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African higher education: Challenges for the 21st century

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Abstract. African higher education, at the beginning of the new millennium, faces unprecedented challenges. Not only is the demand for access unstoppable, especially in the context of Africa's traditionally low postsecondary attendance levels, but higher education is recognized as a key force for modernization and development. Africa's academic institutions face obstacles in providing the education, research, and service needed if the continent is to advance. Generalizing about a continent as large and diverse as Africa is difficult. Yet there are some common elements – and there are certainly some common challenges. In our discussion, we are not generally optimistic either in analyzing the current reality in much of Africa or in pointing to future prospects. The fact is that African universities currently function in very difficult circumstances, both in terms of the social, economic, and political problems facing the continent and in the context of globalization, and the road to future success will not be an easy one.

Based on Africa-wide research, this article discusses such topics as access to higher education, the challenges of funding, the growing role of private higher education institutions in Africa, governance and autonomy, management challenges, gender (including the access of women to higher education and the problems faced by women students and academic staff), the role of research and the problems of scholarly communication, language issues, and the brain drain. These issues are at the heart of Africa's future academic development.

Keywords: academic freedom, access, Africa, brain drain, funding and finance, gender, language, private higher education, student acivism

Introduction

African higher education, at the beginning of the new millennium, faces unprecedented challenges. Not only is the demand for access unstoppable, especially in the context of Africa's traditionally low postsecondary attendance levels, but higher education is recognized as a key force for modernization and development. The dawning of the twenty-first century is being recognized as a knowledge era, and higher education must play a central role. In this essay, we reflect on some of the key challenges facing African higher education.

Generalizing about a continent as large and diverse as Africa is difficult. Yet there are some common elements – and there are certainly some common challenges. Given the complex challenges facing higher education in the

continent currently, our optimism for the future is quite guarded. The fact is that African universities currently function in very difficult circumstances, and the road to future success will not be an easy one.

If Africa is to succeed economically, culturally, and politically, it must have a strong postsecondary sector; academic institutions are central to the future. After being shunted to the side by national governments and international agencies alike for almost two decades, higher education is again recognized as a key sector in African development.

Africa, a continent with fifty-four countries, has no more than 300 institutions that fit the definition of a university. By international standards, Africa is the least developed region in terms of higher education institutions and enrollments. While a few countries on the continent can claim comprehensive academic systems, most have just a few academic institutions and have not yet established the differentiated postsecondary systems required for the information age (Task Force on Higher Education and Society 2000). Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, and Egypt each have 45, 26, 21, and 17 universities, respectively, and each country has many additional postsecondary institutions as well. A few countries, including Cape Verde, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Seychelles, and Sao Tome and Principe have no universities; but even in these countries, preparations have been underway to create one or more major postsecondary institutions. Others, including Somalia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have lost university-level institutions as the result of political turmoil and are trying to rebuild a postsecondary sector.

Generalization is difficult because of the tremendous diversity evident in Africa. There are exceptions to almost every rule. For example, we sometimes underestimate the extent of postsecondary education by ignoring the nonuniversity sector. Zambia has only two universities, but it also has fifty or so colleges for "further education." Our distinction between universities and colleges is based on how they are considered at the local level, irrespective of their size and the program of studies. The overall state and trend of higher education in northern Africa is considerably different from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, a few countries, such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa do not fall perfectly well in a number of generalizations that we make.

Diversity in function, quality, orientation, financial support, and other factors are evident in Africa; national circumstances and realities vary significantly. Nonetheless, generalizations can be made, and it is important to understand the broader themes that shape African higher education realities at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The overall reality of inadequate financial resources combined with unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism, longstanding economic and social crises in many countries, the challenges of HIV/AIDS in parts of the continent, and other significant issues present a particularly difficult reality. It is our purpose here to provide a broad portrait of African higher education realities as a backdrop for further analysis and future change.

