6.35 Research for the People: A University Innovation Lab Experience

Gada Kadoda¹*

¹Independent Researcher, Sudan; *gadoda@gmail.com

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The post-2015 development agenda is envisioned, with challenges faced by South Countries in mind, to account for the multiple dimensions of sustainable development “economic growth, social inclusiveness and equity, and environmental sustainability”. This paper primarily addresses inclusive development, with prospective consequences on other dimensions and on aligning scientific research with “pressing needs” of the masses, impoverished and far-to-reach. To advance a mind-set required for realising visionary and elusive terms like “sustainability” and “inclusiveness”, broadening the educational experience of future leaders and professionals is both imperative and attainable. The paper proposes the University Innovation Lab as a pedagogical tool capable of augmenting learning, for both student and teacher, with ways to intervene as professionals and scholars in promoting social justice. The recent pilot project at University of Khartoum and Sudan University of Science and Technology, investigated the applicability of UNICEF’s Innovation Lab and their approach to “Technology for Development”. The lab functions as “a physical space that allows for collaboration among academia, government and non-governmental organisations, and the private sector” to support development efforts. Pilot participants utilised open source software to develop real-time data collection and analysis capabilities through mobile phones. The project evaluation indicated the potential of the university lab for student professional development and as a multi-stakeholder research and development unit. Moreover, the experience showed that the conditions the lab provided make us aware of the socio-political dimensions of designs and solutions we develop, and critical about the role we play to sustain or subvert the status quo.