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# Broadening Perceptions and Parameters for Quality Assurance in University Operations in Uganda

Frederick Kakembo\* & Rita Makumbi Barymak\*\*

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## Abstract

This article explores the stakeholders' perceptions of quality in university operations in Uganda, specifically in terms of the core functions of teaching, research and community engagement. Conceptually, universities aim to transform, modernise and develop science and technology. A review of the literature suggests that many university communities are an elite group of professors and students who live in relative isolation. Within this 'protective environment' occurs a significant research milieu which is more basic than applied and, thereby, not relevant to local systems and somewhat foreign to community members. Further, the linkage between research results and institution policy makers is minimal or non-existent. In light of this background, it is argued that typical quality assurance (QA) initiatives in many universities focus on establishing operational efficiency of conventional structures of teaching and research. The study investigates comprehensiveness of parameters used by various stakeholders to determine quality in and of university education. Making reference to community engagement as one of the universities' core functions, this study investigates whether community issues and social welfare are central in the conceiving, planning and implementing QA initiatives. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to generate data; specifically, questionnaires, interviews, content analysis of academic and non-academic programme and documents reviews were analysed. Preliminary findings reveal a stronger focus on conventional teaching and scholarly research than on community engagement initiatives. Conceptualisation of a quality university education by various stakeholders (students, lecturers, administration, parents and policy makers) is influenced by concerns of effectiveness and regularity of

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activities at the universities. Monitoring and evaluation activities emphasise: a) effectiveness of teaching and learning; b) relevancy of academic programmes to job-markets; c) quality of basic research; d) number of publications in accredited international journals; and e) concerns regarding ranking of the university relative to others in the country, region, continent and the globe. A lack of emphasis on community engagement initiatives could be explained by the fact that a number of practitioners could be products of the same existing structures and may not be in position to detect the discrepancies. Conversely, local communities, within which these institutions operate as expected immediate beneficiaries, often perceive universities as abstract institutions for the super-elite, and that the 'ivory tower' has little applicability to the day-to-day lives of grassroots communities. It is proposed that debates and dialogues should be organised to engage various stakeholders in re-definition of expectations, duties and responsibilities of higher education in relation to community engagement.

**Key Words:** community-engagement, parameters, perceptions, quality assurance, university

## Résumé

Le présent article examine les perceptions par les parties prenantes de la qualité dans le fonctionnement des universités en Ouganda, notamment en ce qui concerne les fonctions essentielles d'enseignement, de recherche et d'engagement communautaire. Conceptuellement, les universités ont pour objectifs de transformer, moderniser et développer la science et la technologie. La revue documentaire indique que beaucoup de communautés font partie du groupe d'élite des professeurs et des étudiants qui vivent relativement isolés. Cet « environnement protecteur » est un milieu de recherche très important qui est plus fondamentale qu'appliquée et donc, pas adéquate pour les systèmes locaux et quelque peu étrangère aux membres de la communauté. Mieux, le rapport entre les résultats de la recherche et les décideurs de l'institution est minimal ou inexistant. Eu égard à cette réalité, on soutient que les initiatives d'assurance qualité (AQ) typique dans beaucoup d'universités mettent l'accent sur la mise en place d'une efficacité opérationnelle des structures conventionnelles d'enseignement et de recherche. L'étude examine l'exhaustivité des paramètres utilisés par les différentes parties prenantes pour déterminer la qualité dans et de l'enseignement universitaire. Faisant référence à l'engagement communautaire comme l'une des fonctions essentielles des universités, la présente étude examine l'importance des questions communautaires et du bien-être social dans la conception, la planification et la mise en œuvre des initiatives de l'AQ. Les approches qualitatives et quantitatives étaient utilisées pour générer les données; particulièrement, les questionnaires, les entretiens, analyse des contenus des programmes académiques et non-académiques et les revues

