

The GAAS Higher Education Project- Conception, Format and Lessons Learnt

by

Emerita Professor Takyiwaa Manuh
Project Director and Chair, Project Management
Committee

OUTLINE

- i) Introduction and Background- GAAS and its Mandate
- ii) The Ghana HE Context, HE Reforms and Policies
- iii) Key Challenges and Gaps in the HE Sector
- iv) Project Approach and Expected Outcomes
- v) Activities
- vi) Lessons and Challenges

INTRO AND BACKGROUND

GAAS and its mandate

Established by an Act of Parliament in 1959, essentially to provide thought leadership, make inputs into policy-making through research and evidence-based advice, convening and influence

Objects: promote the study, extension and dissemination of knowledge of the Arts and Sciences;
establishing and maintaining proper standards of endeavour in all fields in the arts and sciences;
recognize outstanding contributions to the advancement of the arts and sciences in Ghana
contribute actively to the advancement of Ghana and Africa in particular and the world in general by
examining and addressing issues of development

Membership of GAAS- scholars and experts in various fields including law, medicine, the natural and applied science and technology, engineering, political science, economics, higher education policy and practice, the humanities and the creative arts. Drawn predominantly from the universities, research institutes (CSIR, GAEC), judiciary/legal profession, medicine etc. Ghanaians based in Gh or the diaspora, honorary membership

How work: Convening function- public fora- lectures, symposia, conferences, publications, position papers- cf. recent and ongoing issues around illegal mining (galamsey) and environmental issues

Keen interest in education at all levels, especially at the level of higher education (HE);Chapter on Education

HE in Ghana

Conceptualized as a public good

Rapidly expanding sector, consisting of large public universities and several private universities, from the few HEIs (less than 10) until the early 1990s. (cf. the presentations in the next segment)

Policy orientations of govts and attitudes towards and relations with the universities (cf. URC)-

Cf. 1992 Constitution- Art. 25 (1) (c) – make education ‘equally accessible to all... and in particular by progressive introduction of HE..’ levels- access and equity

Demand pressures and liberalization of the sector- cf. enrolments

HE REFORMS AND POLICY CHANGES

Policies and reforms by gvt, and HEIS either in response to demands by stakeholders or own initiative. Studies also conducted on issues or the reforms

Improving accessibility:

Accreditation of private univs;

Conversion of polytechnics to technical univs

Expansion of public universities- (over?)

Diversification of revenue sources:

HE expenditure and pressures- 1997 Stakeholder Forum on Funding of HE- cf. The Akosombo Accord- cost-sharing- AFUF, RFUF; declining subventions

Establishment of the GETFUND- 2000; IGF

Improvements in governance and management

Regulatory landscape-Gvt: NCHE, NCTE, NAB, to GTEC; failed PUB

Institutional initiatives- cf. UG 2007 International Visitation Panel following a crisis at the univ, leading to major changes in virtually every aspect of the university's functioning; aspects adopted by other HEIs

The HE Sector- Key Issues and Challenges

- Rapid expansion of universities and growth in intake in the last two decades without requisite expansion or growth in infrastructure, leading to significant overcrowding in teaching and learning facilities;
- Unplanned and inadequate investment in infrastructure development;
- Ageing faculty and inadequate staff development;
- Poor learning outcomes because of the above, and leading to challenges with the employability of students;
- Poor research culture and the absence of research funding and infrastructure; and
- Increasingly weak governance at many public universities

KEY GAPS IDENTIFIED

- Absence of platform for independent persons and groups to reflect on the challenges of the HE sector on a regular and sustained basis
- No arrangement in place for providing a sounding board for the different stakeholders
- No regular reviews of current policies
- No or little effort to rely on independent research evidence to inform new policy considerations
- Cf. forums arranged/convened by government to consider a proposed reform- how independent is it, and what is the likelihood that dissenting opinions would be factored into the decision-making?

APPROACH

Based on the above, GAAS recognized an **opportunity** to use its established convening power to develop a platform for **evidence-gathering, information-sharing** and **consensus-building** for HE policy reforms in Ghana.

