

# Factors Constraining University for Development Studies in Community Engagement in Northern Ghana

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## Abstract

University for Development Studies (UDS) was established in 1992 with an explicit mandate to blend its academic work with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction for the total development of northern Ghana in particular, and the country as a whole. Past research has shown that UDS has appreciably linked its teaching, research, and service roles to the socio-economic needs of northern Ghana. This study sought to illuminate the key factors constraining the university in its community engagement programs. It employed an interpretive research paradigm through semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. In all 20 participants were purposefully drawn from specific units within the university for the study. Results from the study showed that inadequate funding of community engagement activities by the national government and regional authorities, inadequate infrastructural development in northern Ghana, lack of ability and readiness of the regional economy to absorb university knowledge and graduates, lack of specific internal incentive structures to motivate academics to engage in activities of regional nature and unwillingness of some academics to engage in activities of regional nature serve as the key factors constraining the regional role of the university. The study, therefore, recommends that if UDS is recognized as a key player in the development of Northern Ghana, then, the national government, regional authorities, and university administrators need to create an enabling environment and put in place appropriate policy support structures to stimulate an effective engagement of the university with its surrounding communities.

**Keywords:** Universities, community engagement, University for Development Studies, Ghana

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, academic interest in the relationship between knowledge production institutions within a region and the region's socio-economic development has increased significantly (Gunasekara, 2004a; Lester, 2005; OECD, 2007). It is increasingly recognized that universities perform important roles as enablers, even leaders, of regional economic and social development and in regional innovation systems (Gunasekara, 2005). Universities are therefore being forced to carefully reconsider their role in society and to evaluate the relationships with their various constituencies, stakeholders, and communities (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008). While communities gain a wide range of benefits through their productive interactions with universities which include enhanced human and social capital development, accelerated economic growth, improved professional and intellectual infrastructure in communities, universities also benefit from effective engagement with their communities (AUCEA, 2006). Students' learning outcomes of universities are enhanced through curricula that are relevant to community issues and priorities. University-community engagement further provides the basis for improved research productivity as partnerships open up new research opportunities and new funding sources, permitting the appointment of new staff or the acquisition of infrastructure.

Realizing the potential contribution that higher education institutions can and do play in the development of their located regions, the government of Ghana established the University for Development Studies (UDS) with an explicit mandate to particularly help address and find solutions to the environmental problems and socio-economic deprivation that have characterized the people of northern Ghana. UDS was established in May 1992 by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 279 as a multi-campus institution and it began academic work in September 1993. Through the legislative instrument establishing the university, the policy makers enjoined upon UDS to "blend the academic world with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of northern Ghana in particular, and Ghana as a whole" (Manuh, Garba, & Budu, 2007, p. 166). Thus, in addition to its core functions of teaching and research, UDS was given an added responsibility for the development of its surrounding communities.

In responding to its development mandate, research has shown that UDS has appreciably linked its teaching, research, and service roles to the development needs of northern Ghana (Abonyi, 2016). Notably, UDS has initiated a policy that aims at promoting the recruitment of students from northern Ghana, creating opportunities for more females from northern Ghana to be enrolled through their admission process, localizing the curricula which integrate students into their surrounding communities, adapting existing programmes and establishing new ones in response to regional labour market needs, introducing innovative practices into agriculture and engaging in community service through the Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP)

to undertake practical field work in the local communities. Nonetheless, UDS has not made enough progress in linking its research activities to regional industrial activities and stimulating local businesses in northern Ghana which contrasts how the regional role of higher education institutions is undertaken in most advanced economies (Gunasekara, 2005; Lester, 2005; OECD, 2007). This could be explained by internal as well as external factors that interact to shape the regional role of the university.

Research suggests that successful implementation of the regional role of higher education institutions is not only determined by the higher education institution but also other complementary factors, both within the region and the national level (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007; Puukka & Marmolejo, 2008). In other words, universities are only one element of the technological infrastructure of innovation and hence if other factors are lacking, innovation is less likely to be complete and the area will not capture the benefits of proximity to the research university (Feldman, 1994). While UDS remains as a unique higher education institution in Ghana since it happens to be the only public university established in the history of Ghana with such an explicit community development focus right from its establishment, it can successfully engage in such a role when an enabling environment is created. However, while the expectation of UDS to have a close relationship with its surrounding communities is widely praised by policy makers and as such other higher education institutions called upon to equally link their activities to suit the development needs of the Ghanaian society, little is known about the sort of factors that constrain the university in executing its regional development mandate. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the factors that constrain UDS in responding to its regional development mandate in Northern Ghana.