documentaires ont été analysés. Les résultats préliminaires indiquent une forte priorité sur l'enseignement conventionnel et la recherche académique plutôt que sur les initiatives de l'engagement communautaire. La conceptualisation d'un enseignement universitaire de qualité par les différentes parties prenantes (étudiants, professeurs, administration, parents et décideurs) est influencée par les préoccupations d'efficacité et de régularité des activités dans les universités. Les activités de suivi-évaluation sont axées sur: a) l'efficacité de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage; b) la pertinence des programmes académiques par rapport aux marchés de l'emploi; c) la qualité de la recherche fondamentale; d) le nombre de publications dans les revues internationales accréditées; et e) les préoccupations relatives au classement de l'université par rapport aux autres dans le pays, la région, le continent et le monde. Le manque de priorité sur les initiatives d'engagement communautaire pourrait s'expliquer par le fait qu'un bon nombre de praticiens pourraient être des produits des mêmes structures existantes et ne pas être en mesure de détecter les disparités. Inversement, les communautés locales, au sein desquelles ces institutions fonctionnent comme des bénéficiaires immédiats perçoivent souvent les universités comme des institutions abstraites pour la super-élite, et que la « tour d'ivoire » n'est pas très applicable à la vie quotidienne des communautés locales. Il a été proposé que des débats et des dialogues soient organisés pour engager les différentes parties prenantes dans la redéfinition des attentes, des obligations et des responsabilités de l'enseignement supérieur vis-à-vis de l'engagement de la communauté.

**Mots clés :** communauté-engagement, paramètres, perceptions, assurance qualité, université

## Introduction

The threefold function of universities includes teaching, research/innovation and community engagement (CE). Conceptually, universities aim to transform, modernise, and develop societies technically, socially and economically. Universities are expected to make significant economic contribution to local, national and regional economies; they are employers, customers, as well as suppliers of goods and services. Staff and student expenditures have a direct effect on income and employment. Along with teaching and research innovations, CE is widely recognised as the third core function of universities (Duke 2008; Goddard 2007). However, of these three functions, CE is given suboptimal attention. As suggested by Perry and Menendez (2011), many university communities are a closed group of professors and students living in relative isolation. By losing grounding within social needs, students, and the faculty fail to understand the challenges and opportunities and are often perceived as less than essential. This study specifically focuses on CE as an area of function, which is commonly given less attention across the functional triad.

CE is conceptualised as the establishment of formal or informal networks, collaborations, partnerships, interactions and joint activities between universities and community agencies at local, national, regional and international levels. Activities are expected to promote technical and social networks, joint projects, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), business ventures, co-sponsored workshops/seminars/conferences, sports events and other benefits. CE may potentially facilitate partnerships among universities, private sector, civil society, and government agencies. CE is expected to facilitate symbiotic relationships between universities and communities, leading to sustainable socio-economic development. In the ideal symbiotic relationship, communities provide human resources for university systems to foster and carry out their purposes. In turn, universities produce skilled manpower and innovations to address challenges in the community. However, this ideal relationship may not occur when CE is considered as an afterthought, or not attended to at the level of teaching and research (Jacob *et al.* 2015).

In light of the above, it is argued that the centrality of CE in developing relationships between universities and communities has not been sufficiently appreciated by the diverse stakeholders of university operations. As such, this study explores stakeholders' perceptions towards CE to determine whether CE is one of the parameters used to determine QA for university education in Uganda. Using the framework described herein, features of CE as predominant in university routine programmes will be analysed and discuss whether CE is given proportional attention as an aspect of QA in Ugandan universities.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Rationale for Community Engagement***

CE is expected to generate organic linkages between university and community agencies, such as government, civil society business, industry. The needs of society present opportunities for first-class research and innovation in which community agencies are able to seek consultancy. In the context of constrained universities' funding, such linkages enable universities and staff to diversify their funding. Universities' human and physical resources are optimally utilised through entrepreneurial models of research and development projects. University human resources are useful for central and local governments who may not have sufficient capacity to fill the demand–supply gaps in delivery of social services (Kakembo 2012). This gap can be addressed only when operations of universities are broadened beyond teaching and academic research.<sup>1</sup> In the arena of CE, universities need partners and collaborators who bring a clear

understanding of community needs and issues. With wide experiences, practical approaches, and social networks, partners bring legitimacy as they are assumed to represent a long-term commitment to local communities.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

Most activities in universities focus on two functions: teaching and, to a more limited degree, research. It was therefore argued that QA initiatives in universities focus only on ascertaining operational efficiency of the conventional structures for teaching and research. This study seeks to identify pillars and indicators of quality considered by stakeholders in university operations. The study investigates whether QA parameters are broad enough to encompass the three functions of teaching, research and CE. Specifically, the study sets out to determine whether teaching and research are organically linked to address the needs of local communities. As pointed out by Strum *et al.* (2011), CE is likely to attract less attention in universities if staff promotion and tenure rewards are only pegged to research and teaching outputs. The investigation of whether CE constitutes a significant portion of QA parameters is considered at various levels of university management: i) faculty level; ii) university level; iii) national (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE]) level; and iv) regional (Inter-University Council for East Africa [NCHE]) level. For each of the levels, checklists of specific parameters of QA were developed. The parameters and criteria are described below.

