

# *The Role of Higher Education in Building a Sustainable African Society*

*J Nyerere, O Mfunne, D Fuh, N Sulemana, E Mutisya, G Yiran, O Fadairo, J Ameyaw, A Odingo*

## Abstract

Africa has a shared history and the common challenges of slow economic growth, and inadequate response to the issues facing the continent that include youth unemployment, food insecurity, environmental degradation and conflict. The provision of relevant and quality education is considered key to responding to these challenges and improving the livelihoods of millions of Africans. As a result, African nations are now emphasizing the importance of higher education, scientific research and innovations in a bid, not only to industrialize and increase the pace of economic development, but also to meet the social aspirations of their populace while at the same time, ensuring the wellbeing of the environment. In short, increasingly, African nations see higher education, science and technology as critical to the achievement of sustainable development. As a result, in recent years, there has been a focus on ensuring that the wealth of knowledge generated within universities is relevant to sustainable development and most importantly, this knowledge is shared so that society in general can benefit from university scientific and technological expertise. In this vein, this paper examined how selected African universities have embraced the notion of sustainable development in their curricula, research and community engagement in order to contribute towards building sustainable African societies. Further, the paper analysed the science, technology, and innovations of policy initiatives put in place for higher education in Africa, initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development. The paper focused on universities in three African regions: Eastern (University of Nairobi), Southern (University of Zambia) and West Africa (University for Development Studies in Ghana). The paper shows that since the 1990s, universities in Africa have not only embraced sustainable development(SD) in the teaching and learning, but have also gone beyond the walls of their universities to engage with communities in their search for solutions to the numerous problems faced in African societies. Their efforts, however, were constrained by inadequate funding to support research and technology development. Further, while policy support for higher education, science and technology prevailed, such support, in most cases, ignore teaching strategies aiming to teach creative thinking, instrumental to sustainable and resilient societies. The scientific excellence emphasized leans more towards research and not as much focus was given to teaching excellence which is key in building a resilient society.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Sustainable development, Environment, Policy, Science, Technology, Innovations