

Community Service Functions of Higher Education Institutions and Socio-Economic Development in Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the link between community service functions of higher education institutions (HEIs) and socio-economic development of localities around these institutions. The study set out to: explore the forms and strategies used by institutions in promoting the community service function; find out the contribution of community service to local socio-economic development endeavors in Uganda; and examine the linkage of HEIs research and teaching to community service. Utilizing the interpretive approach and the general collaborative theory, the research was done among three higher Institutions of learning i.e. Uganda Management Institute, Makerere and Gulu Universities where teaching and administrative staff participated in the study. Findings show that there are many strategies used by staff and students in community service, but community service lacks a comprehensive strategy at HEIs level. The contribution of community service to local socio-economic development is not necessarily explicit in communities but the function is intertwined with research and education which all in the end contribute to socio-economic development. Community service is not deliberately linked to socio-economic development of localities as it is linked to promotion of staff and students learning. Besides, community service interventions in many institutions of higher learning are inadequately resourced and lack systematic approach to working for community transformation. The study recommends that for community service to be meaningful, it has to be beneficial to the communities too. There is need to develop costed institutional strategies for community service and development of documentation mechanisms for community service interventions by university actors.

Key words: **Community Service, Higher Education Institutions, Third Mission, Local Socio-Economic Development, Uganda**

Introduction

The overall focus of this research project is explore the link between the third mission of higher institutions of learning (community service) and local socio-economic development. Community service function of higher institutions of learning requires institutions to engage with communities and focus their research and teaching functions to transform communities in which they operate. This function brings the university 'near to the communities', and consequently minimizes the 'ivory tower' syndrome. In this arrangement, a symbiotic relationship between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their localities is created. Although community service appears to be one of the three functions of HEIs often embedded in schemes of service and promotion policies, the community service function has not been well developed in HEIs in relation to other functions of research and teaching. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that the community service is a potential resource for developing collaborative links with the wider world (Inman & Schuetze, 2010). This research project set

out to explore the contribution of community service function of universities in Uganda to local socio-economic development of communities around higher Institutions of Learning.

Higher Education Institutions and Community Service

There is renewed momentum of interest in the way higher institutions of learning interface with their communities and regions; including a concern that higher education needs to be more relevant to national development needs (UNESCO, 2009). For example, higher education is seen to contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development (WB 2000, UNESCO, 2009). Higher education functions of teaching, research and community service are expected to jointly shape socio-economic development of nations through policies, programming, planning and providing labour that executes these development plans. HEIs have traditionally embraced three functions namely: teaching, research, and community service. However, community service has often been a 'distant cousin' to the more dominant roles of teaching and research. Nevertheless, many scholars have argued that the community service is a potential resource for developing collaborative links between HEIs and the wider world (Inman & Schuetze, 2010).

Community service has traditionally been linked with the concept of service-learning especially in the field of teaching (education), agriculture and community service. There is considerable agreement in the academic community that service-learning is a multi-tiered pedagogy that can be implemented at any level of education. For example, Wade (2000) recommends that in teacher education programs; (a) field experiences and goals be collaboratively developed to minimize the asymmetry between the "server" and the "served," (b) types of community experiences be varied to provide multiple perspectives on societal issues, and (c) critical reflective papers and discussions be planned so that TCs confront preconceived biases and/or beliefs. Service-learning in teacher preparation programs involves the achievement of curricular goals through authentic community or school-based experiences. The experience usually relate to the subject matter of the course. In fact, some scholars such as Roldan, Strage, and David (2004) have investigated service-learning outcomes in terms of student achievement, as well as the social components of civic engagement and personal growth of students. Accordingly, students learn the course content as they engage in the service-learning experiences.

Increasingly, community service is seen as a means of engendering citizenship values and community responsibility amongst university learners. It is also a potential resource for 'africanising' HEIs system through raising the profile of indigenous knowledge systems and helping communities to identify African solutions to local problems in the face of an inherited colonial curriculum and ongoing influences from imported distance education options from other corners of the globe (Brock, 2003). As such there is a call for continued support to higher institutions of learning so as to prioritize needs of Africa's development and for universities to create mutually beneficial partnerships with communities and civil societies to facilitate the sharing and transmission of appropriate knowledge (UNESCO 2009: 6). The notion of reciprocal impact is central in community service; that is, outcomes achieved are also beneficial to the community and/or school partners. For community service programs to be effective, the issues addressed in the experience must be meaningful and of consequence to the communities too. As Harkavy (2004) argues, it is important to target global problems occurring at local

levels through initiatives that provide workable solutions.

Community service includes the vital component of reflection, which engages HEIs actors and communities in knowledge construction and reconstruction as they analyze their own previous understandings of social phenomenon and preconceived notions about people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002; Sleeter, 2000). Experience from diverse settings enables communities to gain insights from HEIs thereby providing the beginning of understanding of HEIs actors who seemingly live in different worlds. Both the universities and communities move from accepting the different worlds as they are to questioning them which can lead to more reflection and research. Thus community service has the potential to transforming thinking of university actors and communities.