**Table 1**

Level	Parameters
Faculty	Research and projects are intimately linked to local communities; gradual drifting from purely academic focus towards a strong market-driven entrepreneurship; teaching, research and projects are linked to national and international business community needs, demands and trends; CE reflected in the routine activities of the faculty; academic programmes organically linked to socio-economic structures of society; research agendas defined or influenced by needs of communities and community agencies; research initiatives providing remedies to community challenges; entrepreneurial models of research; going beyond academics and publication in prestigious journals; needs of society influencing curriculum development and reviews.

University	University flexibility to establish an entrepreneurial relationship with communities; networks and symbiotic relationships between university and community agencies; benevolent co-existence with neighbouring communities and shared visions and mutual respect; sustainable bridges between universities and local leaders; policies supporting entrepreneurial structures in the university; number of memoranda of understanding between university and community agencies; community-based projects undertaken by university; university influence on community within vicinities and outside the neighbourhood; networks/connections established by the university with national, regional and international communities; stakeholders' involvement in various aspects of university life; tangible community benefits from the university; existence of linkages between university, government, civil society and industry involvement; streamlined programmes for service-learning; participation of university in evidence-based policy making; research/innovations disseminated in local media (print, radios, television, village exhibitions) in user-friendly formats; budgetary and time allocations devoted to CE.
Nche	Facilitation of strategic partnerships, alliances, and consortiums between universities; facilitating of institutional frameworks and supportive policies on university CE; sustainable linkages between universities and communities; building of bridges between universities and private sector and/or industry, government agencies, civil society and grassroots communities; institutional and policy frameworks supporting CE initiatives.
Iucea	Facilitated networks among regional universities and between EA universities and global institutions; forums on academic/non-academic matters on higher education in East Africa; facilitation/maintenance of internationally comparable education standards in East Africa; policies that encourage stronger links between universities and regional economies; institutional and policy frameworks supporting CE initiatives.

## Materials and Methods

In reference to the universities' core function of CE, this study seeks to determine if the parameters described in the previous section inform QA initiatives.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are used to generate data and, in particular, the following methods are employed: questionnaires, interviews, and documentary analysis of academic and non-academic programmes. Data for this exploratory study were obtained through in-depth interviews of university staff, including lecturers, administrators and QA officers. Data from two public universities and four private chartered universities are used for this analysis. The interviews generated detailed information regarding the perceptions of university staff on CE in relation to QA. Limitations in funding and time restrictions necessitated that key stakeholder interviews included only those from within the institutions. Inclusion of additional respondents from outside the universities could significantly generate further insightful findings, and should be considered for further research. Additional information was obtained through documents analysis, involving the review of records at universities and in publications at the IUCEA and NCHE of Uganda. The document review was limited to published sources as opposed to grey literature. A comprehensive review of diverse records and documents from the offices of the IUCEA and NCHE are also considered important to provide further insight.

The comprehensive list of parameters that constituted the conceptual and analytical frameworks was compiled from the NCHE and IUCEA documents, along with further documentation retrieved from individual universities. University documents included policies, statutes, minutes of meetings, records in the QA offices and other material that were routinely used in monitoring and evaluation. These documents conceptually represent the ideal standard for the universities, including the emphasis each university and coordinating body invested in various aspects of university programmes.

## Findings

Coded data were sorted and compiled using SPSS© v.20 for the quantitative data analysis, while qualitative data was transcribed and analysed with the assistance of NVIVO® software. The findings of this study reveal that university systems in Uganda have not yet developed elaborate structures for CE, hence, their assessment and monitoring systems are not comprehensive to address a wider spectrum of QA. The study sought to determine whether the three university functions are addressed in equal proportions, and if the functions are compartmentalised or integrated in practice. In this regard, the ideal environment would support a seamless integration of teaching, research, and CE in such a way that there is no dividing line between them. Within the few universities that were studied, data clearly confirmed that the understanding of QA is influenced by concerns of effectiveness and regularity of teaching and research.