## 2. Literature Review

Universities are under increasing pressure to become more relevant to the aspirations of their proximate communities and to provide tangible support for regional and community development initiatives (Gunasekara, 2004b; Jongbloed *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, the extent to which higher education institutions are able to perform their regional role depends on a number of circumstances which include the characteristics of the institution, the regions in which they are located and the national policy frameworks (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007). The interactions of these factors can foster or hinder the contribution of universities to their regions' development (Boucher, Conway, & van der Meer, 2003; OECD, 2007).

The regional engagement of higher education institutions is influenced by the national funding strategies and the way they are funded. In centralized systems, core funding of public higher education institutions is generally based on criteria that do not factor in regional engagement and in the absence of incentives, higher education institutions are more inclined to place a high priority on their national and international role (OECD, 2007). Gunasekara (2006) further observes that while governments are encouraging universities to support the development of their regions there are limited regional sources of funding to support engagement activities by academics and that national scheme of funding is predicated on excellence and specific national priorities, thereby creating little incentive to participate in regional work.

Moreover, the successful accomplishment of regional engagement of universities depends greatly on the extent to which the funding of higher education is regionalized and discretionary power transferred to the regional government or higher education institutions (Boucher *et al.*, 2003; OECD, 2007). In countries where the regional governments are responsible for higher education, it is asserted that there may be a greater commitment on the part of universities to participate in activities of regional nature (Kitagawa, 2005). In an OECD (2007) study, an example is given of the federal government of Germany with a long history of regional funding for universities shared evenly between the lander and the federal government. Gibb and Hannon (2006) further observe that in the US the public universities get their base funding from the state, rather than federal government and this makes them more sensitive and responsive to local needs. However, even if the funding responsibility is transferred to the regional government, it is no guarantee for the regional orientation of the university as it partly depends on the extent to which discretionary power is transferred to the region or to the universities (Boucher *et al.*, 2003) or to the extent to which the regional activities of the universities are incentivized and outcomes monitored (OECD, 2007).

The ability of the regional labor market or economy to absorb the graduates into the region upon completion has also been highlighted in the literature (OECD, 2007; Puukka & Marmolejo, 2008). If the labor market is not vibrant enough to retain graduates, there is likely to be a strong migratory pull of graduates into other regions. Feldman (1994) indicates that the ability of a region to retain the graduates from the university rests on the demand for their services, especially the employment and advancement opportunities in the area. Additionally, the ability of the regional economy to absorb graduates depends on a greater extent the degree of alignment between the university and the regional economy in terms of the programs offered by the university. Relatedly, the nature of the demand for university knowledge and expertise in the region has also gained attention in the literature (Gunasekara, 2004b). Gunasekara (2004b) found that the university was less successful establishing linkages with private firms, especially SME's. It was discovered that there was an unwillingness on

the part of some SME's to engage with the university and this was attributed to the lack of awareness on the part of the SME's of how universities could assist them and also a gap in understanding the innovation process.

At the institutional level, internal incentive structures and criteria for promotion tend to limit engagement activities of higher education institutions. A number of studies have found that internal incentive structures and criteria for promotions do not place greater weight on regional engagement activities (Gunasekara, 2006; Pinheiro, 2010). In his study in Australia, Gunasekara (2004b) indicated that a key obstacle to embedding a focus on regional and community engagement was the university's promotion policy which was not perceived as placing a high valence on regional engagement. The key criteria for promotion centered on teaching and the production of refereed research publications, with community service seen as a desirable requirement, but not critical in decision making. Similarly, in a study of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in South Africa, Pinheiro (2010) found out that internal reward structures followed traditional public funding models based on student and research outputs. It is therefore advocated that "if regional engagement is to become embedded in institutional cultures, it is important that the reward systems recognize the importance of this direction" (Gunasekara, 2006, 157).

Finally, the attitude of academic staff to activities of regional nature tend to hinder regional engagement activities as engagement in regional activities is not fully accepted by all as a legitimate role of higher education institutions. Regional engagement is perceived by some academics as a curious development that creates a dissonance with their constructed role identities (Gunasekara, 2006). Similarly, an OECD study suggests that there has been, and continuous to be, resistance in the academic community against regional engagement because it is assumed that it may limit national and international engagement (Puukka & Marmolejo, 2008).

