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Disablers of Activities for Community Transformation in Regional Universities in Africa: The Case of Gulu University

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Abstract: The knowledge economy discourse underscores the role of regional universities in socio-economic transformation, however, a number of disablers tend to undermine these efforts unnoticed or at best taken for granted. We explored disablers for community transformation activities in regional universities in northern Uganda. Employing the case study design we drew sixteen participants from academic staffs and top management. We collected data using semi-structured interviews from thirteen senior faculty and three top management members and analysed using thematic analysis based on in-vivo coding and pattern coding. Strained university-community relationship, theoretical teaching, and dearth of funding were implicated as the overarching disablers for community transformation. Requisite measures are recommended to surmount the existing disablers.
Keywords: Disablers, community transformation, regional universities, disciplinary fields.

INTRODUCTION
The knowledge economy discourse underscores the importance of regional universities in socio-economic transformation of their regions (Brenner & Schlump, 2013; Dan, 2012; Schmuecker & Cook 2012). However, regional universities have a number of disabling factors to this socio-economic transformation role (European Union [EU], 2011). This study sought to isolate key disablers of community transformation activities in regional universities using the case of one regional university in a developing country.

The concept of community transformation is depicted differently in the literature on higher education. Most scholars use concepts such as community outreach (Stanton, 2008), community involvement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Bringle, Hatcher, & Holland, 2007), community/civic engagement (Benneworth, 2013; Boyer, 2016; Chung *et al.,*, 2016), community/public service (Holland, 2016; Preece, 2011) and engaged scholarship (Griffin, 2012; Rowland & Knapp, 2015). As the discourse continues to shift, more literature tend to address universities' contribution to their adjacent communities as regional development (Harloe & Perry, 2004), or rarely as community transformation (Brennan, King, & Lebeau, 2004). We use the term community transformation which premised on the purpose of the interaction between the university and the community aimed at bringing about real and desired improvement in a community according to Wint & Ngcobo (2000), Capraro (2004) which seems more inclusive.

Three main levels at which universities participate in improving the community are fairly discernible. These are (a) Improvements brought about by the university in the immediate surrounding by the virtue of the university being there. This may manifest in improvement in socio-demographics as a result of students and staff coming from different regions to study and work in the locale, increased incomes through rentals, and purchase of local supplies from the community thus providing market for local products and services. (b) Improvements brought about in the community through services rendered by graduates when they complete their studies and join civil service or politics. In this case, the graduates' intention would be employment, earnings and the perquisites that come along with it but in fulfilling the aforementioned, they

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end up rendering service to the community thus contributing to the socio-economic transformation. The two form of improvements are considered indirect and passive contributions. (c) Direct and interventionist contribution to community transformation involves deliberate identification of a community problem and offering a direct solution to it. This may be institution wide or unit level activity; non-discipline based or discipline based anchored in academic principles or knowledge. The focus is on discipline based activities.

Interventionist activities by disciplinary fields towards community transformation in different universities manifest in extension education, student projects, lifelong learning and student placements; applied research, community based research and student research; patenting and licensing, creation of spinoffs and technology transfer; technical assistance, legal services, patient, clinical and diagnostic services; expert testimony, and consultancy (Chung *et al.,,* 2016; Doberneck & Schweitzer, 2017; Raditloaneng, 2015). Therefore, we define activities for community transformation by disciplinary fields to mean all activities carried out by academics, students or both to solve societal problems directly based on the content and principles of their academic disciplines.

Direct contribution to socio-economic transformation by African universities has been hindered by many factors (Ajayi, Lameck and Johnson, 1996). For instance, in the colonial era, the university colleges implemented western curricula, which were less relevant to the African communities. Besides, colonial higher education did not seek to transform African community in real terms (Ajayi *et al.,,* 1996). Whereas, post-independence higher education had a strong desire to train personnel to fill both technical and political posts in the new states (Ajayi *et al.,,* 1996), this too did not favour direct community transformation efforts by universities. Recent literature reveal that community oriented activities by disciplinary fields in Africa have been hampered by many factors (Etomaru, 2017) such as policies and reward criteria (Etomaru, 2017; Mugabi, 2015a). However, the foregoing studies focus on flagship universities and not regional universities. The case of Gulu University in northern Uganda, a regional university was used to enrich this discourse.