The community service function of HEIs in Africa is historical, though not well developed: some universities have taken initiatives to build it. Scholars have documented elements of community service from different perspectives; for instance Bringle et al., (2006) on service learning; Hall (2010) on community engagement in South Africa; Ntseane (2010) in relation to developing a learning city in Botswana; and efforts to revive the university's community service mission in Tanzania (Mwaikokesya, 2010). The notion of partnership between HEIs and communities is evolving to the realization that community service promotes mutual learning gains (Preece, 2011a, 2011b). Consequently, community engagement is seen as a means of contributing to the knowledge society, whereby theoretical knowledge is adapted to specific local contexts such as the development of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa (Pillay, 2009).

Research Problem

Causing social economic development requires a deliberate effort to identify socio-economic needs, local capacities to transform the local economies, availability of services as well as institutions to guide such development. There is no doubt that higher education is expected to transform communities; however, HEIs, especially Universities, have traditionally been known to be elitist. Universities have been criticized for their 'ivory tower' image with limited impact on the socio-economic environment in their locality (Lulat, 2005) and employers have increasingly voiced their concerns about inadequate graduate skills for the job market. The challenge for African HEIs has been how to match global demands for higher education as a commodity for knowledge production whilst preserving indigenous qualities of pedagogy, identity and relevance to regional and local development needs. The community service function of HEIs provides the space to address such a challenge in a way that can refocus HEIs research and teaching to addressing local socio-economic needs. However, the third mission of HEIs, (i.e. community service) has for long been treated as peripheral or a 'distant cousin' to the more dominant roles of teaching and research. The community service function is usually underdeveloped in terms of its purpose, institutional arrangement for its functionality and how learning and research components are linked to it. There seem to be no standardized practice or measure for HEIs contribution to local development. It is difficult to find existing data that portrays the contribution of community service function of universities to the development of localities. As such, some university stakeholders are not often engaged in community service and if they are, it is basically left to individuals wishes. This scenario has left a knowledge gap.

Objectives

This study set out to examine the role of community service functions of HEIs to local socio-economic development in Uganda. The study comprised three selected HEIs in Uganda. Study objectives included;

- (i) Explore the strategies used by HEIs in Uganda in promoting the community service function
- (ii) Find out the perceived contribution of community service to local socio-economic development endeavors in the country
- (iii) Examine the linkage between HEI research and teaching and community service among HEIs

Methods and approach

The study utilized interpretative process focusing on lived experience by HEIs lecturers and administrators. The study adopted a case study design among three HEIs in Uganda to explore how the community service function has been developed and the experiences of those who are engaged in it. The HEIs covered were Makerere University, Gulu University and Uganda Management Institute. Makerere and Gulu universities were selected to establish how community service was being carried out in a public university setting and Uganda Management Institute was included because of her peculiarities given that the institute does a lot of consultancy work with practitioners. The study participants mainly included teaching staff and administrators who had worked with such HEIs for over 10 years. The 10-year experience was important because it was assumed that such persons would have been assessed by their institutions on their performance regarding community service or managed a community service project or carried out consultancy work, or having been promoted on the basis of community service/consultancy work outcomes.

Data collection methods adopted included both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For instance, interviews focused on participants' experiences, views, perceptions of community service, and their interaction with communities. These were conducted per HEI with the heads of human resource office and the senior teaching staff. The discussions centered on the future of community service in higher institutions of learning; its relevance to research; and possibility of reconstructing the function. Most of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. More data were collected through document reviews that included the universities' performance evaluation forms; promotional criteria documents; human resource manuals; and the HEIs' strategic plans. The review aimed at identifying the elements of community service, especially their presence, understanding and the strategies of achieving their objectives. In addition, more data were collected using questionnaires. On the other hand, quantitative approach used questionnaire which required the respondents to indicate their opinions and suggestions on the different statements concerning community service. In summary, the study used data collection instruments such as a documentary review guide, questionnaire, and an interview guide.

Using interpretative and content analysis, the lived experiences of lecturers and their perceptions of community service were documented. The data from questionnaires, interviews, and discussions were corroborated with existing scholarly literature. In analyzing the qualitative data the researchers followed the sequence of reading, interpreting, re-reading, noting patterns, categorizing, and identifying themes. Primary data were coded into descriptive units of shared meaning, categorized and using interpretive analysis, shared meanings were generated. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from respondents. These respondents were selected from all colleges and schools in the three public institutions. The nomenclature of colleges, schools, or even departments differed across HEIs. However, generally, majority of the respondents were from the humanities departments such as those handling Business studies, Management studies, and Social sciences, while those from the natural and biological science departments were the least represented in the study. In quantitative analysis, the data from the questionnaires were analyzed and presented in form of descriptive statistics which included frequencies and percentages.