### 3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative research paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stress that qualitative research entails interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world and thus study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The interpretive paradigm was deemed appropriate for the study as it sought to explore the perspectives of participants on the sort of factors that constrain them in undertaking community engagement programs in Northern Ghana. The study employed the use of semi-structured interviews to gather the required data from participants. This was supplemented by an extensive review of some selected documents including university reports on outreach programs and Vice Chancellor annual reports.

Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the participants for the study. In purposive sampling, cases are selected because they are information rich and illuminative because they both offer useful manifestations of the points of interest and are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2008; Patton, 2002). In the case of this study, the researcher needed to select respondents strategically from different units within the university that had direct links with the engagement activities of the university so as to generate relevant information to answer the research problem. Participants were, therefore, drawn from the university's central administration, Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments, unit in-charge of the university's outreach program, the Centre for Continuing Education and Interdisciplinary Research (CCEIR), some senior academics, and the Alumni office. In all 20 participants were selected for the study.

Prior to the commencement of the data collection process, permission was sought from the university administration and consequently permission was granted in writing. Participants were then contacted to seek their consent to be interviewed. Upon expressing their consent, dates convenient to the interviewees were fixed. In line with advice offered by Creswell (2005), the researcher re-introduced himself, described the research, its purpose, categories of interviewees, steps being taking to maintain confidentiality and their anonymity, and notified them about the duration of the interview. Interviews were held in the offices of the respondents and each session lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining permission from the respondents and were fully transcribed in preparation for the analysis.

The analysis of the qualitative data consisted of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, reducing the data into themes, and finally representing the data through the researchers' interpretation and in light of perspectives in the literature (Creswell, 2007; Dey, 1993). The process began with the transcription of the raw data generated from the interviewees. Upon reading through several times to immerse himself in the data (Silverman, 2010), the researcher categorized the data into themes which were informed by the labels generated through the literature as well as creating room for emerging themes.

To enhance the data trustworthiness of the data, data triangulation was employed as the interviews were complemented with documentary data. Also, participants were selected from different units of the university so that views on the same issues could be easily cross-checked to enhance the accuracy and credibility of findings. Finally, the researcher complied with ethical principles by commencing the data collection process only after an approval had been sought and granted by the university administration while the consent of all participants was sought.

#### 4. Findings

Results from the study revealed a number of factors that were perceived to be constraining the successful accomplishment of the regional role of UDS in Northern Ghana. These factors were categorized into national, regional, and institutional factors to facilitate the analysis.

##### 4.1 National Factors

Two major themes emerged as factors perceived to be constraining the regional role of UDS in northern Ghana from the national level. These were inadequate funding of engagement activities by the national government and lack of policy framework supporting the engagement activities of the university.

First, inadequate funding for regional engagement activities by the national government emerged as a key factor constraining the engagement activities of UDS. Interviewees indicated that the annual funding to UDS by the national government was based on the number of full-time students and did not make room for the engagement activities. The university, therefore, undertakes community engagement programs using internally generated funds. Participants reported that the university sets aside 30 percent of the academic user fees paid by students and 10 percent of funds generated from the sale of application forms solely for the TTFPP. The coordinator of the outreach program commented that:

The financing of our engagement activity is the biggest challenge. Supposing you have thousand students and you are to group them into tens and spread them across hundred communities, it is a large task. Sending the students there is a logistic problem, monitoring of the program is a logistic problem. And we do not have any special subvention from the national government. They see it as an academic program.

A respondent from CCEIR echoed that:

Except for commissioned research activities, all other research activities are financed by individual academic staffs and the university in some cases. The research center receives no specialized financial package to be used for research activities from the government.

However, it emerged that academic members at the university received 'book and research allowance' which was meant for undertaken research. They explained that such allowance was distributed to academics in all universities in the country and there was no specification as to whether the research activity should have a regional relevance or not. Besides, there was a lack of monitoring to determine whether that money was even used for research purposes or not, and more so, such allowance was inadequate to be used for any meaningful research activity.

As a result, interviewees reported that due to the inadequate funding, they had difficulty in disseminating their research findings to the local farmers and other community members. One of the Heads of Department commented that:

The farmers have problems and when we do research and come out with findings which we think can help them solve some of their problems then we do extension. But the extension component is not all that very strong because of lack of appropriate funding. So as for information we have but we have it on our shelves.