### ***Structures for the Three Functions***

The analysis revealed that more attention was paid to teaching and research than to CE activities. This finding is supported by the suboptimal attention paid to CE as reflected in the structure of academic and non-academic programmes at the universities. Analysis of schedules and calendars revealed that CE was not programmed. Information obtained through in-depth interviews with key respondents at the universities confirmed this finding. It was suggested that activities associated with CE did not have budgetary and time allocations. In addition, there was a noticeable absence of directorates or departments of community service, nor any officers charged with CE programmes. On the other hand, research has fully fledged directorates or departments, while the teaching function received the greatest financial and time allocations as considered as the core function of universities. On the few occasions where evidence indicated universities conducting the three functions of teaching, research, and CE, the activities were not integrated and were considered as separate and independent activities.

### ***Academic Credits***

Research activities conducted by students and staff receive academic credits, which complement the credits obtained in tests and examinations. Some of the respondents perceived CE in terms of internships – which reflects a narrow understanding of the wide spectrum of CE. At Makerere University (MAK), it is officially documented that staff involvement in community service programmes is one of the parameters for promotion. However, promotions and contract renewals are granted without engagement in CE activities, while giving emphasis to evidence of publication in internationally accredited journals.

### ***Research, Dissemination and Diffusion of Innovations***

Findings obtained from academic institutions suggest that most of the research carried out in universities is significantly academic oriented, and mainly used for academic fulfilment. The motivation for conducting research for students is to gain credit for academic qualifications; whereas academics conduct research in order to secure academic growth and promotions. As such, research agendas are rarely influenced by local community needs. It is uncommon for non-academic staff to conduct research, even when baseline information is required to improve work outcomes. Research is understood strictly for academic staff promotions. Research findings conducted by academic staff are disseminated in internationally accredited journals primarily from

Europe and America, yet publication of findings is conspicuously absent in local media. Publications are produced in formats not user-friendly to community agencies, such as investors, industrialists, local government, civil society and grassroots communities. Publication of articles in local newspapers or academic-oriented television or radio programmes was not considered 'academic' as the publication is not peer reviewed, and does not earn academic credits. In many universities, publication is not one of the major requirements for promotion of non-academic staff. There is also limited exposure to research for students other than through participation in college open days and exhibitions where research innovations are displayed.

### ***Stakeholder Conceptualisation of CE***

When asked to describe aspects of on-going community initiatives, many respondents made reference to common forms of service-learning, such as practicum and internships, 'school practice' for teachers, field trips/studies, and industrial attachments – all of which focus on academic purposes and benefit the university and students only. Few academic programmes practise field-based learning. A few respondents understood CE in terms of the business opportunities the university provides to individuals within the vicinity. Other respondents understood CE in terms of jobs, services and benefits provided at university facilities, such as: agricultural demonstration farms; university-operated medical-schools/facilities with health services; immunisation, screening programmes for HIV and cancer; security provided by the university police; educational services for children in the vicinity, including university-operated nursery/kindergartens; 'social' lighting systems provided by the university; and the occasional safe-water provision. In context of the conceptualised description of CE, the benefits cited by the respondents are simply the spillover and spontaneous outcomes of the presence of the university in the vicinity. CE should, by its definition, involve deliberate development of networks, collaborations, partnerships, interactions and joint ventures between universities and community agencies.

### ***Ideal Practices of Community Engagement***

There are specific activities in some universities that were consciously developed to enhance CE. For instance, in Uganda Christian University, there is a programme known as 'Justice Mission' which extends legal services to less-privileged sections of society specifically in matters of land cases, writing wills and human rights issues. Also, in Ndejje University, there is a non-academic programme referred to as 'Block-Placement' that involves students of social work, social administration and agriculture sent to villages to serve

in communities. The programme is mutually beneficial. The students teach some basic skills to communities and help in the marketing of farm products. Communities benefit from the new methods of work introduced by the students, while students become acquainted with socio-cultural norms and work ethics of the communities.

