

Higher Education for Sustainable Development: A love centred approach to integrated teaching and learning, research, and care

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All crises are spiritual and all crises are ecological. In other words, all crises relate to (un)healthy relationships between and among all creation. Globally, an unprecedented global crisis is manifesting itself in multiple and complexly interrelated challenges of latent and active violence, disease, poverty, and climate change among others. Education remains key in disentangling this complexity, and consequently, building healthy relationships for peace and resilience between and among all creation and consequently sustainable health and wealth for all is necessary. Institutions of higher education (HE), revered as bastions of inquiry, analysis, and innovation, bear the responsibility of cultivating and disseminating knowledge, skills, and values that match the needs of society, both locally and globally. Regrettably, this mission encounters significant hurdles where the core pursuits of HE—teaching, learning, research, and service— suffer from rigid compartmentalization of disciplines, prioritization of technical proficiencies, high sounding theoretical perspectives with little community engagement, and yet, prioritization of fiscal and material outcomes. The prevailing paradigm of development is framed predominantly through the lens of neo-liberal capitalism, which often perceives non-Western and non-material values as obstructive impediments. This is contrary to the overarching aim of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs place spiritual realities (read respect for and healthy relationships between and among all creation) which promote just, peaceful, resilient, and inclusive active partnership at the core of development. Spirituality advances conceptualization and practice of development beyond material and fiscal profits to addressing what is at the core of human life – identity, origin, meaning/purpose and destiny. In this paper, we argue for a ‘love-centred’ approach which integrates teaching and learning, research, and service. To illustrate this, we present two teaching/learning-research-and-service initiatives at Moi University, Eldoret Kenya, that focus on spirituality: i) African Character Initiation Programme (ACIP)² which draws from African indigenous knowledge(s) embedded in initiation rites to mentor early adolescents with values for holistic health and wellbeing, and, ii) Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

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² ACIP is recognized by the World Health Organization as a Top 30 innovation on social health.

which is integrating spirituality in teaching and learning at Moi University and spiritual care at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital through a program that offers a personalized practical application of theological constructs contextualized to the special intersection of faith and medicine, of the human search/ need for meaning embodied in the flesh and blood of illness and hope for health. The programme is now expanding to offer professional training for chaplains across various educational institutions in the country. Both initiatives are interdisciplinary, collaborative, and transformative. The initiatives continue to explore what a well-defined methodology for incorporating spirituality into the process of generating, analysing, synthesizing and translating knowledge to practical and sustainable health and wellbeing would look like.

Key words: Spirituality, Ecological, Crisis, Health and Wellbeing, Higher Education