources.

For purposes of ease of implementation and monitoring the first 5 years of the 15 years plan had been worked out in more detail into a rolling plan which is rolled forward by one year at the Annual Consultative Meeting.

The Annual Consultative Meeting is chaired by the Vice Chancellor and is attended by all Deans and Directors, leaders of the Academic Staff Assembly, leaders of the student government, representatives from the Government, representatives of Donors and members of the University Council.

The Annual Consultative Meeting identifies areas of intervention, spells out objectives to be achieved, identifies the required inputs as well as the activities involved. Since 1997 Faculties and Institutes have been preparing five-year rolling plans specific to their Faculties and Institutes but in consonant with the University - level Rolling Plans. Twice a year the Faculties and Institutes meet together under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chancellor to review their rolling plans in order to monitor progress, learn from one another, reinforce each other's efforts and take stock of common problems and think of possible solutions.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORMS

The reforms at the UDSM were guided by the Rolling Strategic Plans. The Corporate Strategic Plan (CSP) as detailed in the Five Year Rolling Strategic Plans (FYRSP) has 16 strategic objectives (see Annex I). The implementation of these 16 strategic objectives is the responsibility of the PSC and PMU. In addition, each College, Faculty and Institute has its own strategic objectives, drawn in consonance with those at university – level, for which it is the responsible body.

Quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the 16 strategic objectives are presented to the University Council for discussion and guidance.

Mobilizing Support for the Reforms

A deliberate effort was mounted to mobilize support for the reforms. This was necessary because the reforms within the university which were taking place almost concurrently with the world Bank and IMF mandated reforms in the banking and financial sectors had led a section of some academic staff to be antagonistic to the reforms by thinking that they were being done at the behest of the World Bank.

The following strategies were used in mobilization of support for the reforms:
information dissemination seminars for staff and students were held in all Faculties of the university
regular meetings were held between the top university management and the leadership of the Ministry responsible for higher education to appraise the later on progress being made and future plans for the reform process.

a meeting was held with Managing Editors of all newspapers to appraise them of the reforms and an annual “media day” was instituted where reporters were taken around the university, unit by unit to see for themselves progress being made on the reform program.

the Vice Chancellor held four meetings in two years with the whole student body where some of the issues raised related to student enrolment expansion – a reform strategic objective.

All reform documents were circulated while in draft form to all academic staff of professorial rank with a request that they provide inputs. The University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA) and the Dar es Salaam University Students Organization (DARUSO) were asked to provide inputs to all reform documents and their inputs were inserted in a transparent manner in the drafts for later discussion by university organs.

At this stage of the reform process, parents had neither been expected nor did they play a role in the reforms.

Initial Resistance to the Reforms

Resistance to reforms depends very much on the contents of the reforms. At the UDSM, initial resistance to the reforms and the reasons for it came from:

academic staff, first because some thought that the reforms are donor driven and secondly because of the large number of scripts they had to mark due to the increased enrolment.

Students mainly due to the cost sharing policy of the Government and enrolment expansion.

Administrative staff mainly because of retrenchment.

Resistance to reforms has largely disappeared except for continued complaints by some academic staff on workload resulting from student enrolment expansion.

Stakeholder Participation

The major stakeholders in the reform process have been:

- (i) Government ministries
- (ii) Staff
- (iii) Students

Government Ministries

The ministries which have so far featured in the university reform program are the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education and the Ministry of Lands and Human Settlements.

Besides dealing with the funding of the University, the Ministry of Finance also appropriates a budget to the Education Fund [9] whose objectives are:

- (i) to raise funds for the education sector through leveraging tax exemptions for any donations made to the education sector
- (ii) to negotiate with the exchequer so that it contributes close to the maximum of 2 percent of the Government's yearly operational budget into the fund
- (iii) to devise an equitable formula for the distribution of the fund to basic and tertiary education institutions.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education is the parent Ministry of the university. Without its firm support, the reform program would not have succeeded.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education is processing for passage through Parliament later in 2003 a new Act for the university which will allow more autonomy and implementation of a new organization structure for the university. Also in 2001, the Ministry completed a study on unit costs for degree programs in all public higher education institutions. The intention is to use these as a basis for determining the block grant given to a public university. This would be a major improvement on the current system which is not based on unit costs.

The Ministry of Lands and Human Settlements has been instrumental in getting the university to implement its land Policy by getting third party investors to invest on university land.

Staff

Staff participated mainly by reading and commenting on drafts of documents and by participating in meetings and seminars.

A major concern for all staff was low or inadequate remuneration. This was largely addressed by the Government starting in 1997. The involvement of staff in professional activities has also mitigated this concern.