Evidence-gathering through:

- mapping exercises and reviews that will then form the basis of various convenings, to lead to information sharing with government and other stakeholders
- reviews of various initiatives under consideration by diff stakeholders
- development of well-researched think-pieces for consideration by diff stakeholders

Regular convenings with regular stakeholder to consider findings from analytical reviews and surveys on diff themes of interest to policy-makers and the general public

Ultimately GAAS seeks to offer recommendations for coherent and well-thought out policy processes that promote equity and sustainability in the HE sector

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- S-T- diversity of voices in the HE space, channeled through GAAS initially
- Platform for researchers and other stakeholders to engage on a regular basis
- Provide an opportunity for sharing relevant research outputs with a wider audience in a form that is comprehensible; in turn this should empower stakeholders in their engagements with policy and other institutional interventions
- L-T- emergence of a new culture of policy-making, where policy-makers rely on evidence from good research from GAAS and other stakeholders

How will know we have been successful?

- Willingness of govt to review current policies and other public interventions where there is a general consensus that those policies and interventions require review and amendment
- Emergence of new culture of meaningful consultation and reliance on evidence from research
- Greater recognition of GAAS' role as an independent broker in the new culture of consultation

ACTIVITIES

- Proposal submitted to CCNY on ‘Motivating Higher Education Reforms in Ghana- Towards Equity and Sustainability,’ over the period 2022-2024.
- Received funding for US \$ 116,000 to cover fees for consultants for the preparation of 7 Background Papers; very modest honoraria for reviewers; convening of 7 policy dialogues, publication of policy briefs, international conference (this one) and conference proceedings. Cf. BOG support for project support expenses
- We advertised calls for expressions of interest to prepare papers in the following 7 areas with specific TORs, based on the proposal submitted:
 - i) The Conversion of Polytechnics to Technical Universities*
 - ii) The Expansion of Public Universities and Effects on Equity, Quality, and Sustainability*
 - iii) Financing Higher Education and Implications for Equity and Sustainability*
 - iv) Making the GETFUND Fit for Purpose*
 - v) Managing Public Universities in a New Age*
 - vi) State-University Relations in Ghana*
 - vii) The Development and Growth of Private Universities in Ghana*

Activities Cont'd

- Following the submission of background papers, which were subject to internal and external review, we convened policy dialogues where the papers were presented and reviewed, followed by a panel discussion with relevant experts and interested parties and an open forum.
- Subsequently, policy briefs prepared by the consultants, were issued by GAAS
- Closing Conference

Lessons Learnt and Challenges-I

- HE sector in Ghana and its capacities and challenges, including within GAAS
- Limited critical studies on HE by locally-based scholars; focus of existing institutes of education often on basic and secondary education- limits capacity for introspection and reform
- Cf. HE leaders and administrators often involved in fire-fighting and day-to-day administration
- Limited uptake and interest in responding to EOIs; others expected to be hand-picked or invited (cf. bureaucratic positions of internal auditors who then wanted 3 persons to be invited to prepare Policy Briefs based on advertised and submitted Background Papers

Lessons Learnt and Challenges- II

- Stakeholder participation- cf. proposal and reality (MOE, GTEC, VCG, UTAG, FWSC, NUGS, UTAG, TETAG, Parliamentary Select Cttee on Education, reps from public and private HEIs, Ghana Employers' Assn, AGI, banks, incl the BOG, the media).
- Desk studies, rather than surveys and interviews
- Data issues- accessibility and currency; gate-keeping
- Funding constraints- no overheads to GAAS, no honoraria to project director, steering or management committees-cf. honorary nature of GAAS

Lessons Learnt and Challenges- III

Organizing the Closing Conference-

- Expected regional participation-Nigeria, Togo, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia (+ Kenya- cf. roles played in reviews)
- Call for papers- limited uptake, time extension, quality of abstracts. Criteria applied (3 out of 4 or 5 expected parallel sessions)
- Missing outputs- Think-pieces and Op-Eds- uptake
- Media coverage and reporting- few critical pieces

Conclusion

- Lots of work to do
- Unfinished business in terms of expected outcomes and success criteria- engaging particular stakeholders
- Collaborations and partnerships needed internally, within public and private universities and with GAAS
- Within the sub-region and further afield
- What lessons can be shared?
- Organizing our own coalitions and partnerships for a renewed HE sector in Ghana and Africa
- Longer-term and more generous funding to enable GAAS play its brokerage role