The term 'regional universities' is conceptualised to mean universities located in peripheral regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, most universities started in the core/centre of their countries offering higher education to a select few thus making them elitist cutting the stature of the ivory tower (Ajayi *et al.,,* 1996). These were implicated for being isolated from the community and embarking on training/teaching with view to supply labour for civil service and the post-colonial political offices without direct interventionist activities for solving societal

problems. With time, the need to democratise higher education and indeed compensate for the deprivation incurred by peripheral regions led to creation of branch campuses of flagships in regional cities or establishing autonomous universities in hitherto marginalised regions. The term regional universities in this paper thus refers to such universities in the peripheral regions of the country. Gulu University in Uganda happens to be one such university as described in the ensuing institutional context.

We sought to understand the disablers for direct community transformation activities in regional universities using evidence from a case institution. This introduction to the study sets the tempo for the study followed by the context of the case institution in relation to community transformation, methods used in the study, findings and discussion. The study conclusions were made in respect to the findings and recommendations proffered accordingly.

Institutional Context
Gulu University is one of the public universities in Uganda established in 2002, by the Government of the Republic of Uganda under Statutory Instrument number 31 of 2003 which was made on the 14th day of May 2003 to the Uganda Gazette number 29 Volume XCVI dated 25th June 2003 (Gulu University, 2009). The motto is "for community transformation" (Gulu University, 2005). The mission of the University is "to provide access to higher education, research and conduct quality professional training for the delivery of appropriate services directed towards community transformation and conservation of biodiversity" (Gulu University, 2014). This tends to depict the university as a community transforming university from the outset.

The University started with one faculty and one institute namely: Faculty of Science Education and the Institute of Human Resource Management with less than 50 staff in 2002/3; it enrolled about 289 students in 2003/4 (Gulu University, 2009). By October 2004, the third faculty, that of Medicine was opened (Gulu University, 2005). In 2006, the vice-chancellor noted that the University had expanded rapidly from about 200 students in 2002 to about 1000 students by 2006, and argued that the University would transform the community through the activities of the established faculties/disciplinary fields (Gulu University, 2006). Indeed, by 2009, Gulu University had five faculties and two institutes: these were Faculty of Medicine (FoM), Faculty of Agriculture and Environment (FAE), Faculty of Science (FS), Faculty of Education and Humanities (FEH), Faculty of Business and Development Studies (IPSS), Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies and Institute of Research, Graduate Studies and Staff Development (IRGS&SD) (Gulu University, 2014).

The University is located in Northern Uganda in Gulu Municipality (Gulu University, 2016; 2013; 2003), a region socio-economically marginalised relative to the south (Blattman, Fiala, & Martinez, 2012). The north has perpetually received fewer public investments relative to the southern part of the country. The foregoing situation was exacerbated by the protracted 20 year civil war which ended around 2006 as a result of the Juba Peace Process (Blattman, *et al.,,* 2012). The civil war was sparked of by the 1986 military takeover of the northerners dominated government by the southern dominated rebel force, which was in turn seen as unacceptable by the northerners. This resulted into a violent armed resistance to the new government of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1988, which morphed into the Lord's Resistance (LRA) War. The war was so ferocious and atrocious, with far reaching economic and social consequences such as looting of homes for supplies, forced conscription of youth and children, killing and maiming, conscription into sexual slavery (Annan, Blattman, Mazurana, & Carlson, 2011). Against such backdrop, by 2003, government had coerced people in northern Uganda into internally displaced people's camps (IDPCs) under squalid conditions typified by crowding, underfeeding, and unhygienic conditions, in which approximately 2,000,000 got displaced (Ager, *et al.,,* 2011). Indeed, the war disrupted all aspects of socio-economic life, destabilising peace and tranquillity; education, livelihoods, and health (McCorman & Benjamin, 2008; The Pope John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, 2014).

As a result of the twin effect of the historical marginalisation and the devastating two decades war, the region certainly needs deliberate efforts and activities towards community transformation. Thus, Blattman, *et al.,* (2012) observe that, although the region appears peaceful, lasting peace may only be realised if economic affirmative action is implemented. The foregoing authors note that, in a bid to enhance this transformation, the Government instituted the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). This has been operationalised through the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), so far implemented in two phases. Despite these Northern Uganda specific interventions, the socio-economic situation in northern Uganda still remains deplorable. Moreover, the national vision is to realise a socio-economic transformation from a peasant to a middle income economy by 2030 and universities are expected to partly contribute to the realisation of this vision (Republic of Uganda, 2013). Gulu University thus positions itself to contribute to transforming the surrounding community in northern Uganda through its disciplinary fields (Gulu University, 2006). Besides its declaration of community transformation, quality assurance regulations and laws in Uganda require universities to tailor their activities to solve direct societal problems (National Council for Higher education, 2014; Republic of Uganda, 2003).