### ***Student-operated Community Engagement Initiatives***

There are several students' clubs and associations that deliver services to communities, typically on a voluntary basis. Information from universities, however, indicates that student activities receive limited technical, moral and financial support from university management. The clubs include, among others, Rotaract clubs, cultural associations, Red Cross, course-professional clubs, and religious-based clubs.

### ***Community Involvement in University Activities***

Instances of community involvement of organisations from outside the university interacting with the university staff may include consultations with professional bodies, such as medical fraternities, the Law Society, business and accounting bodies. The services of such bodies are specifically needed during curriculum development and review. However, practical collaborations with industry, central/local government and civil society are not common. Exceptional cases are partnerships with international donor non-government organisations, who provide research and project funding for community-based research or intervention projects. The relationship however is one of patronage whereby donors dictate the agenda and direction of research projects.

At MAK, policies, organisational structures and guidelines for field work are created, and stipulate respecting what external partners can do (Makerere University, 2011). At both Makerere and Ndejje universities, students are assigned field supervisors based at the organisations where internships are conducted, and duties involve the assessment of students' daily progress and writing of assessment reports. Occasionally in MAK, company employees are assigned the tasks of co-supervisors or appraisers of students' research where data are collected from these organisations.

Public universities often involve external communities in decision-making processes. The membership of the university councils includes, among others, representatives of certain external communities such as Ministries of Education and Sports. The mission statement of MAK focuses on: 'Providing innovative teaching, learning, research and delivery of services responsive to national and global needs' (MAK 2008). The university's strategic plan (2008/09–

2018/19) embraces partnerships and networking as a core function of the university (MAK 2008). An administrative unit in charge of partnerships and collaborations exists to link MAK to the public and private sectors. It is known as the Makerere University Private Sector Forum (MUPSF).

From the foregoing descriptions, it is evident that CE is not well conceptualised by study respondents. Equally, there is scanty evidence of structures and systems to support and sustain CE within the institutions. In such an environment, it is unlikely that CE may constitute aspects of parameters for determining QA.

### ***Community Engagement and Quality Assurance Initiatives***

All the universities involved in the study had QA structures such as offices and personnel. However, the complexity of QA structures varies from one university to another. At the time of this study, Ndejje University had a part-time QA and an academic auditor; Nkumba, Bugema and Uganda Christian Universities had fully fledged QA directorates. The description in the following sections situates CE within the existing QA structures of the universities investigated.

### ***Faculty and University-level QA Initiatives***

The activities associated with QA across universities were centered on: a) monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of teaching and assessments; b) determining relevancy of academic programmes to job markets; c) quality of academic research; d) number of publications in accredited international journals; and e) concerns over ranking of the university in relation to other universities in the country, in the region, continent and the globe. QA also revolved around monitoring of student welfare services, public relations functions, sports, recreation, library and internet facilities, and other basic facilities that promote teaching, research and general student welfare. Within the studied universities, QA is clearly influenced by concerns of effectiveness and regularity of routine activities of teaching, research, and student welfare services. CE does not feature prominently in these monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Features of CE in QA frameworks can be seen in staff promotions. In principle, the contribution of academic staff to CE is one consideration for promotion to senior lecturer, associate professor and professor. For example, the policies on the appointment and promotion of academic staff at MAK identify four required tasks: teaching, research, service and leadership in the university, and professional service including providing service to the community (MAK 2009). The points-based faculty evaluation system at MAK (2013) is weighted as follows: publications (25); academic and professional qualifications (20);

teaching ability and experience (13); supervision of students' research (10); research (8); other academic activities (8); service to the university and the community (5); conduct (5); membership of professional bodies (2); professional practice/outreach services (2); and innovations, including patents(2). Some respondents expressed the concern that staff involvement in CE is not as valued as is teaching and research functions.

Students interviewed reflected similar concepts of QA to those of the lecturers. Their perceptions of QA revolved around: having regular lecturer attendance; fair conduct of assessments (tests and examinations); delivery of social services (accommodation, dining, sports, entertainment and recreation, etc.); and availability of facilities in the library and computer laboratories. Students indicated that they are occasionally concerned about marketability of academic programmes and reputation of their university at the national level. The latter is closely related to future successful engagement in the competitive job market.

Other key stakeholders, such as employers, local leaders, policy makers, parents, members of university councils, members of founding bodies, members of professional bodies and other persons who are central in university operations, although valuable, were not interviewed for this study due to funding limitations. Insights generated by these groups of stakeholders are likely to shed more light on the understanding of universities' QA initiatives.