African higher education in historical perspective

Higher education in Africa is as old as the pyramids of Egypt, the obelisks of Ethiopia, and the Kingdom of Timbuktu. The oldest university still existing in the world is Egypt's Al-Azhar, founded as and still the major seat of Islamic learning. Indeed, Al-Azhar is currently the only major academic institution in the world that is organized according to its original Islamic model. All other universities in Africa, and, indeed, the rest of the world, have adopted the Western model of academic organization. While Africa can claim an ancient academic tradition, the fact is that traditional centers of higher learning in Africa have all but disappeared or were destroyed by colonialism. Today, the continent is dominated by academic institutions shaped by colonialism and organized according to the European model. As is the case in the developing world, higher education in Africa is an artifact of colonial policies (Altbach and Selvaratnam 1989; Lulat 2003).

A multitude of European colonizers – including Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – have shaped Africa's route of development. These colonial legacies affect contemporary African higher education. The most important of the colonial powers in Africa, Britain and France, have left by far the greatest lasting impact, not only in terms of the organization of academe and the continuing links to the metropole but in the language of instruction and communication.

Colonial higher education policy had some common elements. Among these are:

Limited access. Colonial authorities feared widespread access to higher education. They were interested in training limited numbers of African nationals to assist in administering the colonies. Some colonial powers, notably the Belgians, forbade higher education in their colonies. Others, such as the Spanish and the Portuguese, kept enrollments very small. The French preferred to send small numbers of students from its colonies to study in France. Throughout all of Africa, the size of the academic system was very small at the time of independence. A World Bank (1991) study

reports that at independence less than one-quarter of all professional civil service posts were held by Africans; most trade and industry throughout the continent was foreign-owned; and only 3 percent of high school-age students received a secondary education. With all its copper wealth, Zambia had only 100 university graduates and 1,000 secondary school graduates. In 1961, the University of East Africa (serving Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) turned out a total of only 99 graduates for a combined population area of 23 million. Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), for example, reached independence without a single national engineer, lawyer, or doctor. Between 1952 and 1963, French-speaking Africa produced a mere four graduates in the field of agriculture, while English-speaking Africa turned out 150 (Eisemon 1982).

Language. The language of instruction in every case was the language of the colonizer. In some countries, existing forms of local languages used in "higher forms of education" were replaced by the language of the colonizers.

Limited freedom. Limits on academic freedom and on the autonomy of academic institutions were the norm.

Limited curriculum. The curricula of universities in Africa at the time of independence was dramatically restricted. The colonizers tended to support disciplines such as law and related fields that would assist colonial administration and that were not costly to implement. Scientific subjects were rarely offered.

The legacy of colonialism remains a central factor in African higher education. Independence has been the national reality for most of Africa for less than four decades, and the ties to the former colonizers have, in general, remained strong. The fact that no African country has changed the language of instruction from the colonial language is significant and illustrative. The impact of the colonial past and of the continuing impact of the former colonial powers remains crucial in any analysis of African higher education.

This analysis is mainly concerned with contemporary higher education. We now examine key elements of higher education in Africa. These include access, governance, the role of research and publishing, information technology, the academic profession, the "brain drain" and migration of talent, and others. While these topics do not discuss all aspects of African higher education, they are central to any understanding of the continent's challenges.

Access

In virtually all African countries, demand for access to higher education is growing, straining the resources of higher education institutions. Students have had to be admitted into institutions originally designed for fewer students and enrollments have escalated, but financial resources have not kept pace. In many countries, resources have actually declined due to inflation, devaluation of the currency exchange rate, economic and political turmoil, and structural adjustment programs, further stressing the financial stability of institutions and systems.

We estimate that between 4 and 5 million students are currently enrolled in the continent's postsecondary institutions. A report by the Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000) puts this figure at 3,489,000 students. Over 150,000 academic staff work in Africa's postsecondary institutions. Egypt has the highest enrollment in Africa, with over 1.5 million (including about a quarter of a million part-time) students. It also has the largest number of members of the academic profession at about 31,000. The enrollment ratio for the 18–22 age group is approximately 22 percent (Elmahdy 2003).

Nigeria is second with close to 900,000 students enrolled in its post-secondary institutions. It has forty-five universities, sixty-three colleges of education, and forty-five polytechnics – the largest number in Africa. Of the total student population, 35 percent go to universities and 55 percent to colleges of education. However, the gross enrollment ratio for ages 18 to 25 is only about 5 percent (Jibril 2003).

