

# Institutional Commitment to Community Engagement: A Case Study of Makerere University

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## Abstract

Although the earliest medieval universities began as teaching-only institutions, the university as an institution has since experienced revolutions in the way its functions are conceived. Currently, the university embraces three functions: teaching, research and community engagement. Although the teaching and research functions of the university are much more established than its third function, the importance of community engagement is acknowledged in the academic literature and, to varying degrees, by governments, higher education agencies and universities. For example, a review of the mission statements of Ugandan universities shows that, besides teaching and research, the universities aspire to contribute to the socio-economic transformation of society. Unfortunately, such assertions reveal little about the actual commitment of the universities to community engagement because there is a dearth of literature about community engagement at African universities. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to examine the institutional commitment of Ugandan universities to community engagement. However, the discussion will focus on a single university, Makerere University. Data was generated through document reviews and qualitative semi-structured interviews. The review shows that the university (1) recognises community engagement as one of its core functions; (2) has integrated some aspects of community engagement into its curriculum and policies; and (3) has organisational structures and personnel to organise and provide community related activities and services. Nonetheless, community related activities remain largely unsupported and the contributions of the faculty to community engagement are insufficiently rewarded.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Institutional commitment, Community engagement, Uganda, Makerere University

## 1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the University of Bologna in 1088, the university as an institution has evolved and so have its functions. Although the earliest medieval universities were envisioned as teaching-only institutions—places for convenient interaction between the *master and scholar* (Clark, 1983; Perkins, 1972)—the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mainly through the influence of the Humboldtian university ideal, saw the emergence of research as a second function of the university. Later, the enactment of the Morrill Act in 1862 and the founding of land grant universities and colleges in the United States of America broadened the mission of the university to embrace community engagement (CE) (Duderstadt, 1999). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CE gained further importance when six civic universities were established in six provincial cities in England—Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol and Manchester—to promote scientific research, practical professional training, more open access and regional development (Barnes, 1996). In Africa, the importance of CE was emphasised in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when higher education (HE) commentators and politicians urged African higher education institutions (HEIs) to stop being elitist and removed from the external communities but to instead serve as key instruments for national development (Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996). The importance of CE was further stressed at the 1962 UNESCO conference on the *Development of Higher Education in Africa* when African HEIs were advised to be “in close and constant touch with society” (UNESCO, 1963, p. 11). Clearly, the idea that in addition to advancing the frontiers of knowledge—through teaching and research—universities should share knowledge with, and learn from, their communities, is not entirely new (Schuetze, 2010).

Currently, the literature (i.e. Lazarus, Erasmus, Hendricks, Nduna, & Slamet, 2008; Preece, Ntseane, Modise, & Osborne, 2012) shows that numerous universities in Africa emphasise the importance of CE. For example, a review of the mission statements of some universities in Uganda reveals that, besides teaching and research, the universities seek to support the socioeconomic transformation and sustainable development of external communities, especially vulnerable, poor and marginalised groups. Unfortunately, assertions about the importance of CE do not reveal much about the commitment of the universities to CE because there is a dearth of literature about CE in African HEIs in general and Ugandan universities in particular. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the institutional commitment of Ugandan universities to CE.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Community Engagement

In the HE vocabulary, the term ‘community engagement’ denotes collaborations between HEIs and external communities, such as government agencies, industry, nongovernmental organisations and schools, for the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2010). Therefore, unlike outreach, which emphasises a one-way process of transferring knowledge and technology (Kellogg Commission, 1999) from universities to external communities, CE underscores partnerships and recognises that external communities also have knowledge and other resources from which universities can benefit. However, herein, the term ‘community engagement’ is used to denote both two-way and one-way interactions between universities and external communities that take place on- and off-campus and occur in various forms such as continuing education, consultancy, contract research and collaborative research.

### 2.2 Institutional Commitment

According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online, the term ‘commitment’, denotes “a willingness to give your time and energy to something that you believe in, or a promise or firm decision to do something” (Commitment, n.d). Fox, Goldberg, Gore and Bärnighausen (2011) categorise commitment into three broad types—expressed commitment, institutional commitment and budgetary commitment—that focus on different aspects. However, this paper will focus on, and utilise, the term ‘institutional commitment’ to embrace all of the above-mentioned categories of commitment because one cannot capture the full picture of the commitment of a university to CE by focusing on only one aspect of commitment.