Findings of the Study

In this study interest was put on exploring the **strategies** used by HEIs in Uganda in promoting the community service function; finding out how community service contributes to local socio-economic development endeavors in the country; and examining the linkage between HEI research and teaching and community service among HEIs

Participating Institutions and Characteristics of Respondents

Three out of six higher education public institutions participated in the study i.e. Makerere University; Gulu University; and Uganda Management Institute. The total number of 93 self-administered questionnaires out of a targeted 200 (two hundred) were received back from respondents. These were received in different ratios across institutions covered by the study. These include Makerere University; Gulu University; and Uganda Management Institute.

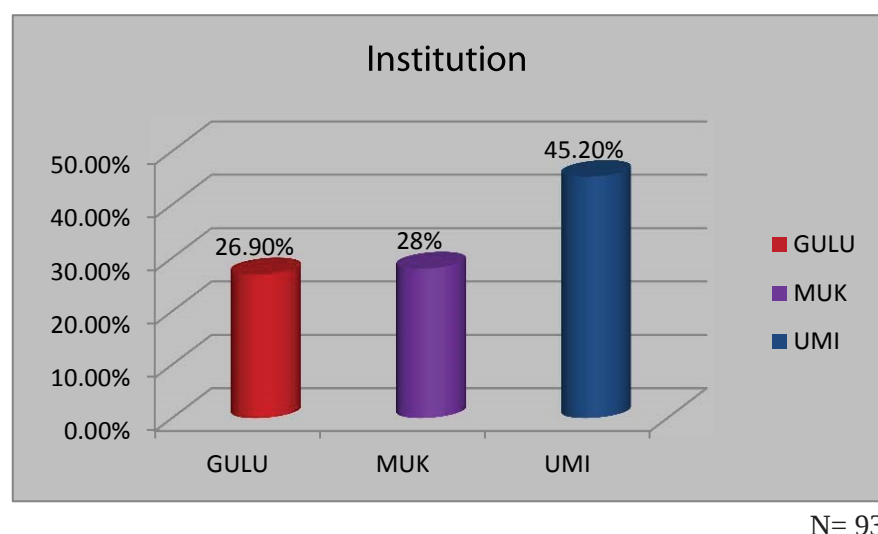


Fig. 1: Percentage of respondents from the participating institutions
Key: Gulu University; MUK = Makerere University; UMI = Uganda Management Institute

As Figure 1 shows 25 (26.9%) respondents from Gulu University, 26 (28%) from Makerere University and 42 (45.2%) from Uganda Management Institute participated in the study. UMI' high participation in the study could be attributed proximity of the respondents to the researchers. For the low response rate was attributed to the fact that, teaching outweighs both research and community service in universities it was because during the time of data collection it was examination time and both teaching and administrative staff were not available to attend to researchers.

Respondents' positions of responsibility

Both teaching and non-teaching staff members participated in the study because these categories were deemed relevant in explaining the community service functions in socio-economic development of localities. Table 1 presents the different occupational categories of respondents.

Table 1: Occupational categories of respondent

Category	Frequency	Percent
Teaching	60	64.5%
Non-teaching	33	35.4%
Total	93	100.0

As table 1 reveals, the majority of respondents were teaching staff category 60 (64.5%), while 33 (35.4%) were non-teaching staff. This could be explained by the fact that non-teaching staff do not carry out community service in form of consultancy work and training.

Participation of HEIs in Community Service

Views were sought from the 93 questionnaire-respondents concerning their participation in community service. Results show that majority (77.4%) of the respondents indicated that they had been engaged in community service before, although only a few (about 41%) had been engaged in community service more than once. It was further noted that the majority (67.8%) of the respondents did not engage in community service for certain reasons (such as contributing to local economic development) but they just engage in community service because it was a requirement of the institution. However, some members make a contribution to society not because they are at an HEI but because it is their personal obligation. Generally, although respondents knew that community service was a requirement for their assessment for their promotion, few were engaged in it. This was because community service is ad hoc in nature, depends on when the need arises and often it is not documented. Moreover, there were no guidelines to undertake community service as it mainly came out during assessment. The above issues challenge the continuity of community service

However, that there seemed to be an appreciation of community service, with an overwhelming 77.4% which indicated that they had gained knowledge through community service, while 70% indicated having passion to serve in the community yet, 68.7% revealed that they had learnt a lot from working with the community. Only 16% reported that participation in community service helped them to access a promotion, and only about 22% believed that community service carries

sufficient points for promotion. Findings suggest that community service is a minor component of the promotion and performance contract strategy. Therefore, community service enhances learning for HEIs staff and increases their belongingness to the community. Actually, 82.8% believed that community service was very beneficial to both the HEIs and the society. Hence, some institutions had even designed strategies for promoting community services.