South Africa, with more than half a million students in its twenty-one universities and fifteen technikons (postsecondary vocational colleges), is third in the number of enrolled students on the continent. Of these, 55 percent go to universities (Subotzky 2003). Tunisia and Libya have enrollments of close to 210,000 and over 140,000, respectively (Millot, Waite, and Zaiem 2003; El-Hawat 2003).

With a population of 32 million, the enrollment in Tanzanian higher education institutions for the year 2000 was under 21,000 (Mkude and Cooksey 2003). With a population of about 65 million, Ethiopia has no more than 50,000 students in its postsecondary institutions (Wondimu 2003). Today Guinea counts 14,000 students from the population of 7.66 million (Sylla 2003), Senegal has 25,000 students for 7.97 million inhabitants (Ndiaye 2003), and Côte d'Ivoire has 60,000 for its population of 13.7 million (Houenou and Houenou-Agbo 2003).

It should be noted that the number of institutions and student figures are not always directly correlated. Sudan, for example, with its twenty-six public universities and twenty-one private universities and colleges, has an enroll-

ment of about 40,000 (El Tom 2003). In some countries, academic institutions may be quite small.

Enrollment in Ghana is less than 3 percent of the eligible age group, and in many countries the figure is under 1 percent of the eligible age cohort. For instance, in Malawi and Tanzania, the proportion is 0.5 percent and 0.3 percent of the eligible age group, respectively (Chimombo 2003; Mkude and Cooksey 2003). Those who have access to postsecondary education in Africa overall represent less than 3 percent of the eligible age group – the lowest in the world by a significant percentage. This is one of the reasons for the current surging demand for access to education as Africa seeks to catch up with the rest of the world.

Africa faces a significant challenge in providing access to higher education, not only to reach the levels of other developing and middle-income countries but also to satisfy the demand of populations that are eager for opportunities to study and that have achieved a level of secondary education that qualifies them for postsecondary study.

Funding and financing

The central reality for all African higher education systems at the beginning of the twenty-first century is severe financial crisis. Academe everywhere, even in wealthy industrialized nations, faces fiscal problems, but the magnitude of these problems is greater in Africa than anywhere else. The causes are not difficult to discern, and include:

- The pressures of expansion and "massification" that have added large numbers of students to most African academic institutions and systems
- The economic problems facing many African countries that make it difficult, if not impossible, to provide increased funding for higher education
- A changed fiscal climate induced by multilateral lending agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund
- The inability of students to afford the tuition rates necessary for fiscal stability and in some cases an inability to impose tuition fees due to political or other pressure
- Misallocation and poor prioritization of available financial resources, such as the tradition of providing free or highly subsidized accommodations and food to students and maintaining a large and cumbersome non-academic personnel and infrastructure, among others.

Not all of these elements are, of course, present in every African country, and financial circumstances vary, but overall, funding issues loom very large in any analysis of African higher education.

Higher education is a four-to-five-billion-dollar enterprise in Africa. With Africa's largest student population, Egypt's higher education is a US$1.29 billion enterprise (Elmahdy 2003). Nigeria, with an estimated half-a-billion-dollar budget (Jibril 2003) accounts for about a third of the remaining total figure. South Africa, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria appear to dispense a significant portion of the remaining expenditures when compared to other countries of the continent.

For a continent of more than 700 million people, this expenditure is depressingly small. The total yearly expenditure for higher education in Africa as a whole does not even come close to the endowments of some of the richest universities in the United States. The budgets of individual universities in many industrialized countries exceed the entire national budgets for higher education in many African nations. These comparisons clearly illustrate the disparity between the financial situations of higher education institutions in Africa and in industrialized nations.

It comes as no surprise, then, that virtually all African universities suffer from the effects of scarce financial resources. Serious shortages of published materials of books and journals, the lack of basic resources for teaching, the absence of simple laboratory equipment and supplies (such as chemicals) to do research and teaching, and, in some countries, delays of salary payments for months are just some of the common problems faced by institutions across the continent.