### 2.3 Institutional Commitment to Community Engagement

Literature concerning CE shows that the process of integrating CE into the norms, values and structures of a university—that is, transforming CE into a widespread and meaningful aspect of “faculty work, student life, institutional identity, and external partnerships” (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000, p. 282)—calls for institutional commitment. Vidal Nye, Walker, Manjarrez and Romanik (2002), for instance, identify nine institutional aspects—campus mission, leadership, policy, publicity, budget allocations, broad staff understanding of and support for CE, infrastructure, faculty roles and rewards, and integration of engagement activities into other aspects of institutional work—that reveal the institutionalisation of CE. Therefore, although the process of transforming CE into a core function would vary from one university to another, it usually “entails a redefinition of the university culture, includes curricular change, involves and empowers faculty and staff, and necessitates new institutional infrastructure and accountability mechanisms” (Brukardt, Percy, & Zimpher, 2006, p. 10). In short, it necessitates institutional commitment.

A review of the literature concerning CE (i.e. Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011; Hollander, Saltmarsh, & Zlotkowski, 2002; Weerts, 2005) reveals that the institutional commitment of any university to CE is framed and evinced by organisational factors—policies, structures and programmes—related to that institution. For example, Holland (1997), in her study *Analyzing institutional commitment to service: A model of key organizational factors*, proposed and utilised a matrix of institutional commitment to service (see Table 1) to explain the interrelationship of levels of commitment with key organisational factors. The matrix was developed to help HEIs assess their current conditions regarding service learning, monitor progress toward desired levels of implementation and understand the extent to which service is an integral component of their missions (Holland, 1997). The X-axis of the matrix outlines seven organisational factors—mission; promotion, tenure and hiring practices; organisation structure; student involvement; faculty involvement; community involvement and campus publications—that frame and reflect an institution’s service-related activities and commitment to service. The Y-axis shows four levels of commitment: low relevance, medium relevance, high relevance and full integration (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Holland, 1997). Thus, for each organisational factor, the matrix outlines indicators of four levels of institutional commitment.

Table 1. Levels of commitment to service characterized by key organizational factors

<b>Organizational Factor</b>	<b>Level One: Low Relevance</b>	<b>Level Two: Medium Relevance</b>	<b>Level Three: High Relevance</b>	<b>Level Four: Full Integration</b>
<b>Mission</b>	No mention or undefined rhetorical reference	Engagement and/or outreach are part of what we do as educated citizens	Engagement and/or outreach are aspects of our academic agenda	Engagement and outreach are central and defining characteristics of the institution
<b>Promotion, Tenure, and Hire Practices</b>	Service to campus committees or to discipline – engagement confused with the traditional view of service	Community engagement and outreach mentioned; may count in certain cases	Formal guidelines for defining, documenting and rewarding engagement and outreach	Community based research and teaching are key criteria for hiring and rewards
<b>Organization Structure</b>	No units that focus of engagement, outreach or volunteerism	Units may exist to foster volunteerism	Centers and institutes are organized to provide engagement and outreach	Flexible unit(s) with base funding exist and support engagement and outreach; widespread faculty and student participation
<b>Student Involvement</b>	Part of extracurricular student activities	Organized institutional support for volunteer work and community leadership development	Opportunity for extra credit, internships, practicum experiences	Service-learning courses integrated in curriculum; student involvement in community based research
<b>Faculty Involvement</b>	Traditional service defined as campus duties; committees; disciplinary focus – little support for interdisciplinary work	Pro bono consulting; community volunteerism acknowledged	Tenured/senior faculty pursue community-based research; some teach service-learning courses	Community-based research and service learning a high priority, intentionally integrated across disciplines; support for interdisciplinary and collaborative work
<b>Community involvement</b>	Random, symbolic or limited individual or group involvement	Community representation on advisory boards for departments or schools	Community influences campus through active partnership, teaching, and participation in service-learning	Community involved in defining, designing, conducting and evaluating research and service learning; sustained partnership
<b>Campus Publications</b>	Engagement and outreach not an emphasis	Stories of student volunteerism or alumni as good citizens; partnerships are grant dependent	Emphasis on economic impact of the institution, links between community and campus centers, institutes	Engagement and outreach are central elements; focus of fundraising goals

