

## **Towards a new paradigm in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: Research and knowledge mobilisation to reposition Polytechnics in the knowledge economy**

Category: Higher Education Policy

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### **Definition of Research and Knowledge mobilization.**

Knowledge mobilisation is the process of linking researchers and their work with both external and internal publics to the organisation for the purposes of sustaining life. Knowledge mobilization involves facilitating, prospecting and mediating, conversations and collaborations between and among individuals and groups of people in order to create a “knowing culture” from different spheres of experiences and expertise to generate new ideas. It also includes putting available knowledge into active service for the benefit of the community.

### **Social background to research and Knowledge mobilisation.**

It is imperative to note that inter-generation knowledge of most African communities continue to selectively survive through indigenously based knowledge systems which is bequeathed through story-telling. African scholars have not taken seriously the documentation and publication of African traditional medicines, cultures, values and knowledge. Research and knowledge mobilisation must be culturally, traditionally, socially, academically and politically relevant to the needs of the community. The African societies have survived for centuries through practices of story-telling; oral tradition and intercession through medium spirits. Spirit mediums were/are viewed as powerful source of knowledge.

There are various processes that help ensure that public investments in social sciences and humanities research have the greatest possible impact—intellectually, socially and economically, for example, knowledge-brokering and outreach, to more effective dissemination through new technologies, to the “co-creation” of knowledge according to (SSHRC Strategic Plan: Framing Our Direction, 2010-2012).

Gaudet, (2012) defines mobilization as the activation and application of individual or organizational resources towards a goal. Knowledge mobilization is the use of knowledge

towards the achievement of goals – such as social, cultural, political, professional, and economic goals. The concept mobilization is concerned with research that has the potential to inform decisions about public policy, professional practice and social programs. Knowledge mobilization works with research from the social sciences and humanities, health and natural sciences. Partners for knowledge mobilization are often from the public and community/non-profit sectors but also include the private sector. Knowledge mobilization also supports engagement of research and researchers with the broader public. “Knowledge mobilization involves making knowledge readily accessible, and thereby useful to individuals and groups in society , by developing ways in which groups can work together collaboratively to produce and share knowledge” according to Shields and Evans, (2008).

Knowledge mobilization is a suite of services that connects academic research and researchers with people and organizations seeking to develop sustainable solutions to social, environmental, economic and cultural challenges. Basically there are three communities involved in the knowledge mobilization/ transfer process, firstly, *policy decision-makers*, *secondly*, university-based researchers as well as researchers and analysts attached to think-tanks, policy institutes, NGOs, and **thirdly knowledge brokers** according to Shields and Evans, (2008). It is fundamental that what is learned from research actually influences practice and policy. Research should be demand-driven because of rising educated population, media attention; challenges to development and government interest in efficient use of resources, for example, use can be multidimensional, instrumental, conceptual, strategic or symbolic, and inspirational.

“Knowledge brokering is one of the human forces behind knowledge transfer. It's a dynamic activity that goes well beyond the standard notion of transfer as a collection of activities that helps move information from a source to a recipient. Brokering focuses on identifying and bringing together people interested in an issue, people who can help each other develop evidence-based solutions. It helps build relationships and networks for sharing existing research and ideas and stimulating new work.” (CHSRF 2003: ii).In South Africa, the government's has put community engagement as a key anchor of the educational system. The White paper (1997) called upon Universities to “demonstrate social responsibility ... and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes”.

## **Research Method: Case study.**

Yin (1984:23) defines the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

In this study case the boundaries involve higher and tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. Siggelkow (2007) argues that a single case analysis can be very powerful and can be used to fill in the gaps in existing theories. The rationale for choosing Zimbabwe higher and tertiary institutions, is that it contains crucial elements that are especially significant, and that the researcher could be able to predict certain outcomes if the theory holds true.

## **Findings**

1. All respondents concurred that there was no known policy on research and knowledge mobilisation.
- 2.6 agreed that there is a misalignment between research and knowledge mobilisation.
3. All agreed that there is limited management support for research and knowledge mobilisation as budgets for the same are not readily available.
4. Research and knowledge mobilisation plays a crucial role in the economic, political, social, technological, environment and legal system of a nation.
5. Research and knowledge mobilisation are representative of a nation’s heritage in terms of intellectual assets or capital.

## **Impact of research and knowledge mobilisation**

An informed and knowledgeable community/society

Appreciation of research and knowledge mobilisation as instruments/tools of social transformation.

Appreciation and recognition of intellectual property rights and the benefits of research and knowledge mobilisation.

Maximisation of use of research and knowledge mobilisation portals like information and communication technologies.

## **Conclusion**

The context for Knowledge Brokerage and Social Learning processes in research and knowledge mobilisation are *Communities of Practice*. These communities are organised around different topics, such as higher education learning strategies or education supply chains and comprise of heterogeneous actors from policy, science and civil society organisations. A Community of practice should be a vital and productive community vehicle through which people can constantly nurture, facilitate and operate as a process of interaction and instruments for collaboration .While face-to-face interaction is of crucial importance to form a group and build trust, experiences have shown that ICT tools can also be adapted to create online arenas, showrooms, platforms and theatres of interactions thereby widening the scope of research and knowledge mobilisation.