The bulk of funding for higher education is generated from state resources. While small variations in the proportion of resources allotted to higher education by country exist, African governments consistently provide more than 90 to 95 percent of the total operating budgets of higher education. The remaining percentages come from fees for tuition, services, consultancy, renting facilities, and other sources. In addition, there is a growing trend toward funding from external sources. Research, for example, is largely funded by donor agencies, and this naturally has implications for the nature of the research and for its impact on African higher education.

In many countries, governments pay stipends and living allowances to students, and this consumes a substantial proportion of university resources. In Guinea, for instance, scholarship money given to students accounts for as much as 55 percent of the total government allocations to the universities (Sylla 2003). In most countries, student fees have traditionally not provided more than token support.

There are some rare exceptions. In Lesotho, for instance, much of the income for the University of Lesotho comes from student fees. Students in Lesotho also repay student loans as soon as they have completed their studies and have secured jobs. The arrangements for loan payments are also

contingent upon where graduates eventually work; that is, in public, private, regional, or international sectors (Ntimo-Makara 2003).

The enormous support for the provision of nonacademic activities and facilities, such as allowances, free accommodation, and catering, is now facing scrutiny in many countries. Such support not only consumes major portions of university budgets, which consequently undermine the *raison d'être* of a higher learning institution, but it may also serve as an incentive for students to take longer to complete their studies. In situations where jobs for graduates are not immediately available, students have been reported to delay the completion of their studies, which then blocks the opportunity for potential upcoming students to enroll. Initiatives to curtail such support schemes are often precipitated by declining resources from governments and by multinational pressures on African governments to cut social services.

We can measure the scope of the financial challenges facing African higher education by examining what universities request from their governments and what they actually receive. In Ghana, according to Paul Effah (2003), five universities requested a total of $32 million in 2000. The government only provided $18 million – a mere 56 percent of what they requested; and the pattern is the same for the former polytechnic institutions whose statuses have been upgraded. In 1999–2000, the education sector in Uganda received 33 percent of the total government discretionary recurrent budget, and tertiary education accounted for only 18 percent of this total (Musisi 2003).

Without exception, African universities are under considerable financial pressure and face serious financial problems. That said, there are a few places where the financial situation appears to be relatively less severe or even improving gradually. In Nigeria – a country that suffered serious social, economic, and political upheavals during a series of military regimes in the past – funds are expected to increase by 252 percent under the current elected government (Jibril 2003). Botswana, which has a small population and considerable mineral wealth, has provided its higher education sector with adequate funding.

Over the last decade or so, the pressure to expand the revenue base of higher education has been clear. Universities have either taken it upon themselves or have been pressured by governments to expand the financial and resource base as resources have dwindled against mounting enrollments and escalating demand. Various forms of ideas to generate revenue and a variety of programs have been experimented with and implemented in many countries. While governments, sometimes with pressure from external donor agencies specially the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have been exploring the possibilities of expanding revenues from and the resource

base for higher education, there has often been resistance from the public and, especially, from students.

Some universities, such as Uganda's Makerere University, however, have been claimed as models of successful transformation in funding higher education for moving away from the entrenched culture of government support as sole funding source of universities. Musisi (2001) reports that in 1992–1993, 5 percent of the students in Makerere paid their way; seven years later, 80 percent were doing so. In Tanzania, the new trend is to adopt policies to equitably share costs between the government and those who use the university's services. The government is confining itself to funding the direct costs of education and leaving the remaining costs (such as residence fees, food, and the like) to be met by students, parents, and family members.

The complex dynamics that enabled fiscal reforms to succeed in some countries and to fail in others needs careful analysis. The sustainability of such reforms; their perceived, real, and potential benefits and concealed drawbacks and ramifications; and the significance of external and internal forces toward such a change are interesting topics for further research.

In virtually all cases, researchers observe the constant decline of direct and indirect resources allocated for higher education by governments. The impact of this trend and how this over time has eroded the quality of teaching and research, the moral and physical well-being of the academic profession, and the general state of the universities as a whole remains a subject for more discussion and analysis.

Governance

Public higher education institutions predominate in Africa, and governmental involvement in university affairs is the norm. The current governance structure in most African universities reflects this legacy. Throughout much of Africa, the head of state holds the ultimate authority as the chancellor or president in appointing vice-chancellors and others down the administrative line; this is especially typical in Anglophone Africa.