**Source:** Holland (1997, p.33).

Although the comprehensiveness and relevance of the matrix of institutional commitment to service have both been validated (see Furco & Miller, 2009; Mohrman, 2010; Weerts, 2005), studies—for example, Beere et al. (2011), Brukardt et al. (2006), Mohrman (2010), and Wergin (2006)—also emphasise the importance of organisational leadership and support for CE. Wergin (2006), for example, observes that transformative change towards CE

necessitates a charismatic leader; administrative support from above and below a galvanizing idea that challenges the status quo but also fits the institutional tradition and culture, an open and inclusive process, cultivation of “partners” rather than “markets” and resources for long-term commitment. Correspondingly, Lazarus et al. (2008) observe that the process of integrating CE at various universities in South Africa was influenced by several enabling mechanisms, principally the appointment of an executive person responsible for CE; establishment of an office for CE; appointment of senior academic and support staff responsible for CE; establishment of institution-wide and faculty-based committees for CE; and inclusion of CE in staff promotion and reward systems. Likewise, Brukardt et al. (2006), observe:

Institutionalizing engagement requires the leadership of the president or chancellor, provost, and academic leadership team. . . . It is not sufficient, of course, but it is essential because these administrative leaders are the voice for the campus and can use their positions to rally support, connect to the community, and identify engagement as an institutional priority” (p.18).

The above discussion reveals that the true test of institutional commitment to CE is the presence, absence and coherence of the key aspects of institutional infrastructure, policy, communication, participation (Holland, 1997) and support of a university.

### **3. Research Design**

#### *3.1 Research Methodology*

Although all Ugandan universities to some degree underscore the importance of CE, it is Makerere University (MUK) that openly emphasises CE as a core function. Accordingly, this paper will utilise a case study approach and the analysis that is presented herein will focus on a single university, MUK. Nonetheless, the arguments and conclusions presented are envisaged to be relevant to other universities because the researcher will utilise not only the findings and observations regarding MUK but also the findings and conclusions of previous studies.

#### *3.2 Description of the Case*

MUK is the oldest and largest university in Uganda. It was founded in 1922 as a technical college. It was transformed into a university college in 1949, a constituent college of the University of East Africa in 1963 and a fully-fledged university in 1970 (Ajayi et al., 1996; Musisi & Muwanga, 2003). It consists of nine constituent colleges and one school. It has 3 university campuses, 36,627 students (34,635 undergraduates and 1,992 postgraduates), 1,380 fulltime academic staff, 142 undergraduate programmes and 131 postgraduate programmes (MUK, 2014a). It aspires to be “the leading institution for academic excellence and innovations in Africa” (MUK, 2008, p.12).

#### *3.3 Generation of Data*

The data used herein was generated using two methods:

1. Review of key documents—for example, the strategic plan (2008/09–2018/19), the policy on the appointment and promotion of academic staff and annual reports—of the university; and
2. Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with 3 college principals, 2 deputy college principals, 16 other members of the academic staff, 1 university administrator, 1 official from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and 1 representative from an external organisation. The interviews were conducted in March and April 2012 and lasted between 40 minutes and 90 minutes each.

The interviewees were selected purposively (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) based on the belief that they would provide rich information. The decision to interview the principals of university colleges, for example, was based on the belief that their positions would enable them to contribute to the interviews from well-informed viewpoints. In fact, the college principals serve as heads of the Establishment and Appointments Committees (the sub-committees of the faculty appointments board of the university that appoints academic staff below the rank of university lecturer); therefore, they were expected to be knowledgeable about how the university appoints, evaluates and promotes its academic staff. As the university comprises nine colleges and one school that represent different academic disciplines, the interviewees were selected from five colleges (see Table 2) that represent four conceptually different categories of disciplines: hard-pure, hard-applied, soft-pure and soft-applied (Biglan, 1973). The aim was to capture CE related issues that are common to all disciplines.