Second, interviewees noted that while UDS has a policy mandate to engage in regional development activities, such a mandate has not been followed by the appropriate policy support at the national level. They explained that the university has not been actively involved in policies aimed at eradicating poverty in northern Ghana as well as other development plans in the area. Thus, the regional mandate of the university has not been accompanied by an appropriate funding scheme by the national government and lack appropriate policy framework guiding the engagement programs. This could either mean that the regional role of higher education institutions, is not well understood by national authorities or they do not perceive the engagement activities of UDS as a key component to the development of northern Ghana.

##### 4.2 Regional Factors

Four major themes emerged as factors perceived to be constraining the regional role of UDS in northern Ghana at the regional level. These factors were inadequate infrastructural development in Northern Ghana, lack of ability and readiness of community members to absorb university knowledge, the capacity of the regional economy to retain graduates in the region, and lack of specific role played by regional authorities.

One factor perceived to be constraining the regional role of UDS at the regional level was inadequate infrastructural development in northern Ghana. Participants, for example, reported that the road network poses a challenge for their outreach program. They noted that there were communities that were sizeable enough for them to send students there but those communities could not be reached by road and besides they did not have portable water. Thus, even though the communities stood in need and could benefit from the program they were denied due to the lack of adequate social amenities in those areas. They also pointed out that for health reasons, students were sent to communities that had community health centers and thus several rural communities in northern Ghana did not equally benefit from the outreach program since they had no healthcare facilities. It further emerged that due to the low infrastructural development in northern Ghana, staffs felt reluctant to accept

postings to UDS. They reported that in most cases staffs looked at the prospects they would have for their families in that deprived part of the country. It was noted that northern Ghana generally lacked good schools, proper housing, and poor medical facilities so staffs considered those before accepting postings to the place.

Another challenge that was pointed out by participants was the lack of ability and readiness on the part of community members to absorb scientific knowledge. Interviewees indicated that even where the knowledge will benefit the people they do not have the financial ability and the technical know-how to tap it. In explaining this, they claimed that there are instances where students and academics identify a new technique that can enhance the productivity of their farming activities but due to financial challenges the farmers were unable to support those programs. A Head of Department from the Faculty of Agriculture commented that:

Students who are trained in agriculture technology go to the community and identify a challenge of lack of agricultural technical know-how, lack of use of resources. The students with their technical know-how knew that these communities can do dry season farming. But the communities were not ready and capable of financing the students to stay with them. The knowledge of the students is needed by the communities but they are not capable of retaining them. The missing link is that of finance.

Participants further reported that since many of the community members cannot read nor write they find it difficult to apply the new techniques that they have been introduced. Additionally, it emerged that there are instances where the acceptance of the community members to new knowledge becomes very difficult since they are not ready to accept new ways of doing things. One participant shared his experience that in one community where the people hunt a certain type of rodents, he tried organizing them to breed those rodents with the explanation that if measures are not put in place to breed them a time will come that they will be extinct. The participant reported that the community members claimed that the rodents had been in their communities since the time of their forefathers so they do not see how they will be extinct. Thus, in cases where scientific knowledge seemed to conflict with their indigenous knowledge, community members were not ready to accept the new knowledge.

Furthermore, the inability of the regional economy to retain graduates upon completion emerged as a factor constraining the regional role of UDS. Respondents noted that since northern Ghana is a deprived area, most graduates end up not getting jobs in the region upon completion. When asked if there is a mismatch between their academic programs offered and the labor market needs in northern Ghana, respondents indicated that their programs were well linked to the labor market needs, but only that very few job places were available. The result showed that most of the students were trained to be employed in the public sector and very few job places were available in the public institutions in the region. However, the past students interviewed complained about the lack of seed capital to start their own businesses in the region. Thus there is a high migratory pull of students to other regions.

Finally, the study showed that the regional authorities for the three administrative regions of northern Ghana have no specific role or policy focus on the university's regional role and engagement activities. They indicated that they do not receive any financial or logistical support from the regional authorities in pursuance of their regional development mandate. It further emerged that there exist poor coordination between the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), which is the highest governing body of the region, and UDS. This could mean that the function of the RCC is not clearly defined on how to integrate the higher education institutions into their development plans or it could be that the regional governments do not see the university as a central agent in regional development plans.

#### *4.3 Institutional Factors*

A number of constraining factors peculiar to UDS as an institution perceived to be hindering their regional role emerged. These factors included internal structures which seemed not to promote regional activities and the lack of willingness of some academics to be involved in activities of regional nature.

