

# MAPPING GOVERNANCE RISKS, THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITIES

**Olanrewaju A. Fagbohun**, PhD, SAN

Professor of Environmental Law

Former Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University

National Productivity Order of Merit Award Winner

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# Frightening Images of Africa's Future

Africa will continue to grapple with critical challenges and persistent impoverishment unless we enhance the quality and functionality of our higher education system.

- Adoption of foreign practices;
- Struggle to break free from dependency chains;
- Individual and corporate aspirations remains a mirage and no more than lofty aspirations.

# Concept of the 'universities of the future'

- **Not a** narrative unfolding in the remote distance ahead.. It's a reality here with us;
- Our smartphones, computers, mirroring the human brain, game-changing technologies, disruptive competition of online learning – all have ushered in university of the future;
- <sup>3</sup> Emergence of personalized learning singing '*Nunc Dimittis*' of traditional model of universities that are resistant to change.

# Relevance of Good Governance to Higher Education – *an existential issue*

- The core business, and objective of Higher Education is ‘*creation of knowledge*’, ‘*knowledge transfer*’ and ‘*personal growth and transformation*’.
- University is a fragmented organization – increased governance complexity:
  - (i) Good governance assures the quality of decision-making.
  - (ii) Good governance provides the framework for its variegated group of stakeholders.
  - (iii) Good governance allows the university to be efficient and sustainable in the long-term as a result of the following:

**| Adherence to purpose | Dedication to the interest of stakeholders | Transparency | Accountability | Accommodation of diversity | Robust well-informed decision - making |**

# Goal of Presentation

- Delineate threats and risks actively undermining the governance of universities, in Africa, and concomitantly their future.
- Identify actions required to enhance efficiencies and capabilities.

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# Defining 'University Governance'

- Diversity of opinion in agreeing a definition.
- 1992 World Bank definition of public sector governance, *'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development'*.
- *The manner in which power is exercised in the management of an entity or institution'*
- <sup>6</sup> Covers appointment and/or selection, monitoring, removal, replacement of stakeholders within the system, formulation/implementation of policies; and interaction between the different stakeholders.

# State of Governance in many African Universities

- Diplomatically captured in the background to this conference thus:
  - *‘...Despite these improvements, there is still the **general impression** that the quality of higher-education institutions in Africa is generally not high enough to form a strong and formidable foundation for global competitiveness, [and] address the continent’s complex challenges.*
- Reality is self-evident and beyond ‘general impression’.
- There are universities in Africa that are making steady progress and delivering world-class impacted research. Thus, governance reform will be diverse and context dependent.

# Understanding the Challenge of Governance

- Governance structure of universities recognized two fundamental principles:
  - (i) A robust intellectual tradition marked by organized disputation of issues;
  - (ii) Consistently undergoing a state of flux to align with new directions in teaching, learning, research and services
- Governance has evolved through three broad models: | **Bureaucratic** | **Collegial** | **Legislative framework** |

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# Understanding the Challenge of Governance...

- Legislative framework with its governance instruments has emerged the prevalent model (statutes, by-laws, charters, regulations etc).

- Distribution of decision-making among different constituents,

- Checks and balances embedded within the governance ecosystem to make it self-correcting.

- Grievance procedures to remedy complaints.

- Layers of supervision to ensure desired outcomes.

- Formal/informal structures ask two pivotal questions: **where are we now**, and **where are we heading?**

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# Shapes of Threats and Risks

- Four fundamental threats have continued to undermine the governance regime despite the numerous foundational governance rules and regulations:

**(i) Institutional autonomy and political interference (external interference)**

- 10 | Competence of potential appointment | staff promotions | student admissions/graduation | Adherence to quality standards | Maintenance of discipline of staff and students |

# Shapes of Threats and Risks...

*Incompetent leadership is a threat to: complementary knowledge, disciplinary plurality, integration of research & learning, inter or trans-disciplinary research, and overall institutional discipline and reputation.*

## (ii) Institutional autonomy and unbridled chief executives (internal interference);

*'Occupying a position of leadership and exercising the role of leader are entirely different. The first requires only a title. Too many positions of academic leadership are filled by those who occupy the chair and carry the title but fail to lead academic institutions in ways that enable them to adapt to a demanding environment, optimize their mission, align with values and produce a lasting contribution to society'.*

*- Stanley Ikenberry (2022)*

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! Arrogance of office | Failure to use feedback system of staff and students | Preference for self-sponsored awards than reliance on national and global ranking systems | Politicalization of institution |

# Shapes of Threats and Risks...

## (iii) Respect for Rule of Law and Due Process

- ❑ Supremacy of law and respect for component units of the institution.
- ❑ University Governing Council in particular must be sensitive to governance issues.

## (iv) Sufficient funding is imperative

- <sup>12</sup>❑ Role of proprietors
- ❑ Focus and priorities of university management..
- ❑ Contribution from parents/students

# Ushering an Authentic African presence into Higher Education

The university as an organization is characterized by fragmentation leading to governance complexity. Its governance architecture is designed to be holistic, with each component reinforcing the other. For Africa, many of her universities have consistently faced avoidable governance threats. Recognizing and addressing these threat, coupled with an intentional and bold approach will be pivotal in bridging the gap between the current state of many universities and their aspirations for the future.

**Thank you**