The concern of administrative staff with retrenchment ended with the completion of that exercise. The concern of academic staff with student enrolment expansion is being addressed by recruitment of Teaching Assistants.

Students

The residence time of students at the university is short and their leaders are in office for only one year. Constant seminars and the inclusion of materials on the reform program within the orientation program of new student leaders are a necessity.

The concern of the students with Phase III of the Cost Sharing Policy of Government which would have involved the payment of a proportion of tuition fees was taken up as an issue by opposition political parties. It is seen to be so politically sensitive that to-date, no Government – sponsored student pays any fees.

FACTORS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS

Success of the reform program at the University of Dar es Salaam has depended on many factors. It embraces technical and managerial factors on one side and financial factors on the other. Several factors important in ensuring and assuring success of the reform process are.

Ownership

All staff and students in the university must feel that they participated fully in the reform process and that the strategic objectives of the reform process address their concerns. They must, in short, own the process and its outputs.

The need for ownership of the process was the main incentive for the conscious decision taken at the beginning of the reform process to use internal expertise, to manage the process internally and to engage in intensive consultations. To date those consultations are continuing even though we are in the consolidation phase. The frequency of the consultations has, however, been relaxed.

Committed Leadership

A reform process requires massive investments of time in meetings with staff, government, students, trade union, reading reports and chairing or attending statutory meetings to move the process forward. All this requires a high level of commitment.

A Supportive University Council

The University Council has representatives from Parliament, the Government, the Trade Union, the Cooperative Movement, the private sector and the university. After approving the Corporate Strategic Plan, the Council continued to receive quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the 16 strategic objectives of the Five Year Rolling Strategic Plan. The Council always gave support and advice where appropriate. A supportive Council is necessary for an undertaking of the magnitude and scope of a reform program.

Government Support

Since the University of Dar es Salaam is a public institutions, the university took the initiative of involving the Government right from the beginning of the reform process. Starting with the budget speech of 1993/94 the Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education has every year informed Parliament on progress made in the reform program of the university.

The guest of honour at the first Annual Consultative Meeting of the Institutional Transformation Program in 1994 was His Excellency, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, then President of Tanzania.

These gestures of support from the Government gave the ITP wide publicity and support within the civil service leading to an improvement in staff remuneration and student welfare.

Support from Development Partners

The ITP received right from the beginning considerable support, especially financial support, from its development partners. Major donors who positively supported the ITP are: GTZ, NORAD, Sida/SAREC, MHO, VLIR and Carnegie.

The financial support from donors did also contribute to human capital development which aided the implementation of the ITP.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the reform process in the University of Dar es Salaam. A historical sketch on how the reforms started and how they were implemented has been provided. Measures to ensure success of the reforms are described.

THE AUTHOR

Matthew Luhanga holds a Ph.D. in Computer Engineering and is a Professor of Telecommunications Engineering at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). He has been the Vice Chancellor of UDSM since 1991. He has served as a Chairman or member of Boards, Councils or Task Forces at national, regional and international level and has received awards for his academic and professional activities at national and international level. He is currently a member of the Executive Board of the Association of African Universities and of the Inter-University Council for East Africa.

He can be contacted at vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz

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ANNEX I

The 16 Strategic Objectives Of The Five-Year Rolling Strategic Plan

The strategic objectives for the Five-Year Rolling Strategic Plan cover the following broad areas:

- (i) organization, management and culture
- (ii) teaching and learning
- (iii) research and publications
- (iv) consultancy and service to the public
- (v) national and international relations
- (vi) marketing and public relations
- (vii) human resource management
- (viii) support units, facilities and services
- (ix) financial resources and management

The 16 strategic objectives are:

- (i) improved legal framework, organization and management
- (ii) enhanced speed and impact of the institutional transformation programme
- (iii) expanded undergraduate and postgraduate student outputs
- (iv) improved system for assuring quality and relevance in teaching and learning
- (v) improved information and communications technology capacity and its effective utilization in teaching, research and management
- (vi) improved library and publishing services
- (vii) improved volume and quality of research and publications
- (viii) improved volume and quality of consultancy; continuing education and service to the public
- (ix) enhanced capacity for financial management, diversification of funds and sustainability
- (x) improved handling of student affairs
- (xi) improved health services and HIV/AIDS pandemic, policy plans and implementations
- (xii) improved human resource management capacity
- (xiii) improved gender mainstreaming and balance amongst the staff and students
- (xiv) improved marketing and promotion of UDSM outputs and public relations
- (xv) improved infrastructure maintenance, rehabilitations and estates management
- (xvi) increased number and productivity of national and international networking

Key targets and key strategic for achieving each strategic objectives have been identified [6].