In Anglophone countries, the chancellorship is a symbolic position. The vice-chancellor, who is equivalent to an American university president, has the executive power as furnished by the board of directors, who themselves are composed largely of government-appointed members and, in some countries, students. The vice-chancellors have also been known to be appointed by a minister of education with or without the approval of Parliament or even a chancellor. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, under normal circumstances, university presidents are nominated by the members of the academic community; however, it is the president of the republic who

makes the final decision on the selection of the vice-chancellor upon the recommendation of the minister of education (Lelo 2003).

The chain of administrative power starts with the vice-chancellor, then moves to deans/directors, and then department heads. The deans and directors in most cases are appointed either by the vice-chancellor, directly by government officials, or by boards of directors or trustees. In many cases, fellow members elect the department heads. In a few countries, a short-list of candidates for the highest positions is submitted to the government as a compromise between the university community and the government. In most cases, the professorial authority that is typical in Western industrialized nations is lacking in much of Africa. The academic profession has less power in the African context than it does in the West.

Excessive non-academic staff

The teaching and research staff in quite a large number of African institutions is smaller than the nonacademic/administrative staff. The administrative bureaucracy in African universities is disproportionately large. A few examples illustrate this disparity:

- At National University of Lesotho, Matora Ntimo-Makara (2003) reports, there are twice as many nonacademic support staff as there are academics, and more than 60 percent of the institution's budget goes to staff costs. The financial resources of the university are, therefore, mainly used on nonteaching personnel costs. This imposes limitations on the creation of additional teaching positions to enhance capacity in academic programs.
- In Madagascar, James Stiles (2003) reports, the student-to-administrator ratio remains high relative to other countries (with 6 students to each administrator) and high relative to the ratio of students to teachers (47 to 1 in 1993 and 22 to 1 in 1996). This remains true even after the number of administrative staff was reduced in 1997 by 5 percent while the teaching corps increased.
- Togo, Emmanuel Edee (2003) reports, has 1,136 administrative and technical staff in higher education, yet the academic staff numbers fewer than 730, of whom only 55 percent are full-time. While the number of nonacademic staff is high, they face several problems, including overstaffing and lack of communication between the different services and the students.

The number of nonacademic personnel and the proportion of resources allocated to this sector are disproportionately high, and the quality and performance of the administrative cadre leaves much to be desired. Bureaucracy

and inefficiency are rampant. Training and skills development for the nonacademic staff are rarities.

While the nonacademic staff of African educational institutions are crucial, their disproportionate presence takes away the resources needed for the basic functions of universities: teaching and research. In countries where such resources are very scarce, universities must consider minimizing this significant and unsustainable fiscal burden in order to direct resources to the priority areas. While seldom discussed as a key issue for academic development in Africa, the complex issues surrounding the administrative staff in African universities deserves careful attention.

Management issues in universities

Efficient management and administrative systems are of paramount significance to the productivity and effectiveness of any enterprise; academic institutions are no exception. By and large, however, African universities suffer from poor, inefficient, and highly bureaucratic management systems. Poorly trained and poorly qualified personnel; inefficient, ineffective, and out-of-date management and administrative infrastructures; and poorly remunerated staff are the norm throughout the many systems.

Accounts of serious corruption charges and embezzlement of funds in African universities are not common. Some blame misappropriation of funds and poor prioritization as one of the factors for financial difficulties in the universities. For instance, the fiscal crisis in Kenyan public universities, Charles Ngome (2003) observes, is worsened by the misappropriation of the scarce resources. As students continue living and studying under deplorable conditions, the top administrators in the universities are regularly accused by the national auditor general's office of mismanaging funds and having misplaced priorities. During the 1995–1996 financial year, it was reported that Maseno University lost over US$660,000 (Kshs. 50 million), most of it through theft and false allowance payments. Even though the issues of mismanagement tend to be generally similar across nations and systems, it is important to note that the manner in which the university is governed and the leadership is appointed often contributes to the magnitude and scope of the problems.