First, interviewees commented that while the university's internal requirement for promotion recognizes 'community service', it does not carry much weight in the career/promotion system. Many academics were therefore not encouraged to engage in activities of regional nature. Interviewees reported that community service represented 15 percent in their promotion process. However, it was pointed out that the community service component of their job description was more of attending conferences to share research findings with little regional focus. One of the documents reviewed regarding the university's promotion requirement confirmed the concerns raised by the participants as it noted that:

List your activities outside normal University work since last promotion/appointment that you consider relevant and important to the University and the Community. These include radio talks, television appearances, newspaper publications, guest speeches, Membership of National Boards/Committees, and Chairmanship of National and regional Professional societies. (Promotion requirements for senior staffs, UDS)

Throughout the entire document, the above statement was the only one that dealt with engagement activities in

the promotion system of the university and it is obvious that it is not directly linked to engagement activities in northern Ghana.

Second, participants reported that the university has not internally instituted any incentive mechanism to motivate academics and students for engaging in activities of regional nature. While interviewees reported that the university bears the transport cost of academics when they go to the field to supervise students on fieldwork, there was no any other special incentive package in place to motivate academics or students in engagement activities. Most of the participants saw this as a problem. One interviewee expressed that:

No special incentive package has been instituted. It is the normal civil or public servant thing that if you work out of your station, you are given a per-diem for living outside your normal place of residence. It is regarded as part of the normal work schedule of staffs. It is a problem.

When asked how the students are motivated in community engagement activities, interviewees reported that there are no specific incentive packages for students in community engagement. They reported that the university runs trimester system and students are obliged to participate in community activities to complete the academic year. The Coordinator of the Outreach Programme remarked that:

We tell them that this is our agenda, so it is only those who are ready to accept who join. When they are given the admission letter, we tell them that they have to engage in community activities in the third trimester as part of their training process.

One of the Heads of Department at the Faculty of Agriculture, however, seems not to be bothered about the lack of incentive schemes to motivate staffs to be involved in activities of regional nature. He indicated that:

As for the university, it is a profession so you teach and you are paid at the end of the month. There is nothing like you need to be motivated before you do what is expected of you.

The above comment demonstrates the level of understanding of some academics of the engagement activities of universities as they do not regard it as a distinctive role of the university.

Finally, the unwillingness of some academics to engage in regional development activities emerged as another factor at the institutional level perceived to be hindering the regional role. Interviewees indicated that some academics felt reluctant and even opposed to the whole idea of community engagement activities carried out by the university since according to them they did not believe in those ideals. One of the documents reviewed confirmed this as it noted that “internal pressure also comes from academic staff members who subscribe to traditional thinking that does not expect universities to be engaged in this way with communities”. The unwillingness on the part of some academics may stem from the fact that the engagement activity has no appropriate funding and incentive structures.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the key factors perceived to be constraining the regional development mandate of UDS in northern Ghana. An investigation of this nature was deemed relevant as UDS was established in 1992 under the PNDC Law 279 with an explicit mandate to blend its academic work with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of northern Ghana. Results from the study revealed a number of factors perceived to be hindering the regional role of UDS. The sources of these constraining factors were perceived to be at the national, regional, and the institutional levels. This supports the existing literature that the regional role of higher education institutions could be constrained or shaped by the characteristics of the institution, the region in which they are located, and the national policy frameworks (Arbo & Bennenworth, 2007; Boucher *et al.*, 2003).

Findings from the study showed that UDS does not receive adequate financial and policy support from both the national government and the regional authorities. The existing funding model is predicated on full-time student numbers and makes little room for engagement activities. This confirms the findings of other studies in Australia (Gunasekara, 2006) and South Africa (Pinheiro, 2010) which found that although national governments were encouraging universities to support the development of their regions, there was little incentive to this and national schemes of funding were predicated on excellence and specific national priorities. Pinheiro (2010) recounted that in South Africa internal reward structures followed traditional public funding modules based on student numbers and research outputs. From a policy perspective, since UDS was established with a specific policy mandate to blend its academic work with that of the community and considering the fact that it is established in an economically challenging area of Ghana, one would have expected that it would have received the appropriate national as well as regional funding and policy support. The lack of funding and appropriate policy support to promote engagement activities of the university in Northern Ghana could be attributed to the fact that UDS is probably not seen as a key instrument in regional development or that the notion of universities in regional development is conceived differently by national and regional governments in the Ghanaian context.