Institutional Strategies used in promoting community service function

In view of the fact that HEIs in Uganda assess the performance of their staff inter alia based on service to the community, the current study chose to explore and explain the strategies used by the institutions. Through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study established that indeed there are some strategies used in promoting community service function in HEIs. Such strategies include internship, research, training, rewarding and some administrative strategies as further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Students' internship strategy

One of the strategies for intervention in communities was reported as internship. For example, in the three departments studied at Makerere University, some lecturers reported that when they send out students for internship or fieldwork placement, the department directly contributes to community service. The students help communities, institutions and industries to practically solve given problems. Actually, one respondent explained: "In practice we have been doing internships. This is where students go to the community and are attached to certain organizations and they transfer knowledge and skills to the community". Another respondent noted: Although we have started to send our diploma students to institutions for internship, the objective is mainly to give the student hands on experience rather than helping that particular organization in undertaking activities. The objective is mainly to promote student centered learning and the assessment is usually on what the student has learnt, rather than on what the student was able to transfer at a workplace. Further, the follow up by supervisors is still a problem.

Internship is widely used as a two-way strategy of HEIs working with the communities to solve their problems and enable the students to attain practical skills and gain interaction with the communities. As students and lecturers go out to do something; the students receive as well as give out some knowledge. However, it also came out that internship is riddled with quality-related work problems due to the limited experience and expertise possessed by students. Even then, on the side of the students, internship is ideally more of a learning experience than a working experience. Therefore student's contribution to achieving organizational objectives may not be tangible and it may not be very effective because it is not designed for that purpose.

Research and innovations strategy

The research and innovations strategies were perceived to be both opportunistic and also deliberately undertaken to help out the community on a particular issue of interest. Under this strategy HEIs in Uganda considered community service to embrace situations that involved students' learning and lecturers' research. For instance, a respondent said:

We have been doing research in the community...and, we have also been transferring innovations. For example, we have developed a questionnaire that measures corruption and we have been selling it to public service and communities so that it can help to detect the corrupt applicants... as to whether this is considered part of community service or not, we believe that is the contribution HEIs make to society.

Another respondent observed:

You know in Makerere University, teaching students are always deployed in schools to teach in secondary schools. Even others go into hard to reach areas and get the experience of living in those areas, they integrate accordingly as they learn...especially the science and agriculture faculties undertake technology development and transfer in communities. There are many demonstration farms in communities and in so doing people are learning from those farms as students and lecturers also learn. This kind of action research is good for community service, because farmers are given on spot advice where such studies are being done. In Makerere still, like with social work and social administration course students are sent to children homes to learn as they offer labor.

In addition, a different respondent noted:

One important strategy at Uganda Management institute has been the applied nature of the Masters in Management studies. You know our masters were intended to solve organizational problems. It was a problem-based master's [degree] until recently. That is why we encouraged students to do research at their own workplaces, be supervised by both a practitioners and a UMI based academician so as to blend theory and practice. Then the work-based supervisor and the student would ideally advocate for implementation of such research findings, thereby contributing to better organizational performance.

The above responses indicate that through research and innovation strategies, HEIs can help the communities solve problems. Through research and innovations both the HEIs and communities benefit. For example, staff members of HEIs develop their careers and individual profiles while communities benefit from directly consuming the innovation or research products.

Direct training of stakeholders' strategy

The HEIs use training as a strategy for helping the community improve their livelihoods or businesses. The use of training as an intervention is premised on the fact that HEIs have a lot of knowledge and skills that can be shared out. One respondent said:

Of recent, the university, through the Department of Social Work, has been working with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to build capacity of community development assistants in issues of child protection. I regard this as community service. We have trained over, 500 persons in 80 districts in Uganda, more especially Community Development Assistants.

Given that HEIs are considered to be the centres of knowledge, skills and learning, training is indeed one of the most straightforward tools for community service. As HEIs, train the community, they (HEIs) also receive some learning from the community – operating a kind of give and take relationship.

Role modelling strategy

HEIs staff performed a plethora of activities within their neighborhoods (including charity work, leadership roles, giving motivational talks), which consciously or unconsciously serve as good practices that can be emulated. In the process, HEIs act as role models for the community. For example, one respondent explained:

Some individual people do community service for example in northern Uganda which was helping to rehabilitate and resettle people out of the war. We have many members who are members of NGO boards such as Hospice Uganda; and there is another one in Child Fund, which I also consider community service.

One other respondent noted:

“Some university lecturers are members of school boards of many well performing schools in the Country. Such people give talks to students and explain their own life histories which help students to admire and build careers”.