### ***NCHE's QA Parameters on Community Engagement***

Information regarding perceptions and parameters for QA at the national university coordinating level (NCHE) was obtained through a document analysis. For purposes of analysing NCHE QA parameters, reference is made to the Quality Assurance Framework for Universities and the Licensing Process for Higher Education Institution (January, 2014). The institution-audit criteria developed by NCHE highlights eight pillars of QA. The eighth pillar is 'University and Community Services' and is specifically described as: a) the needs of the community, market and general society which universities ought to address; b) the effectiveness of internship programmes; and c) communities participating in university activities. This pillar is a point of departure for communicating what the NCHE considers as ideal standards. However, within the checklist that outlines capacity indicators for assessment of programmes, including thirteen items and thirty-three sub-items, no reference is made to CE activities. It is likely that many universities will focus on the checklist requirements to determine what NCHE expectations are. Given that the checklist excludes a direct reference to CE, universities, particularly those with financial constraints, are likely to neglect CE issues.

### *IUCEA's QA Parameters on Community Engagement*

Similar to the NCHE, only documents obtained from the organisation's website were analyzed to investigate the perceptions and parameters of the IUCEA on QA with regard to CE, and specifically, the checklist of programme quality. A content analysis of the self-assessment report at programme level reveals that the eighteen items and seventy-six sub-items do not make specific reference to CE initiatives.

If universities in Uganda rely solely on the cited documents of these two coordinating levels (NCHE and IUCEA) to guide their QA initiatives, gaps for CE will emerge. This has significant implications for universities, particularly those that are not financially well resourced, as a natural pretext for omitting CE from their routine activities. Coordinating bodies have programmes positioned to transform the concept of university CE at country and regional levels. One such example is the 'Academia-public-private partnership forum and exhibitions' organised by the IUCEA, and supported by various local and international organisations (including the 2015 Forum sponsorship by the East African Business Council (EABC) and East African Development Bank (EADB) held in Entebbe). Such initiatives promise to create platforms where universities, private sector and governments share insights on integrated sustainable partnerships.

### **Summary of Findings**

Study findings suggest that many universities fail to allocate proportional financial and time resources to CE, which encompasses one of three core functions of the university. Even the sphere of research, which is an area of emphasis, was found to lack relevance to social needs, and is typically more basic than applied science, and not relevant to local production systems. Research is driven by career-driven expectations to publish in prestigious journals and may not value studies that document local content. The conceptualisation of CE by staff of universities is very narrow. Equally, many universities lack structures and personnel for operating and sustaining CE initiatives. Within such a context, CE is not a prominent feature or parameter for university QA operations. Nonetheless, there are examples in some universities and at regional university coordinating agencies that aspire to enhance CE activities.

### **Discussion**

Conceptually, CE requires proportional allocation of time, human, material and budgetary resources for initiatives that connect the university to communities and community agencies. Perceptions and parameters for QA activities need

to be broadened beyond teaching and research in order to explore ways in which the three functions could be seamlessly integrated. The following section discusses the issues, prospects and challenges of broadening QA perceptions and parameters beyond teaching and academic research.

### ***Broadening the Stakeholder Base***

Developing effective CE initiatives begins with stakeholder mapping and analysis. While some university stakeholders could be considered primary, others may be peripheral. Primary stakeholders include: a) founding bodies; b) parents/students; c) local/central government; and d) neighbouring communities. Peripheral stakeholders and their attachment with the university could be described as temporal and opportunistic, including the media, as well as business and service sectors. There is a wide spectrum of relationships that exist among the various stakeholders, ranging from personal networks to long-term sustainable initiatives. Preliminary findings suggest that perceptions of university functions in CE vary among stakeholders. CE calls for frameworks and models to link local governments and industries (Khan and Park 2011). Flexibility on the part of the universities is also required in order to forge entrepreneurial relationships with communities and community agencies (Etzkowitz 2012). Universities should consider organising open forums where identified stakeholders brainstorm on various developmental issues, challenges and prospects. The views of the diverse stakeholders should be sought, while setting parameters for determining QA in the universities. For instance, diverse stakeholders should assess how components of teaching, research and innovations can meet their specific needs. Identification of indicators by industrial and business communities can be supported through the research function of the university to generate market-based technological prototypes.