Table 2. Selected colleges at Makerere University

<b>Task area</b>	<b>Hard</b>	<b>Soft</b>
<b>Pure</b>	College of Natural Sciences	College of Humanities and Social Sciences
<b>Applied</b>	College of Engineering, Design, Art, and Technology College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	College of Education and External Studies

**Source:** Mugabi, 2014 (based on the classification of academic disciplines by Biglan, 1973).

### 3.4 Data Analysis and Conceptual Framework

Since the matrix of commitment to service (Holland, 1997) was developed to help HEIs assess their performance in service learning—by comparing their goals with their actions—it can serve as a useful diagnostic tool for describing and interpreting the institutional commitment of any university to CE. Therefore, it was expected to be a useful tool in “characterizing the overall commitment [of MUK to CE], and . . . identifying potential facilitators and obstacles to sustained or expanded engagement” (Holland, 1997, p.38). It was also envisaged to enable the researcher to analyse and present detailed information about the policies, structures and practices of the university.

However, to analyse the institutional commitment of MUK to CE, the researcher utilised a slightly modified version of Holland’s (1997) matrix of institutional commitment to service. The collected data was coded and analysed thematically. The analytic process focused on the presence, absence and coherence of eight organisational factors: mission; faculty hiring and promotion policy and practices; organisational structure, faculty involvement and commitment; student involvement; community involvement; campus publications and communications; and leadership and support.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

As mentioned in Section 3, the analysis of the institutional commitment of MUK to CE focused on eight organisational aspects of the university. Accordingly, this section presents the findings of the study.

### 4.1 Mission

Although the term ‘mission’ can be interpreted in different ways, mission statements are regarded as important tools that organisations can use to form and convey their identities, purpose, values and direction to their stakeholders (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Bartkus, Glassman, & McAfee, 2000). Thus, according to Dominick (1990), “A college or university that is clear about its mission can more easily choose among competing goals and can more readily establish its priorities than can one that is uncertain about its mission” (as cited in Beere et al., 2011, p. 51). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the literature concerning CE (i.e. Beere et al., 2011; Brukaradt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2006; Holland, 1997) considers university missions to be key indicators of institutional commitment to CE.

Although the link between mission and institutional commitment to CE is as complex as most mission statements, the analysis of the mission of MUK focused on whether CE is part of, and/or central to, the mission and academic agenda of the university. To begin with, the mission of MUK is “To provide innovative teaching, learning, research and services responsive to national and global needs” (MUK, 2008, p.12). Thus, in terms of inclusion and clarity of definition, the mission statement does not spell out the term ‘engagement’; instead, it uses the conceptually deficient, unstable and incoherent term ‘service’ (Abukari, 2010). By using such an ambiguous term, ‘service’, in its mission statement, MUK fails to affirm its commitment to CE.

However, as Brukaradt, Holland, Percy and Zimpher (2006) observe, having an engaged mission necessitates embracing CE as a defining feature of the mission statement and the other aspects of a university. That is, CE should be reflected in not only statements but also actions. Therefore, to ascertain the commitment of a university to CE, one must analyse not only the stated mission but also the institutional attributes—policies, organisational structures and practices—that together constitute the mission of that university. Accordingly, although the mission statement of MUK is quite vague about CE, the university’s strategic plan (2008/09–2018/19) states that the university values and is committed to CE. The plan, for example, embraces partnerships and networking as a core function of the university and outlines its goals, objectives, strategies and key performance indicators (MUK, 2008).

#### 4.2 Faculty Hiring and Promotion Policy and Practices

According to Ward (2005):

No matter how clear the mission statement or presidential proclamation to connect the campus with the community [is], if efforts to the public good are unrewarded or seen by faculty as distracting from the pursuit of the kinds of things that count on a dossier, either those public service efforts will be set aside, or the faculty member will be (p. 228).

For that reason, promoting CE requires universities to align CE with their faculty recruitment, promotion and reward structures. At MUK, faculty hiring and promotion processes are guided by the Policy on Appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff, which offers guidelines for the appointment and promotion of different groups of the academic staff—clinical scholars, research staff, academic library staff and general academic staff—at the university. A review of the policy revealed that, besides the academic and professional qualifications, publications, teaching experience, research, administrative responsibilities and academic tasks, the innovations and contributions of the academic staff to external communities should be considered during the appointment and promotion processes (MUK, 2009). In fact, all appointments to senior academic ranks—senior lecturer, associate professor and professor—consider, among other requirements, the contributions of the academic staff to society.