METHODS

This was a qualitative naturalistic study anchored in the constructivist worldview. Our ontological stance is that multiple reality exists, thus epistemologically knowledge can be constructed by participants based on context. We used the exploratory case study design to generate in-depth account and understanding of the phenomenon in a natural setting. The case institution as a regional public university in a socio-economically marginalised region was purposively chosen. We considered it as a community oriented regional university in a developing country context which should be implementing what it declares in its mission.

We used the Biglan (1973a) classification of academic disciplines of hard applied and soft applied. The hard-applied and soft-applied disciplines are both similar and dissimilar. They are similar in terms of application and dissimilar in paradigm. Biglan (1973a) found that the applied disciplines are more eager to apply their subject matter to solve societal problems; the hard disciplines have a more solid paradigm but the soft disciplines do not. Biglan (1973b) revealed that different disciplinary types have different academic output. This was affirmed by Roskens (1983) and Smart, & Elton (1982). Hence, the hard applied disciplines were selected from the faculties of Agriculture, Medicine and Science; while the soft applied disciplines came from Education, Business and Development Studies and Peace and Strategic Studies. The aim of this study was not to validate the Biglan classification. We used it to guide our choice of participants from disciplinary fields.

Sixteen participants from disciplinary fields and senior management were selected from six academic units and the central administrative unit (Table 1). We derived pseudonyms from participant categories and numbers which do not reflect participants' information in order to protect their identities as suggested by Creswell (2014). For instance HAAD stands for hard applied academic disciplinary field, SAAD stands for soft applied academic disciplinary field, while TOPM stands for senior management. To differentiate participants within category we added a one digit Roman number to the alphabetical code, which resulted into alphanumeric pseudonyms such as SAAD1, SAAD2 . . . Therefore, SAAD1 denotes the first participant in the soft applied domain, SAAD2 denotes the second, and the rest of the pseudonyms were modelled on the same principle.

To further ensure that information provided do not reveal participants' identities in order to secure confidentiality, we used an abridged profile of participants (Table 1). Choice of participants was based on seniority and perceived participation in activities for community transformation. Indeed, we excluded graduate assistants and assistant lecturers from the

study on the ground that they might not be experienced enough to provide rich and valid information about the subject. However, it is worth noting that the hard applied disciplines had more senior academic staff included. Academic staffing in the case institution is also male dominated (Table 1), therefore the researchers had no control over this situation as is expected in a naturalistic non-experimental inquiry.

Table 1: Abridged Profile of Participants by Category, Rank, Sex, Unit and Pseudonym

Category	Rank	Sex	Unit	Pseudonym
Hard Applied Academic Disciplines	Senior Lecturer	Male	Faculty of Agriculture	HAAD1
	Professor	Male		HAAD2
	Professor	Male		HAAD7
	Senior Lecturer	Male	Faculty of Medicine	HAAD3
	Senior Lecturer	Male		HAAD4
	Senior Lecturer	Male	Faculty of Science	HAAD5
	Lecturer	Male		HAAD6
Soft Applied Academic Disciplines	Lecturer	Female	Faculty of Business and Development Studies	SAAD1
	Lecturer	Female		SAAD2
	Lecturer	Male	Faculty of Education and Humanities	SAAD3
	Lecturer	Male		SAAD4
	Senior Lecturer	Male	Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies	SAAD5
	Lecturer	Female		SAAD6
Senior Management	Academic Registrar	Male	Central Administration	TOPM1
	Dean of Students	Male		TOPM2
	Director, Planning	Male		TOPM3
Total				**16**

We conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews in English in 2017 and 2018 in participants' offices. Each interview lasted for twenty to sixty minutes and was electronically recorded upon obtaining written consent. We transcribed data verbatim. We then performed thematic analysis from verbatim transcripts in order to avoid biases. This is called in-vivo coding, and is manual. In it, we read data transcripts and identified key words or phrases speaking to disablers of community transformation, which we labelled manually (Saldana, 2009). At the second level, we constructed categories of codes iteratively based on their similarities and differences as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1990). This is called pattern coding (Saldana, 2009). Initial coding was done by the lead researcher, then back and forth scrutiny and adjustments were done by the whole team until consensus was achieved.