While the involvement of staff in this way of role modelling was reported as a strategy, the researchers observed that it was a ‘haphazard’ strategy with no clear institutional framework to manage it. This is because individual lecturers, do it mainly for personal gains, took own initiatives to engage in such work as finding own organizations or participating on administrative bodies within the community. This is not guided by institutional ideologies or objectives but individual responsibility

Business’ strategy

HEIs in Uganda promote community service through a business strategy. This takes the form of consultancy services or directly selling products such as formulas, books, food, and so on to communities. One respondent reported:

There is a lot of community services we are doing and also part of it could be in consultancy form which is like doing baseline surveys, evaluations which contribute to understanding communities and solving community problems but at the same time as sources of income to individual staff...Some staff have published books and they sell them, it is a form of sharing knowledge with communities but also a source of income for university staff. The product like books, formulas of animal feeds, food and beverages inspires communities to engage in similar activities.

Another one said;

I believe it is community service even if I sell the idea. Why not? ... I am using my knowledge and my expertise to go and help somebody to solve a problem. I believe it is community service; I don’t market myself to these people to employ me but they come and ask for a service.

Another one said:

You know university lecturers have their academic knowledge and have failed to do business in communities. But giving back to communities includes bringing services nearer to them. For instance if you are a doctor and you open a clinic, if you are a counsellor and you run a youth counselling centre, if you are a project manager and you start a project and run it professionally, then you are offering community services. Increasing a service to a community, whether they are paying for it or not, it is community service. Even those probation officers and community development officers in government, undertake community services, they do not do it free, they are paid for it in form of salary.

HEIs staff members undertake community service as a business, they employ and incur operational costs (for example, fuel for a car to travel long distances) which inevitably require monies. Universities in Uganda are cash strapped making it difficult to offer free services to communities. Therefore the sale of goods and services to the community creates inspiration and solves some pertinent community problems that require expertise from HEIs.

Rewarding community service strategy

HEIs reward their staffs who participate in community service. The traditional reward mechanism has been through promotion. The performance of a staff in community service earns them points that form part of the equation when the time for promoting an individual comes. As one respondent mentioned: "Of course, when they are promoting you, you must indicate what community activities you have been doing and that has a score. Anyway, it is in a way promoting people's engagement in community service..." Indeed, the objective of such rewards is to encourage more staff to do community service. However, the researchers could not establish any clear-cut criteria used by the different HEIs in capturing data on community service done by their staff. Moreover, the scoring systems and levels were equally blurred as anything good done by an HEI staff outside the campus gates seemed to constitute community service.

Administrative-structural strategy

Majority (53%) affirmed that universities encourage joint work with communities, even though many of them showed that community service is not considered as part of staff workload. Some departments or schools within the HEIs had designed some administrative units manned by staff who, among other things, handle matters of community service. At Makerere University, for example, it was reported:

The school of psychology is a unitary school. A unified school is actually holding two departments and an outreach center. ...when we became an institute about ten years ago we asked to become an institute with academic departments plus a unit that would be ideally responsible for doing outreach work to be able to promote community learning and interaction. So that outreach department is the way we try and reach out to the community in terms of trying to apply what psychology can do to the world of work, to the communities and all the different sectors of work-life outside there. Our members of staff are actually engaged in the activities of this department.

Therefore, the presence of a structure in such a setting presents an opportunity for the advancement of community service in such a school and the university as whole. However in some institutions community service is not yet institutionalized with a clear specific strategy although such institutions still believe community service is their function. As one of the respondents said:

Here at Uganda Management Institute we have no institutional strategy for community service. It is considered as part of promotion criteria, but we have not yet developed that function. We should have direct linkages with employers, some of our students for attachment, but as you know the nature of our business, weekend and evening classes: when will students work where they have been attached? It becomes hard. We need to think through it if we need to organize it and possibly even create an office for that purpose.

In very few cases (26%), institutions were noted to be facilitating individuals to carry out community service and still only few respondents (33%) showed that institutions support them to take their students for community service. Results suggest that there is lack of serious strategies in terms of facilitating, supporting and engaging in community which might be affecting the effectiveness of community service.

Contribution of Community Service to Local Socio-Economic development

The researchers' central focus of this study was to explore the contribution of community service to the local socio-economic development. From the data collected, the majority of the respondents (76%) confirmed that a university is ideally responsible for its community's socio-economic development because it is the university that shapes thinking and models for local economic development. HEIs have a duty to transform their communities. Majority of the respondents (53%) felt that there are visible positive results as a result of their participation in the community, although only 28% said that their involvement enabled communities to increase their incomes. In general, community service by HEIs in Uganda was considered to be important in terms of: 1) designing new products; 2) sharing of knowledge and skills; 3) solving community problems which contribution may not easily be quantified.

Designing new products

Institutions of higher learning generate products and ideas which, among other things, they sell or give out to the community thereby contributing to development. As one respondent revealed:

We have got a third component of this department called incubation center. The incubation center is like a hen lays an egg, incubates it, hatches it, looks after the chick ... This is what we do here. We have people who have good ideas, about value addition on their products. We seal them, we help to nurture their ideas up to a good level when they have reached commercial level and then we release them to go and have good business. We do all that with communities.

