

**ABSTRACT
PARALLEL WORKING SESSION**

EDUCATION

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Interrogating the Role of Higher Education in the Delivery of the MDGs

It could be argued that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were prompted by the desire that resides in every decent human being, for a perfect world. The eight goals cover a spectrum of socio economic development initiatives, which jointly and cumulatively offer the prospect of a quality of life that for most in the developing nations, is but a dream. As the second goal, Universal Primary Education simultaneously acknowledges the basic human right of male and female children to an education, and the transforming power of education. While not mentioned explicitly in the MDGs, higher education is similarly acknowledged world-wide as a core driver of socio economic growth and development.

However, while there can be no denying that some progress has been made on a number of fronts, the MDGs seem unlikely to be achieved in any great measure by 2015. The same rather sobering prognosis appears to apply to the envisaged increased delivery of quality higher education in developing nations and especially the African continent.

Fundamental to the success of both the MDGs and (higher) education is the issue of integrated policy-making and more pertinently, policy implementation, and there is increasing evidence that the policy and implementation paradigm as conceptualized and articulated by the developed “North” does not find resonance with the developing “South,” hence the limited progress. The reasons are manifold, but they speak amongst others, to political and economic hegemonies, a changing world order, and assertions of identity. It is in this conflicted and fragmented environment that higher education is obliged to operate, prosper and deliver.

This paper will examine, from a policy and implementation perspective, the role that universities can play, not only in the delivery of the MDGs, but also in contributing to broadened access to quality higher education in an environment that is seemingly antithetical to sustained progress and growth