Results

We reported participants' voices verbatim. The findings reveal strained university-community relationship, theoretical teaching, and absence of institutional funding as factors hindering activities for community transformation.

Strained university-community relations

A participant from a soft applied academic discipline disclaimed any semblance of community transformation efforts by disciplinary fields citing poor university-community relationship as a barrier:

The relationship between Gulu University and the community that surrounds the university does not appear to be good because there was a statement made that Gulu University has a certain acreage of land in the north eastern part of the university but for all these fifteen years the community has not easily accepted to give that land to the university. The relationship between management and the community is not cordial, how then do you transform the community if you don't have a good relationship? (SAAD4).

The participant further observed that:

Well, the management has been struggling to say things like 'university-investor partnership'. For example, convincing the community to give land so that investors may be allowed to put up business activities which would in turn create employment for the people, but the community turned it down. In fact, the community has used this idea of 'university-investor partnership' as a reason not to give land to the university arguing that the Vice-Chancellor seems to have personal interests for acquiring land but using the name of the university. (SAAD4).

Implicit in SAAD4's submission is mistrust by the community for the university leadership. To give more credence to the argument, the participant cited a scenario depicting strained relations between the university and the community:

The faculty of agriculture when they brought a certain variety of banana and tried to put them around, the community turned round and started destroying these bananas. Even now, those projects have collapsed. (SAAD4).

Such views from members of the soft applied disciplines left no doubt in our minds that the relationship between the university and the community was problematic.

Participants from the hard applied disciplines as well reported views which intimated to a fragile university-community relationship prevailing between Gulu University and its neighbouring community. One participant observed:

We need a lot of collaborative efforts with the community we want to transform. We can do that through involving the community into our agenda. There are a lot of things that I see that if we key on some community leaders, invite them regularly to participate in some key university meetings, then the university also attends district meetings because there are things indirectly the district is also working for the same community. Gulu University should do a lot to market itself. A lot of people still don't understand what is going on here but there are a lot of things. (HAAD1).

The views of HAAD1 above are implicit of absence of collaboration, lack of involvement and dialogue between the university and the community. The participant argued further:

The community doesn't probably understand us and we don't understand the community because if we do understand the community and the community understands us, we would not have a lot of buildings crowded near the university. That in itself is a problem, when it comes to expansion. (HAAD1).

The foregoing data extract is implicit of possibly a poor relationship, otherwise, it is unlikely that in the absence of understanding a good relationship could thrive.

Another participant demonstrated how unhealthy the relationship between the university and the community seems to be using a practical scenario of apparent physical and verbal violence directed towards the university by a member from the surrounding community. The participant recalled "there was a time somebody was passing and saying Gulu University you are removing our land, and this person was stoning the university sign post!" (HAAD6). Corroborating other views, this participant's view pointed to wanting university community relationship.

Another Participant Observed:
It seems the attitude of the community towards the university is not very positive. This is seen during student placement. You take students to the community, the community expects you to give them something, money! To me it appears that the community generally has a negative attitude towards the university. (HAAD7).

The above participant seems to express a bad state of university-community relations implicating community attitude for the situation.

Views of participants from senior management corroborated those from the disciplinary fields. A participant from senior management argued:

You know, on community transformation, I think as a university we need to do more. To engage the community and generate ideas together with the community to see what do they expect. What are their needs? Because when you go to the community, there are key people with very good ideas, they don't come out to share it with us. (TOPM3).

The participant added:
And then we are not also engaging them to ask them. So, if we could develop an approach of a regular engagement with them saying which direction we should focus on, what we should prioritise; there are many things that the university could do with the community. To me, what is lacking is open interaction over community engagement between the university and community leaders at different levels which may be on top, middle or lower levels. (TOPM3).

TOPM3 clearly explicated defective university-community relationship in quite a succinct manner. It seemed summative to all the submissions made by other participants. The participant did not opine a hostile relationship, but implicated lack of interaction which seem to negate symbiotic relationship between the university and the community.