Another one echoed:

There is no doubt that universities come up with new products through interaction with communities. I think the challenge has remained at technology or innovation transfer to communities for use. For instance the car invented at Makerere [University], when will it be ever used? What mechanism is there to scale it up and start manufacturing such cars? Yes lecturers and student will design new programs but again they will remain irrelevant to Universities if they are not carefully transferred.

Product development was, however, noted to be on a small scale due to lack of resources, including a clear-cut policy for supporting transfer of such products to usage. In fact, low product development among HEIs in Uganda is one of the major shortcomings commonly quoted by the public.

Transfer of knowledge and skills

Majority perceive HEIs to be the source of information sharing especially with communities regarding for instance, survival, development and prosperity. Sharing of knowledge happens on different fronts such as when students and lecturers are doing research and publications, or through radio and television programs, through public debates and dialogues and so forth. For example, one respondent stated:

Units and colleges form one university. I can look at the Department of Music Dance and Drama; they are doing community service activities of sensitization through drama, they compose songs. Look at the Department of Food Science and Technology they are doing a lot of things. If you consider the institute of languages, they are doing a lot of things e.g. in translations, helping people such as traders...

Another respondent reported that:

At Uganda Management institute, we have contributed to public policy formulation through policy research and holding public debates and dialogues on certain policies, thereby providing alternative views. We have developed policy briefs and shared among academicians, practitioners and the public. This helps to clarify some policies and/ or understand policy positions...

Through such activities the HEIs transfer knowledge and skills to the wider community of practice.

The knowledge and skills shared by the HEIs with the communities directly or indirectly provide an input into the development process from different perspectives. In the process, the HEIs not only share knowledge and skills but also solve community problems.

Providing solutions to community problems

Through day-to-day work routines the HEIs solve some community problems. When University staff engages with students, with their neighborhoods they provide solutions to problems. This is a deliberate strategy for educationists to contribute to the community. The process involves identifying a problem and moving out to solving it. For example, a respondent revealed:

First of all, from the nutrition area, we have got projects which are targeting communities in terms of nutrition (you know malnutrition is a serious problem in this country). We look at child nutrition, especially the under-fives; now projects are targeting mothers (lactating mothers); then we have programs that are targeting the elderly. So, all those are in community programs. Then from the food science point of view we have several programs... For example, ... addressing the area of food safety, something to do with micro-toxins and afro-toxins which are poisons found in maize, groundnuts, dried cassava etc.

Another respondent suggested:

Institutions of higher learning should be to support research, and to establish the problems facing the communities and how these problems can be solved. Two, they can also be policy makers with government and parliamentarians because most of these institutions have got expertise to inform policy very well. So, that one can be something which is very good.

There is no doubt that providing solutions to immediate problems contribute to community development. This has been possible through the day to day interaction between the HEIs and the community.

Linkage between community service, research, teaching and learning in HEIs

One of the objectives of this study was concerned with establishing how community service connects to teaching, learning and research in HEIs in Uganda. Results show that 61% of the respondents used the research findings from the community service in their teaching. Seventy five (75%) of the respondents said that, that students appreciate local examples from research, besides being more informed as a result of conducting the research. It was also noted by majority of respondents (72%) that students understand better when lecturers use examples from the community and besides, when lecturers conduct research with the community, the students gain deeper understanding of the concepts. Community service is accepted as an avenue for practicum. Teaching staff utilize their community service experience to teach students basing on reality which is quite often informed by the research and work the lecturers do in the community. Similarly, students engaged in community service, for instance, through internship or field work placement gain knowledge and skills from the world of work. For instance, a respondent confirmed:

Actually, I think community service is a very positive thing. And, from my own assessment, I think it has made a difference in the way our students appreciate the experience from learning ... When students learn from practical experience, there is an immense difference this makes to the way they actually appreciate the knowledge they are getting from the university and how much they can actually use the time they have at the university to better themselves as future employees.

In addition, another respondent argued:

Community service has enriched teaching and learning. It has made teaching and learning more practical, more hands on. And also a chance for job opportunities; once these people come to the university from the community, then students learn about the available opportunities, they are offered trainee opportunities. Staff go with students to the community to places such as markets and hospitals to experience reality.

The current study established that community service is very good because it enables lecturers to teach practical courses better. Indeed, the teaching is better informed if the lecturer has something that comes from the real world of practice given that basically lecturers are not practitioners, but academics.

Community service is utilized in designing some courses with a focus on enhancing community well-being. The outreach programs of universities involve working with communities; disseminating our research findings; and experimenting with them, in so many areas. For instance, a respondent noted:

This department has two areas: one, we have a bachelor of science in human nutrition; and two, we have a Bachelor's Degree in Food Science and Technology that is at undergraduate level. And then at postgraduate level, we have a Master's of Applied Human Nutrition and a Master's in Food Science and Technology. In both of those programs, we have different activities where we interact with communities. Our students do their degree research projects in real life situations such as human nutrition or food preparation.