### ***Broader Spectrum of University Community Engagement***

Initiatives to promote CE should start with the faculties, progress to university and later shift to NCHE level. At the latter level, governments could promote CE by providing special funding and policy guidelines. Existing Ugandan government initiatives in this direction are demonstrated by the National Development Plan, 2010/11–2014/15 and the National Science, Technology and Innovation Plan, 2012/2013–2017/2018. However, as pointed out by Cloete, Bailey, Bunting and Maassen (2011), having policies and plans does not necessarily translate into tangible practices for CE. Once NCHE-level initiatives for CE are established, they can transcend national boundaries and meld into the structures of the IUCEA. With over 200 higher education institutions in East

Africa, CE is potentially enhanced by a wider network of universities and their corresponding community agencies (i.e., private sector agencies, government departments, business communities, industries, civil society).

### ***Research Community Service and QA***

Quality in research and scholarship is largely perceived through a foreign lens in Uganda, and not through local societal opportunities, needs and challenges. A segment of local research and scholarship activities is influenced by the imperative of *publish or perish*. Appointment, promotion and contract renewals in many universities are linked to publishing in refereed and reputable journals. Some journals may not value studies that document local content. Consequently, researchers often publish 'for foreign consumption' rather than striving to address local needs. As well, research and project proposals target external funders and ignore existing funding opportunities from local industries and businesses. Local industry and business firms rarely invest significantly in research without evidence that university-based research is relevant to the local production systems. As such, scholarship and research programmes continue to face shrinking budgets, low staff allowances and inadequate facilities. Governments have adequate financial resources to solely support academic research, while the current structure of university research and scholarship promise limited impact on the lives of the people governments are expected to serve. Developing strategic links between university, business, and industry could therefore be one of the practical remedies for enhancing quality and sustainability of local university operations.

### ***CE and University Funding Diversification***

Initiatives to propagate CE in universities may erroneously be perceived as an added expectation imposed on the university by the national or regional coordinating authorities. On the contrary, CE is an opportunity for the university to radically transform existing funding and networking structures. CE creates opportunities for universities and community agencies based on mutual exchange of knowledge and resources (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2010). Partnerships and collaborations are positioned to resolve the critical funding gaps that many universities are currently experiencing (Hart and Northmore 2011; Pike, *et al.* 2011; Soska and Butterfield 2004). Partnerships and collaborations are a key to long-term sustainability of quality operations in universities, and universities in Uganda are yet to play a central in the processes of evidence-based policy making.

### ***Symbiotic Nature of Partnerships***

Community engagement' denotes a two-way dialogue between universities and community agencies. Existing patterns are characterised by a patronage relationship. On rare occasions when university – community interactions take place, the relationship is one of a deficit model. The community is seen as a laboratory for university researchers to 'generate new knowledge for purposes of staff promotion or higher degrees for students' (Perry and Menendez 2011). The knowledge is presumably used to 'address community needs' but, in reality, serves the purposes of staff promotion and higher degrees for students. Full benefits can only materialise if the university and society are organically linked; when needs of society are at the centre of the university's activities. While university outreach involves a one-way process of transferring knowledge and technology to communities, CE recognises that external communities also have something to offer to universities. As Tagoe (2012) remarks, there is a need for a drift from unidirectional engagement in which communities are considered 'pockets of need and laboratories for experimentation' and towards bidirectional engagement. Communities are no longer 'passive recipients' of university expertise. Besides the potential funding opportunities that they may offer, communities also have knowledge reserves that universities could access. The entrepreneurial model of research and innovation entails that universities go beyond teaching and research, towards the welfare of their communities (Etzkowitz 2002). It is proposed that the research agendas of universities should be defined by interaction and negotiation with community agencies.