Therefore, participants tended to view the relationship between the university and the community as being hostile. Land question and poor or lack of communication between the university and the community seem to be implicated for this apparent poor relationship. The university seemed to express strong quest for land acquisition which implies dispossession on the part of the surrounding community. The reaction by the surrounding community included open physical and verbal violence against the university in some cases as depicted by the participants. On the other hand, the university being difficult to understand and lack of apparent meaningful efforts being made to make the community believe the university is part of them exacerbates the situation. Participants believed that, not only did the community fail to understand the university but the university also seems not to understand the community, widening the gap between the university and its adjacent community.

Theoretical Teaching
Theoretical teaching/curriculum was reported by a number of participants as a disabler of activities for community transformation. Different ways and varying level of emphasis were used. The following voices were

particularly deemed strong, and therefore reported verbatim:

The hindrance to all that we do in Agriculture is lack of a farm. Without a farm or university farm, Agriculture is not a topic that you can only teach in class. A farm itself is a demonstration. We don't have a university farm and that has been one of the biggest hindrances. Then, I think it goes and touches the very motto of community transformation. You cannot have demonstration. (HAAD1).

Inherent in the participant's submission, we decipher theoretical teaching which in the case of this disciplinary field (Agriculture) the participant attributes to the absence of a university farm. The participant cited an example:

We don't have animals that we can say this is a milking cow and it is eating this kind of you know, what do you call it? Forages and things like that but if we had, even research, PhDs, scientific research is not possible without a farm. So that had been one key drawback, absence of a university farm. We have land but land is not a farm! (HAAD1).

The foregoing participant seems to drum up the gravity of the situation implicating the lack of a university farm for theoretical teaching which in turn undermines their efforts as members of the academic field towards transforming the community. Another participant from the same academic field expressed a similar view:

In Agriculture we should be more scientific but because of the environment I have told you, the students now do mainly qualitative research and me personally I don't value that a lot. For instance when you talk about nutrition, it doesn't pay to go out and ask that people are you eating this and that? It would be appropriate to pick samples and bring to the laboratory and analyse then you get the actual result. (HAAD2).

HAAD2 underscored the theoretical nature of their teaching as a disabler of community oriented activities including research. The participant made attribution to the absence of laboratory as the immediate factor for theoretical teaching/research.

Yet, one other participant from a soft applied discipline was so emphatic in making his submission which implicated theoretical teaching as a factor undermining community transformation efforts. The participant pinned down some specific disciplines to drum up the gravity of the problem, thus:

Even here [in Gulu University] the way we teach the disciplines, well Medicine I have no problem because Medicine has the hospital there so they can do more practical but Agriculture where is their land? You teach students [Agriculture] without land! without a farm! What community transformation? We are not! We are teaching theory. You see, we are teaching theory. In Agriculture we are teaching theory. We need to be more practical. The need is that we need to be more practical in how we teach these different courses. (SAAD3).

The participant was surely emphatic about theoretical teaching as a barrier to community transformation activities, citing the field of Agriculture as the epitome of the same. In the participant's view the field of Medicine was not a culprit of theoretical teaching. The participant attributed theoretical teaching in Agriculture to absence of a farm and land. To qualify his submission further, he added:

When you look at departments and look at the faculty and what they do to influence community transformation, a lot of emphasis has been put on issues of examinations at the expense of other issues. You know that most of the meetings here even at the faculty level are on the issues of exams, issues of research supervision, marking, what and what, you know we are not looking at other issues. (SAAD3).

Too much emphasis on examinations, research supervision and marking of examinations were thus implicated as the major things preoccupying academic faculties and departments, and keeping their minds off other important issues. Activities for community transformation might be implicit in 'other issues'.

The next participant from the same academic unit made submissions which vividly supported those of the foregoing participants, thus:

I think our focus has been so much on academics such that when we are designing academic programmes, we don't factor in the elements of community transformation. We may talk to the students when we are teaching but they do not encourage students to go out there. Our teaching is all class based. We don't have much field work. We don't encourage the students to go and meet with community members, we don't encourage we the staff to go and meet with community members. So we should begin to change our own mind-set which is theoretical and all class based. (SAAD4).

SAAD4 was indeed quite unequivocal yet elaborate in pointing out that theoretical orientation in the university cuts across from mind-set, through curriculum designing, and actual teaching which are devoid of community orientation.