Similarly, all promotions to senior academic ranks—starting at the rank of a lecturer (in the ordinary track system), senior lecturer (fast track system), research associate professor (research staff) and librarian archivist (library staff)—consider the contributions of the academic staff to external communities (MUK, 2009). This assertion was corroborated by the interview data. Respondent 8, for example, intimated:

Definitely, it is part of the university-wide practice that every application and every promotion is graded and part of the points goes to someone's contribution to service (Personal communication, March 20, 2012).

Although the interviewees concurred that MUK values CE and rewards the contributions of its academic staff to external communities, they also intimated that the appointment and promotion policy and practices at the university undervalue the involvement of the academic staff in community related activities. Accordingly, the question is not whether the appointments and promotions policy of MUK recognises and rewards the contributions of the academic staff to the external communities, but rather whether the rewards are appropriate. A review of the policy shows that all promotion tracks at the university—the ordinary track and the fast track—emphasise teaching- and research-related achievements. Table 3, for example, shows the distribution of points under the ordinary track system.

Table 3. The points-based faculty evaluation system at MUK

Defined Parameters	Maximum Points Allocated
Academic and professional qualifications	20
Publications	25
Teaching ability and experience	13
Research	8
Supervision of students' research	10
Other academic activities	8
Service to the university and the community	5
Membership of professional bodies	2
Conduct	5
Professional practice/outreach services	2
Innovation (e.g., patent)	2

**Source:** Mugabi, 2014 (based on data from MUK, 2009, pp. 17–18).

The requirements for, and the allocation of points in, the appointment and promotion of research staff and academic library staff are not very different from the ones presented in Table 3; they also underscore the importance of research and teaching. Besides the inadequacy of the rewards, the university does not actually spell out what constitutes contributions to external communities; thus, the process of evaluating the contributions of the academic staff to external communities is unclear.

### 4.3 Organisational Structure

The literature (i.e. Clark, 1998; Hölttä & Pulliainen, 1996) shows that organisational structures such as technology transfer offices, incubators and technology parks are essential for CE because they serve as ‘entry points’ through which communities can obtain information about opportunities for collaboration with a university and vice versa (Lynton & Elman, 1987). By coordinating CE related activities and, therefore, providing information about opportunities for CE, such organisational structures help to transform CE into a core function of a university. In addition, because CE related activities, especially collaborations with regional industrial partners, tend to produce value contradictions within universities, the best policy approach would be to create specialised units to help universities to interact with environmental subsystems and to “separate external collaboration from the basic academic activities” (Hölttä & Pulliainen, 1996, p. 122). In this regard, MUK has numerous centres and multi-disciplinary institutes (see Table 4) that organise CE related activities and provide outreach services to external communities. The centres are spread across almost all the colleges and, therefore, they are the most widespread specialised organisational structures through which CE can be realised.

Table 4. Organisational structures for community engagement at MUK

Organisational structure	Function
Food Technology and Business Incubation Centre	To promote innovative research, provide practical solutions, and support the development of food and food-related enterprises
Technology Development and Transfer Centre	To develop, apply, and transfer innovative research and technology to promote development
Centre for Language and Communications Services	To provides CE and consultancy services
Centre for Lifelong Learning	To provide short, non-credit bearing extramural courses
Makerere Institute of Social Research	A multidisciplinary research and teaching institute that offers postgraduate education, conducts multidisciplinary research and organises public dialogues
Human Rights and Peace Centre	To promote teaching, research and activism for human rights and peace issues

**Source:** Mugabi (2014).

In addition to the centres and institutes, MUK has an administrative unit—Makerere University Private Sector Forum (MUPSF)—that is mandated to foster partnerships between MUK and the public and private sectors. Despite their funding challenges, these units have the potential to promote CE at the university. Nonetheless, CE is not restricted to the abovementioned units; academic units such as schools and departments are also involved in some community related activities.

### 4.4 Faculty Involvement and Commitment

Since universities are, as Wanat (2006) observes, “institutions that completely depend on and are defined by their human capital” (p. 214), the success of community-oriented teaching and/or research activities requires the involvement and commitment of the academic staff. At MUK, for example, most of the CE activities, such as continuing education, contract research and consultancy, rely on the expertise and involvement of the faculty. Therefore, despite the importance of good appointments and promotions policy and practices and organisational structures, CE cannot flourish without the active involvement and commitment of the faculty. The involvement and the commitment of the faculty were examined in terms of the responsibilities of the faculty, the existence or absence of support structures for faculty members and the attitudes of the faculty towards CE.