Since the students are sent to work in the communities, it is possible that students will have a more practical approach to issues and therefore be in better position to help the communities. In addition, as already indicated elsewhere in this paper, there are business incubators in Makerere University; for example where certain demonstrations concerning food preparation, packing and storage are made and the public is always welcome to emulate the practices at the university that are informed by research.

It should also be noted that community service is a source of new knowledge, it provides an opportunity for knowledge construction like in form of teaching materials and research reports needed by HEIs in Uganda. The recommendations in the research reports for both practice and further research are important for HEIs as potential new frontiers for new knowledge. It provides real first-hand empirical evidence relevant for learning. It is through knowledge construction and reconstruction that development models are developed and later implemented for the benefit of society.

It was further established that some research done by staff of HEIs has been disseminated in the community. In some cases, dissemination had been done physical while in others it was just through sending a research report to the community. Actually, one of the ways of research result dissemination was through the consultancy reports generated from consultancy services offered by staff to communities. The HEIs staff give such reports to the organizations or sponsors hoping that they (sponsors) are going to learn from the reports. For example, at

Makerere University, some of the university's research is disseminated through the national research dissemination workshop, organized annually by the Directorate of Graduate School of Makerere University. Normally, once in a year the university holds a very big workshop funded by Swedish International Development Agency where government officials, researchers and policy makers are invited. During the workshop, the university academics present their researches and innovations. Meanwhile, at Uganda Management Institute, research seminars and public policy dialogues are organized about 6-8 times a year to disseminate research reports.

In a nutshell, findings suggest that community service is intertwined with research and training at HEI, in such way that the three functions of universities are difficult to delineate. However, the visibility of community service is hampered by a number of challenges as highlighted below.

Emerging challenges to community service

The study reveals that in Uganda the challenges of community include; limitations in financial availability, strategy definition and data capture.

In almost all institutions studied there was a regular outcry of absence of a clear strategy in these institutions for advancing community service in spite of it being a requirement for promotion in some institutions. Many claimed that such strategies were not yet institutionalized in HEIs, and that is why there was limited guidance and documentation for it. In most institutions there were uncoordinated efforts in undertaking community service and most employees participated in community service through their own initiative. Community service was still haphazardly done, with no timetable and no strategy, although it was a requirement for staff promotion and career advancement. University staff do a lot of community service in form of consultancy assignments where they are paid by their clients on contract basis. If there was a clear-cut strategy, resources or an appropriate forum, community service would be more vigorous and helpful to both the communities and the HEIs in Uganda.

On the challenge of financial limitations, it was echoed that inadequate financial resources as a limiting factor in the growth and prosperity of community service. Inadequate funding was indeed a challenge that was echoed by most of the study respondents. The lack of resource for community service is compounded by general resource constraints experienced by most HEI. It was established that most departments in HEIs, were struggling to survive financially. In fact, funding of community service was a non-priority and was easily dropped by departmental management teams. At management level it was revealed, that there was no budget specifically for community service.

There was another challenge of inadequate capturing of data which seemed to have been riddled with absence of data on community service done by their staff. The institutions rely on staff-self reporting as and when the information is needed, say for promotional purposes. After such an ad hoc capture of community service data, there appear to be no classification or storage of such data.

Discussion of findings

This study set out to examine the linkage between the community service functions of higher institutions of learning with the socio-economic development of localities around these institutions in Uganda. The study comprised selected higher education institutions in Uganda. Although HEIs have traditionally embraced three functions namely: teaching, research, and community service, the third mission, (i.e. community service) has for long been treated as periphery or a 'distant cousin' to the more dominant roles of teaching and research. Yet, some scholars (e.g. Inman & Schuetze, 2010) have found a strong relationship between community services with improved local economic development. These scholars maintain that community service provides a strong potential resource for developing collaborative links with the wider world, which in the end translates into improved socio-economic development of any country. For this potential benefit UNESCO, (2009) found a renewed momentum of interest in the way HEIs interface with their communities. Similarly this study found out that HEIs in Uganda have undying interest in community service, though the community service function is not uniformly active across universities. The major purpose of undertaking community service is mainly for promotion purposes and some staff members of universities undertake community service to contribute in fulfilling their religious obligations and not necessarily for academic reasons.