Similarly, a participant from senior management seemed to proffer a broad based picture of what happens, not only in the case University but in others within the country as well:

Training in Uganda is still to a greater percentage academic. We should balance academic with skills, values so when they get out there they should know how to deal with the community. . . So that is why I was mentioning that teaching still remains more academic than getting into projects to harness skills of the staff and of the students. (TOPM1).

Upon Probes, The Participant Reasoned:

Of course there are some staff who just as I mentioned, they are just teaching. There are these staffs who don't think beyond, we have them but really not everybody. They just go in class teach and business is done. I know in teaching you are also contributing but is that adequate? Can't you write projects which take you to the community? Can't you write projects where you work with your students and research assistants? So that is why I was mentioning that teaching still remains more academic than getting into projects to harness skills of the staff, of the students. (TOPM1).

Just like other previous participants, TOPM1 reasoned that a good number of academic staffs do concentrate on classroom teaching without having to link their teaching to the community in form of projects.

Generally, theoretical teaching was strongly perceived as disabler of community transformation activities with considerable salience. This was inherent in views from all the three categories of participants, moreover with a good number reporting it emphatically. Further scrutiny into the views of participants revealed that absence of teaching facilities and attitude of staff were implicated for theoretical teaching/learning in the university. Absence of a university farm and functional laboratories were pinned down. Participants lamented how they were expected to teach and indeed they taught applied disciplines without such facilities. However, one member from senior management observed that such theoretical teaching typified not only the case institution but other universities within the country as well.

Lack of Institutional Funding

The issue of absence of institutional funding featured prominently among the top disablers of community transformation efforts by disciplinary fields:

The other barrier which is very clear is from an institutional perspective, usually universities are supposed to generate their own funds through research and I think the government also does not have a clear commitment in increasing the human resource and also funding of research projects. I think there is that other aspect of funding which is limited. (HAAD3).

Indeed participant HAAD3 was categorical in indicating that no university funding goes to actual community oriented activities, observing that government does not also put aside funds for such

activities. This was supplemented by another participant:

Given that our motto is actually for community transformation, we should be having these programmes running every now and then but ours was only in 2012. From that time on we don't have any main stream community activity. Probably the university should have earmarked some small funding to the respective faculties to be able to come up with some community outreach programmes such that this is a continuous programme, but that is unfortunately not there. (HAAD5).

Voices of participants from the soft applied disciplines pointed to the same thing, absence of funding for community outreaches, engagement and service among others as they are commonly referred to by academic staff, thus:

With outreach, the problem is normally funding. When you go in the field you need to be facilitated which is a bit difficult. I don't think we have tried that. I don't think we have done that very specifically. (SAAD3).

And another participant stated:

And as I said, no funding comes from government for such kind of activities, no funding comes from the university so, we got a project some kind of a grant proposal which was accepted by a German Development partner, it was called DED. (SAAD5).

A similar response decrying the absence of funding was obtained from participant SAAD6 from the same academic unit, thus:

Gulu University does not itself fund these activities. It is left to the tuition of the individuals which is problematic. A university like this should have a budget for community outreach which staff would ask for and be granted. (SAAD6).

Views of SAAD6 are in synch with those of other academic staff. Finally, the views of one participant from senior management seem to sum it all:

And then may be funding can also be to some extent a hindrance, because to what extent can you go in the community if there are funding issues? (TOPM1).

We interpreted these voices to mean that absence of institutional funding for community transformation activities by the university was a hindrance to community transformation activities, except those few embedded in the university curricula.

Therefore, the perceived disablers of activities for community transformation revealed in the study include: strained university-community relations, theoretical teaching/curriculum, and absence of institutional funding.

DISCUSSION

Strained university-community relations was implicated for undermining community transformation. This finding resonates well with those of Munk (2010) who found a fragile relationship existing between Dublin City University and its surrounding community to the detriment of the third mission such that even when the university was trying to impact the community, it was considered by the community as an enclave of learning. However, the findings contradict those of other scholars such as Laninga *et al.,* (2011) and Wander *et al.,* (2015) who found that the relationship between the respective regional universities and their regions very symbiotic. Laninga *et al.,* (2011) found that regional universities worked jointly with their host city to mitigate a number of urban problems and collaborated with various communities to solve community problems. Similarly, Doyle (2010) found a reciprocal relationship between the university and the community to the extent that the community were quite privy of what took place in the university. Wander *et al.,* (2015) describe vividly how the university of Sunshine Coast in the Sunshine Coast region of Australia built a strong rapport with the community and offered an incubation facility for local firms to develop and grow and in turn a number of firms greatly got transformed. Paton *et al.,* (2014) reports a vibrant relationship between a community oriented university and the neighbouring communities with thriving community oriented activities. Similarly, Dan (2012) describes a vibrant relationship between Viennese universities and their surrounding cities in a successful bid to transform the cities with robust collaborative efforts in place. Symbiotic and functional relationship is inherent in all these.