In terms of responsibilities, the policy on the appointment and promotion of the academic staff states that the academic staff have four tasks: teaching, research, service and leadership in the university and professional service including providing service to the community (MUK, 2009). This assertion was confirmed by the interviewees. As a member of the academic staff, respondent 24, for example, noted:

I am supposed to teach, to do research, to provide consultancy services to the community, which we call community outreach, and to involve in other university activities like sitting on committees—research committees and appointments’ committees (Personal communication, March 28, 2012).

Therefore, service to the community is one of the requirements for the appointment and promotion of academic staff to senior academic positions at the university. With regard to the availability of support for the academic staff, MUK

does not have a structured system—apart from the appointment and promotion policy and the aforementioned organisational structures—to support the involvement of the academic staff in CE. Notwithstanding this lack of official support, the interviewees revealed that some informal support mechanisms sometimes exist at the departmental level. Some of the interviewees intimated that, at times, heads of departments permit the academic staff to go and carry out community related activities. Other interviewees also noted that, sometimes, when the academic staff want to participate in community related activities, they consult their heads of departments, who then allocate their teaching tasks to their colleagues. Thus, apart from their participation in field attachment—a field-based practical training for all undergraduate students—that is expected and supported, the involvement of the academic staff in CE is predominantly personal, less structured, sporadically supported and poorly rewarded. Nonetheless, it is encouraged, expected and valued.

Regarding the attitudes of the academic staff to CE, the general feeling among the interviewees was that CE is an important function because it enables the university to interact with, share knowledge with and learn from external communities. Therefore, the main issue regarding the involvement and commitment of the academic staff is the insufficiency of institutional support.

#### *4.5 Student Involvement*

As students usually constitute the largest proportion of the internal communities of universities and have diverse backgrounds, they can easily interact and share knowledge with, and learn from, many external communities, particularly those that cannot engage directly with the universities. At MUK, the formal involvement of students in community related activities occurs through field attachment and, at times, field-based learning. That is, learning activities, such as field trips and camps, which take students to external communities and allow them to observe, experience and understand better how phenomena in the wider environment function (Scott, Fuller, & Gaskin, 2006). The interactions involved in field attachment and field-based learning connect the students' learning activities and experiences with external communities and, consequently enable the students to develop subject-specific and generalist skills. However, unlike field attachment, which is rewarded and compulsory for all undergraduate students and, therefore, an essential part of the undergraduate curricula, few academic programmes practice field-based learning. Besides field attachment and field-based learning, some students participate in college open days and exhibitions where they, at times, display their innovations.

Informally, the students—through various student associations—engage with, and organise voluntary activities for, external communities such as secondary schools and local communities. Although the university—through the office of the Dean of Students—allows students to form associations and to offer volunteer services, it neither rewards nor financially supports the involvement of students in CE. Therefore, the involvement of students in community related activities is largely unrewarded, undocumented and unstructured.

#### *4.6 Community Involvement*

Although the involvement of external communities in the academic, administrative and other affairs of universities, at times, serves a ceremonial role, it also facilitates the exchange of knowledge between universities and external communities, enables universities to mobilise external funding and enriches the learning experiences of students. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that MUK recognises the importance of the involvement of external communities in its academic activities and decision-making processes.

First, the university has created organisational structures and policies—for example, the guidelines for field attachment (MUK, 2011)—that recognise the potential benefits of CE to the university and that therefore involve and seek to enhance the involvement of external communities in the activities of the university. The guidelines for field attachment, for example, emphasise that field attachment should link and/or strengthen the linkages between the university and its external partners. In this regard, the guidelines for field attachment outline tasks that the external partners should perform (MUK, 2011). The interview data revealed that during field attachment, the university assigns students field supervisors—from places or organisations where the students carry out field attachment—who work with the students, assess their daily progress and write assessment reports. In addition to their involvement in the supervision and assessment of students' field attachment, the external communities, mainly company employees, occasionally co-supervise or appraise students' research theses, especially when such research concerns their organisations.