Findings from the study further showed that there was lack of ability and capacity of the regional economy to absorb university knowledge and graduates. Research suggests that the ability of the regional economy to absorb graduates depends, to a greater extent, on the degree of alignment between the university and

the regional economy in terms of the program offered by the university. Feldman (1994) further argues that the ability of a region to retain the graduates from the university rests on the demand for their services, especially the employment and advancement opportunities in the area which is a function of the types and occupational structure of industries located in the area. In the case of northern Ghana, the main economic activity in the regional economy is agriculture with few local industries. Thus, the industrial, as well as the overall absorptive capacity of the region, is low. In that respect, a stronger alignment of the activities of the university is likely to be difficult. It is therefore not surprising that most of the academic degree programs of the university are oriented more towards the public sector which has led to a high pull of graduates to other regions.

Also, inadequate infrastructural development in northern Ghana was also perceived as a problem. On the one hand, it was seen that this makes it difficult for UDS to attract the needed human resource it requires to execute engagement activities. It was also pointed out that many communities were not benefiting from the engagement activities due to the lack of some social amenities in those communities. Respondents indicated that for the sake of the health needs of students, they were made to undertake the outreach program in communities with health facilities suggesting that those communities without health facilities were not benefiting from the outreach program. This challenge equally points to the fact that the regional role of the university has not attracted the necessary policy support and northern Ghana has not seen massive infrastructural development that could serve as a catalyst to promote engagement activities of UDS. Yet, universities are seen as only one element of the technological infrastructure of innovation and if other factors within the region are lacking, innovation is less likely to be complete and the area will not capture the benefits of proximity to the research university (Feldman, 1994). This suggests that effective execution of engagement activities in UDS is partly dependent upon the state of development in Northern Ghana.

At the institutional level, lack of internal incentive structures to motivate academics to engagement activities, the requirement for promotion for academics not perceived to be carrying much weight on engagement activities, and lack of commitment on the part of some academics to participate in activities of regional nature were perceived to be hindering the regional role. A number of studies suggest that if regional engagement is to become embedded in institutional cultures, it is important that the reward systems recognize the importance of this direction (Gunasekara, 2006; OECD, 2007; Pinheiro, 2010). This study found that while the criteria for promotion for academics recognizes 'community service' the description given to it does not focus specifically on regional activities in northern Ghana. There is, therefore, a gap between UDS's intentions on regional development and what it actually does to incentivize such engagements. Thus, the unwillingness of some academics to participate in activities of regional nature could, therefore, be explained by the lack of existing incentive schemes and the internal promotion criteria for academics.

## 6. Conclusion

The key lesson drawn from this study is that while UDS is established with a policy mandate to blend its academic work with that of the community in order to further the development of Northern Ghana, such a policy mandate has not been accompanied by appropriate support structures at the institutional, regional, and the national levels. The financial support that UDS receives from the national government does not create room for engagement activities but specifically focusses on numbers of full-time students and this means that UDS has to rely on internally generated funds to undertake activities of regional nature. Taking into account that northern Ghana remains economically disadvantaged with few local industries, UDS may be handicapped in securing adequate funding to undertake meaningful engagement projects in northern Ghana. The government and regional authorities would, therefore, need to set aside a special fund and put in place appropriate policy support structures to offer support to its community engagement activities.

There are equally inadequate internal incentive mechanisms that motivate the academics to readily engage in activities of regional nature. Some academic staff feel reluctant to pursue initiatives in community engagement because this type of work is not seen as beneficial for promotion, compared to work of national or international significance. The university would need to strengthen internal promotion procedures to strongly align with regional engagement and institute internal incentive mechanisms to enhance the involvement of academics in engagement activities. Further, since UDS is surrounded by rural communities with high rate of illiteracy, community members may be hesitant to readily absorb the products and knowledge from the university due to the lack of awareness of how such products could stimulate their industrial activities and farming practices. Liaison offices could be created in some selected communities to showcase new innovative practices from UDS and to undertake extensive community education on how such new products could benefit the community members. On the whole, it appears the notion of universities and regional development is conceived differently by policy makers and regional actors who have not done enough to give UDS the necessary support to realize its development mandate. Future research could, therefore, investigate how the internal and external stakeholders associated with UDS understand and/or perceive university-community engagement. Further studies could equally explore the experiences of students in community engagement and the

challenges they face in participating in community engagements activities in northern Ghana.

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