### ***Facilitators and Barriers for CE***

Sutz (2005) points out that, in many developing countries, small-scale collaborations between researchers and industry have failed to grow into national trends. The development of effective CE by universities calls for diverse stakeholders to buy in with full participation in all sections of the university administration and university programmes that are relevant to community needs. Relevancy is one of the parameters that QA initiatives are necessary to uphold. Reasons for failed higher education CE initiatives may include a lack of support and buy-in from one or more key stakeholder groups, such as students, faculty members, staff, administrators, alumni, parents of students, policy makers and community members. On the part of the faculty, Strum *et al.* (2011) support the view that success of CE initiatives necessitates an expansion of the traditional reward structure that is based on quality research and teaching outputs, whereby staff promotion and renewal of contracts centre on staff involvement in CE. As pointed out by Beere, Votruba and Wells (2011), organisational factors, such as policies, structures and programmes, impact

the institutional commitment to CE. Specifically, CE could be facilitated by specialised and multidisciplinary units designed to coordinate community-related activities and services.

### ***Compatibility***

One of the barriers for the development of partnerships between universities and community agencies is the lack of compatibility. The university faculty may not rhyme well with the rigorous work schedules of private sector, non-government and community based organisations. Work schedules of the latter are characterised by regular report making, effective communication, cooperation, tight accountability, willingness to compromise and flexibility. These virtues do not augur well for the faculty which is relatively autonomous. The lack of openness on part of the university faculty is one of the structural limitations that community agencies highlight. University information is often not accessible, with a lack of transparency (Hallak and Poisson 2007). On the other hand, the university faculty also experiences challenges interacting with community agencies. Community partners are occasionally unaware of the workload and constraints faced by the faculty. Officers in community agencies also often have unreasonable expectations about the type and amount of work a faculty member can devote to an individual project. To aggravate matters, university faculty members are accustomed to strong disciplinary boundaries of departmental and college structures that it are often difficult to work under in multi-disciplinary, integrated and collaborative work required by community agencies.

### ***Institutional, National and Regional Leadership***

Community engagement initiatives call for committed leadership on the part of faculties, individual universities, national councils of higher education and the IUCEA. At the regional level, partnerships may be sustained by the information communication technologies (ICT) that provide essential platforms for promoting outreach initiatives (Beere *et al.* 2011; Brukart, Holland, Percy and Zimpher 2006) and fulfil the key indicator for the university institutional commitment to CE.

### **Conclusion**

The three-fold mission of higher education places an emphasis on the synergistic relationship that strengthens the three functions, namely, teaching, research and CE. Broadening perceptions and parameters for QA require that there is organic linkage between the three core functions of the university. Moreover,

incorporating CE into teaching and research activities encourages the interaction between specialised units and traditional academic units. Quality assurance instruments can serve to determine whether components of the research agenda provide remedies to societal needs. Research and innovation are in the position to be disseminated and diffused in local platforms in user-friendly formats and local expressions. However, the lack of emphasis on CE initiatives may be explained by the fact that a number of practitioners are the product of existing structures, and therefore may not be in position to detect discrepancies. On the other hand, local communities, as expected immediate beneficiaries, perceive universities as abstract institutions for the super-elites, within the 'ivory tower' that has relevance to the day-to-day lives of grassroots communities.

Universities are wise to increase the adoption of CE initiatives and engage diverse stakeholders as central to the operations of universities, while university management reflects upon funding and networking opportunities present with increased CE. Considerations to organise open forums where identified stakeholders brainstorm on various developmental issues, challenges and prospects, and become directly involved in QA initiatives will identify emergent research needs. Specified duties, responsibilities and expectations of various stakeholders towards universities may also effectively monitor QA measures. In addition, universities that do not currently have structures for CE can begin through the promotion of student-operated CE initiatives, including Rotaract Clubs, cultural associations, Red Cross, professional clubs, religious-based clubs, etc. Finally, the development of local parameters for ranking universities within East Africa is an important role for national and regional university coordinating bodies, such as the NCHE and IUCEA, with CE as a prominent feature used in the ranking system. Engaging various stakeholders in developing these QA initiatives is important in consideration of the diversity in terms of levels of education, various interests and geographical constituencies of institutional stakeholders in this endeavour.

The primary limitation of this study is the exploratory nature of the work and the limited sample available for data collection. Increased funding for this area of research will result in more comprehensive findings. Broadening the diversity of the research team, the inclusion of additional universities and a greater diversity of organisations and respondents, such as the private sector, employers, parents, government departments and civil society will increase the applicability of the work, and increase the attention to the importance of CE in QA measures of academic institutions.

## Note

1. See H. Etzkowitz, 2002, *MIT and the Rise of Entrepreneurial Science*, London: Routledge Press.

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