Second, MUK involves external communities in its decision-making processes. The membership of the University Council—the highest decision-making organ of the university—and the University Senate includes, among others, representatives of certain external communities, for example, the Ministry of Education and Sports and the district



where the university is located. In addition, the board of directors of the MUPSF includes members from the public and private sectors. In fact, in 2006, MUK bestowed honorary professorships on four people from the public and private sectors in recognition of their contributions to the country. The idea was that the honorary professors would mobilise resources for the university, enhance the involvement of the public and private sectors in the affairs of the university and enable the university to make appropriate responses to the needs of society.

Third, the interview data revealed that the university involves some members of external communities in its curriculum development and review processes. Although no documentary evidence could be found to verify this assertion, the university, at times—for example, in 2004, 2009 and 2012—holds consultative conferences during which it shares information with, and involves, external stakeholders in its decision-making processes (MUK, 2013). Unfortunately, the level of meaningful involvement is minimal.

#### *4.7 Campus Publications and Communication*

Campus publications and communication help universities to inform, and create awareness among, the internal and external communities about CE. In this regard, MUK has developed a communications system to promote the flow of information within the university and between the university and external communities. First, the university's publications—for example, its annual reports, the strategic plan (2008/09–2018/19) and the guidelines for field attachment (MUK, 2011)—emphasise CE as a third and core function of the university. The annual report (2013), for example, describes in detail the contributions of the university to external communities, specifically community related activities and projects that were organised and carried out by each university college in 2013. The annual report also outlines the existing organisational structures, existing partnerships between MUK and external organisations and members of the academic staff who received awards in honour of their contributions to research and the socioeconomic transformation of Uganda (MUK, 2014b). Second, the university colleges produce annual reports, quarterly and/or monthly newsletters, handbooks and/or brochures—for example, the *Covabian* and the *Innovations Catalogue*—that provide information about different aspects of the colleges. Notwithstanding their potential to inform the internal and external communities of the university about CE, campus publications and communications at MUK rarely demonstrate consistent support for CE.

#### *4.8 Leadership and Support*

The literature concerning CE (i.e. Beere et al., 2012; Brukardt et al., 2006; Mohrman, 2010) shows that for CE efforts to succeed, they must be supported by university leaders. “In their roles as institutional innovators, motivators, and shock absorbers,” Wanat (2006) stresses, “[university leaders] are expected to change the climate, encourage the faculty, and find the resources needed to make engagement happen” (p. 221). Organisational leadership and support, then, involve the presence of sustained administrative support at all levels, adequate staffing and communication, an appropriate organisational infrastructure and financial support, among other organisational features (Beere et al., 2012; Brukardt et al., 2006; Mohrman, 2010).

With regard to MUK, the interview data revealed that the interviewed college principals were quite knowledgeable and had positive attitudes towards CE. However, since positive attitudes alone cannot promote and/or remove barriers to sustainable CE, the question, then, is whether the university has adequate mechanisms to promote CE. As mentioned earlier, MUK has a number of policies and plans—for example, the guidelines for field attachment, the strategic plan and the policy on the appointment and promotion of academic staff—that underscore the importance of, and thus support, CE. The university also has organisational structures and employees that offer and coordinate community related services. In essence, the leadership of the university recognises the importance of, and is quite committed to promoting, CE. In terms of financial support, the data revealed that the university finances field attachment and, sometimes, field-based learning. However, funding for other community related activities is rather inadequate, unsustainable, complicated to access and, most often, non-existent.

### **5. Summary and Observations**

The review of the key indicators of institutional commitment to CE—mission; hiring and promotion policy and practices; organisational structure; faculty involvement and commitment; student involvement; community involvement; campus publications and communication; and leadership and support—revealed that MUK has some policies, structures, programmes and customs that accentuate, coordinate and/or support CE. In terms of mission, the university acknowledges CE (partnerships and networking) as one of its core functions. With regard to organisational structures, the university has specialised and multidisciplinary units and personnel that coordinate and provide community related activities and services. In addition, the university has incorporated some aspects of CE into its budget, the roles of the academic staff, the undergraduate programmes and the policy on the appointment and

promotion of academic staff. The university also supports the involvement of academic staff and students in some CE activities and involves some members of the external communities in its decision-making processes.