This research explored the forms and strategies used by institutions in promoting the community service function. Several strategies including; internship, research, training, rewarding and other some administrative strategies were being used. The findings in this study mirror those of the previous studies, for example Inman and Schuetze (2010) who contend that rewards have often been attached to the third mission. Such rewards have been found to include; career enhancement, recognition and sometimes, financial rewards. However, according to this study, many institutions were not using the above mechanisms of rewarding those involved in community service. The major reward was in terms of promotions which come at the end of it all. This possibly explains why despite its "theoretical" importance, staff in higher education institutions are not eager to participate in community service. This study found that the mission is often treated as a "by the way", yet there is considerable agreement in the academic community that service-learning is a multi-tiered pedagogy that can be implemented at any level of education (Wade, 2000; HERANA (2010) and Roldan, et al., 2004). Although previous research (e.g. Bringle et al., 2006; Hall, 2010; Ntseane, 2010; and Mwaikokesya, 2010), has identified value to community service many higher education institutions have not attached a stronger value as a strategy to encourage staff to contribute toward socio-economic development. In accordance with previous studies the present results have demonstrated that there is need to aggressively create awareness of the importance of community service in HEIs in Uganda.

The contribution of community service to local socio-economic development was assessed and indeed the study established that community service by HEIs in Uganda contributes to; designing new products; sharing of knowledge and skills; and directly solving community problems. This is in line with other scholars' findings (such as Baldwin & Rudisill, 2002; Sleeter, 2000, and Preece 2011a, 2011b), who argue that community service promotes knowledge construction and mutual learning. The study found that designing new

products such as renewable energy, affordable sanitary pads, recycling waste paper, affordable fertilizers and so forth – all contributed to the promotion of community service. These findings are supported by the findings of Wade, (2000); HERANA (2010) and Roldan, et al. (2004) who found that sharing of knowledge and skills could go a long way in solving community problems. However, the study shows that a small percentage of 28% said that their involvement enabled communities to increase their incomes. By and large, the impact of community service in Uganda does not come out strongly. For instance while scholars like Roldan, Strage, and David (2004) said community services increased citizen engagement and created community responsibility among learners, this is not the case in Uganda. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to value attached to community service in the Ugandan context. The results of the study indicate that HEIs in Uganda considered community service to embrace situations that involved students' learning, lecturers' research and private consultancies.

In other words, community service was basically linked to research, consultancy work, internships and school practices that are believed to give back to these agencies or Higher Education Institutions. By implication, whereas university lecturers go out to do research and consultancy work and students go out to study, in the process they may identify areas beneficial to school curriculum, further research and collaborative learning. A possible explanation for these findings might be that as lecturers go out to work in community to advance individual professional and academic career, and also believe that they are contributing to community service. This is supported by the findings of this study where things such as Rotarians, founder members of development programs, development of partnerships and representatives on boards (e.g. church, mosque, schools etc.) earn more points during promotional exercise. However, in order for community service programs to be effective Harkavy (2004) recommends that the issues addressed in the experience must be meaningful and of consequence to the communities too. In addition, Preece's (2011) findings support these findings of this study and explain how the notion of partnership between HEIs and communities is evolving from the realization that community service promotes mutual learning gains.

As to whether HEIs research and teaching are linked to community service, community service that includes research and other kinds of participation is surely useful for teaching and learning. This study found out that community service is useful in knowledge construction and reconstruction as the communities analyze their understanding of social phenomenon. Experience from diverse settings enables communities to gain insights from HEIs and provides HEIs actors with opportunity to incorporate research findings into teaching (Baldwin & Rudisill, 2002; Sleeter, 2000). On the other hand, Oyewole (2010) recommends development of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa which should improve the quality education and relevance in HEIs.

Conclusions and implications

The link between community service of HEIs and local socio-economic development exist but is not deliberate. Apparently, there are no standardized activities, strategies or even guidelines to community service. As indicated in this report, the strategies include internship, role modelling, research, direct training and so forth. Community service seems to mean any activity a student or staff is involved in outside the gates of an HEI. However, these strategies

used by the institutions are generally disjointed and ad hoc in nature. No clear-cut strategies were established by this study. The lack of clear institutional strategy contributes to the limited practice and emphasis of community service in HEIs in Uganda.

Potential role of HEIs in improving the livelihoods of the community and overall national development is high. The contribution of community service to local socio-economic development was assessed and indeed the study established that community service by HEIs in Uganda inter alia contributes to: designing new products; sharing of knowledge and skills; and directly solving community problems. However, the impact of community service to local economies does not come out explicitly and is not intentional. While it is acknowledged that institutions can act as agents of change and positive transformation of communities, for community service to be meaningful it has to be consequential to communities too.

The link between HEIs research, teaching and learning to community service was widely described as real. The work of staff in communities provided them an opportunity to generate new learning resources such as research reports and recommendations needed in their teaching. Research reports also inform both practice and further research which benefit both the HEIs and the community.

Overall, it can be concluded that indeed community service contributes to local socio-economic development of localities in Uganda. It contributes to designing new products for the community; sharing knowledge and skills; and directly solving community problems. Community service is beneficial to universities and those that engage in it. The findings are similar to what Roldan, Strage and David (2004) attest that students learn the course content very well when they engage in the service-learning experiences that relate to their studies. Therefore, it is imperative that community service be promoted and streamlined in HEIs in Uganda.

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