We observe that it is only when the relationship between a university and its immediate community is cordial that a good milieu for interventionist role of a university is created. We argue that regional universities need to underscore the importance of their relationship with their respective communities. Regional universities need not front themselves as ivory towers and enclaves of learning in the community. They risk failing to achieve their purpose of community transformation if they do not consciously nurture cordial and symbiotic relationship with their immediate communities. This would put them in a risk of being surrounded by communities typified by squalor and despair to detriment of their own health and vitality within such ecosystem.

Theoretical teaching in regional universities mirrors Boyer (2016) who decries the reluctance of universities to solve community problems observing that teaching was put above the service function during tenure and promotions. This tends to negate the notion of universities' direct contribution to societal development (Holland, 2016; Wade & Demb, 2009). Indeed, this may be rooted in the nature and mission of the university; whereas other universities tend to concentrate on teaching with the view to train students to join the workforce without deliberate efforts to cause direct community transformation, regional universities according to Brenner & Schlump (2013), Salamzadeh, Salamzadeh and Daraei (2011), have explicit community oriented intentions. Such universities are expected to infuse their teaching, research and service into the regional development agenda whether there is a formal national policy on regional development or not (Schmuecker & Cook, 2012).

The case university was meant to cause community transformation through agriculture and yet the disciplinary field of Agriculture was heavily cited for theoretical teaching. Thus, we argue that the absence of a university farm remains disabling at the operational level. We observe that theoretical teaching may not be absolute as some semblance of practical teaching might feature upon scrutiny. We note that universities which are contributing to community transformation effectively infuse considerable practical aspects of teaching into their curricula as reported by Holland (2016) and Griffin, 2012. We therefore argue that, if regional universities continue to pursue theoretical teaching, their community transformation vision may indeed not be achieved.

Absence of institutional funding as a disabler for community transformation activities, supports findings by Mugabi 2015(a) and Mugabi 2015(b) who found that insufficiency of institutional funding was a hindrance to third mission efforts in one Flagship University. The finding however, contradicts studies by ElHadidi and Kirby (2016) which reveal that institutional funding for the third function of the university were set aside and managed by designated units which in turn led to a boost in the third mission of regional development. It further contradicts those by Wander *et al.,* (2015) which reveal that the University of Sunshine Coast used institutional structures to seek for grants specifically meant for regional development agenda, which was used indeed to host and nurture a number of local firms in the University of Sunshine Coast Innovation Centre.

Therefore, regional universities in Uganda, tend to deviate from the norm. This indeed negates the true intention of regional universities which is to consciously spur community transformation. We argue against the notion that regional universities should contribute to the development of their regions indirectly

through their graduates. This relegates universities to medieval thinking reported by Scott (2006), and Etzkowitz (2014) and contrasts the 21st century knowledge economy discourse, which calls for direct contributions by universities to regional development according to Regional Universities Network (2013). Therefore, if the regional development mission has to be achieved, it has to enjoy considerable institutional funding otherwise it remains rhetorical.

We argue that the findings of the study might be symptomatic of bigger issues which could be systemic or institutional.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Activities for community transformation in regional universities would remain incapacitated or malfunctioned if poor university-community relationship, theoretical teaching and absence of funding are left to thrive in regional universities. This calls for deliberate efforts to nurture a symbiotic relationship between the university and the community, becoming more practical in their teaching through use of functional teaching laboratories, university farms, well designed practical curricula in content and approach; and deliberate funding towards community oriented activities. We note that our choice of participants could have negated inclusiveness of the study, therefore we encourage future research in this area to include views of students and the community. None-the-less, the current study could be an eye opener to an otherwise taken for granted but important aspect which could unlock the potential of universities in peripheral regions towards transforming their communities.

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