The review also showed that the focus of CE at MUK is shifting from unidirectional engagement—looking at external communities as “pockets of need, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise” (Tagoe, 2012, p. 179)—to bidirectional engagement—acknowledging that the external communities command knowledge bases from which the university can learn (MUK, 2008). Therefore, although CE practices at MUK might not be as entrenched as they are at American land grant universities and European technical universities and polytechnic-type institutions (Benneworth, Conway, Charles, Humphrey, & Younger, 2009), the university recognises CE as a core aspect of its mission. However, this should not blind us to the fact that CE at MUK is still vaguely defined, poorly evaluated and insufficiently funded and that numerous community oriented activities and projects are unsupported, unrewarded, unrecorded, and rely on the commitment and involvement of individuals.

Furthermore, the review reveals that although the success of CE at any university requires the presence of the key organisational factors discussed in Section 4, efforts to examine the institutional commitment of any university to CE should consider these organisational factors in their entirety lest we mistake strategic responses by universities for deliberate efforts to promote CE. In addition, although the institutionalisation of CE necessitates the creation of organisational structures—for example, knowledge transfer offices and continuing education centres—MUK as well as other Ugandan universities should avoid creating a silo system that restricts CE to specialised units. Instead, the universities should incorporate CE into their teaching and research activities and encourage interactions between the specialised units and the traditional academic units—for example, schools, faculties and departments. In short, CE should pervade all the structures and activities of the universities (Mugabi, 2014).

Lastly, much as the institutionalisation of CE at MUK and at other Ugandan universities necessitates the institutional commitment of the universities, there is a need for government support towards promoting CE and CE related activities at the universities. This could be achieved by providing special funding and policy guidelines to support selected projects and activities as well as to guide decision-making at HEIs. A review of the relevant policy literature—for example, the National Development Plan, 2010/11–2014/15 and the National Science, Technology and Innovation Plan, 2012/2013–2017/2018—reveals that the government emphasises the potential contributions of HE and HEIs to socioeconomic development. However, studies such as that by Cloete, Bailey, Bunting and Maassen (2011) reveal that there is a lack of consistency between national and institutional policies regarding the expected role of HEIs in socioeconomic development. Therefore, having clear national policies and focused funding mechanisms would ensure that a comprehensible and shared national agenda (rather than similar forms of CE) could be followed by all HEIs in ways that mirror their missions and priorities (Mugabi, 2014).

## **6. Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

Marshall and Rossman (1999) observe that there is no perfectly designed study. Accordingly, this study is not exceptional; it has its own limitations. First, by focusing on the academic and administrative staff and two representatives of external communities, the study failed to capture the views of students who can play an instrumental role in promoting CE. Second, the assessment of the institutional commitment of MUK to CE based on the presence or absence of eight key organisational factors is not without drawbacks; although the presence of these factors signals commitment, the absence of some of the factors does not necessarily signal an absence of commitment (Heaver, 2005). Holland (1997) acknowledges that most HEIs exhibit traits of all the levels of commitment, and thus determining the actual level of commitment is not just difficult but almost impossible.

Third, because the paper focuses largely on the formal aspects of the university—organisational structures, policies and practices—the analysis did not pay much attention to the informal ways in which the university, especially the academic staff, engages with external communities. However, the literature (i.e. Cloete et al., 2011; Lazarus et al., 2008; Preece et al. 2012; Wangenge-Ouma & Fongwa, 2012) demonstrates that CE related projects at most African universities rely on individuals and/or groups of individuals. Unfortunately, such projects, as Mohrman (2010) observes, tend to die out when such individuals are no longer involved or available. Therefore, as much as it is important to pay attention to projects or programmes that are initiated and coordinated by individuals—staff and/or students—understanding the institutional commitment of a university to CE requires that we pay attention to the institution-wide policies, structures and practices. This is partly because micro-level actions, such as the involvement of the academic staff, the students and the external communities, tend to be promoted or constrained by opportunities or limitations at the macro level (Galaskiewicz, 1991). Accordingly, there is a need for more research about how to (a) integrate individual or isolated CE initiatives into institution-wide practices and (b) appropriately evaluate and reward the contributions of the academic staff and students to external communities.

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