Private higher education

In many African countries, the provision of higher education by private institutions is a growing phenomenon. When compared to other parts of the

world, however, most African countries have been slow to expand the private sector in higher education (Altbach 1999). The trend toward private higher education has been enhanced by a number of factors: a burgeoning demand from students for access, the declining capacity of public universities, the retrenchment of public services, pressure by external agencies to cut public services, a growing emphasis on and need for a highly skilled labor force that targets the local market, and the beginning of interest by foreign providers. In terms of numbers, there are now more private institutions than public ones in some countries, although the private schools are smaller and tend to specialize in specific fields, such as business administration. The following examples showcase the development of private higher education in Africa:

- Kenya has nineteen universities, of which thirteen are private (Ngome 2003).
- In Sudan, Mohamed Elamin El Tom (2003) observes, the number of private higher education institutions increased from one in 1989 to sixteen in 1996 and to twenty-two in 2001. The number of students enrolled in private higher education institutions increased nearly nine-fold within four years – from under 3,000 in 1990–1991 to close to 24,000 in 1994–1995.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, over 260 private institutions were operating in 1996, of which 28.9 percent were approved by the government, 32.3 percent were authorized to operate, and 38.8 percent were being considered for authorization. Many newly established institutions, unfortunately, do not meet the required higher education standards because of their organization and the conditions within which they operate (Lelo 2003).
- In Ghana, there has been an upsurge, especially among religious organizations, in the establishment of private higher education institutions. By August 2000, the National Accreditation Board had granted accreditation to eleven private tertiary institutions to offer degree programs. Ghana has five public universities and eight polytechnics whose status has been upgraded (Effah 2003).
- In Uganda, more than ten private universities have been established or being established. Currently, Uganda has two public universities; and the founding of two more public universities was also recently announced by the government (Musisi 2003).
- Togo – a country that has one major university and four other post-secondary institutions – has encouraged the creation of private institutions of higher education. Today, there are twenty-two private postsecondary institutions, of which eighteen were created between 1998 and 2000 (Edee 2003).

- Ethiopia, with a very small public academic sector, has seen the establishment of 20 private postsecondary institutions recently.

It is important to point out that most of these institutions are based in the major capital cities and in cities where the student pool is robust and the infrastructure is relatively good. It also should be noted that even though the number of private institutions on the continent has increased dramatically and appears higher in absolute numbers than the number of public institutions, student enrollment in public institutions outnumbers enrollment in private institutions in nearly all countries. For instance, while the enrollment in the six public universities in Madagascar was not more than 9,000, the total enrollment of the sixteen private institutions was less than 2,000, and none of the private institutions had more than 500 students (Stiles 2003).

Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa that has a well-developed private university system, yet only 20 percent of the 50,000 enrolled students attend the thirteen private universities (Ngome 2003). In Uganda, the total student population of the ten private institutions amounts to 3,600, while the two public universities enroll 23,000 students (Musisi 2003).

Private institutions in Africa are secular as well as sectarian. In religious-based private institutions, the funding of the institutions relies heavily on the founding religious organizations – based both locally and abroad – or their affiliates. Most other secular private institutions in Africa depend on student tuition and fees to generate their revenue. As a consequence, the cost of education in these institutions is generally higher in comparison to other educational institutions.

Governments do not give financial support to private institutions in most African countries. In certain cases, however, the private institutions receive direct financial support from governments. In Liberia, for instance, the state provides subsidies to private and church-operated postsecondary institutions. It also provides financial aid to students attending these institutions to cover the cost of tuition and textbooks (Seyon 2003). In Togo, private institutions that offer short-period technician degrees are subsidized by the state in the same way as other institutions are (Edee 2003). In Mozambique, some scholarships are also made available to private higher education students to help them pay their tuition fees (Chilundo 2003).

Private for-profit higher learning institutions provide high demand and relatively low cost, skill-based courses rather quickly. These institutions are free from the obligations that constrain other public institutions whose responsibilities span across wider and broader national objectives. Private institutions also play an important role in serving as immediate safety-net in addressing the overwhelming need of higher learning in the continent whose over all enrollment rate in higher education institutions is very low. In

some countries, such as South Africa, the private for-profit sector has come under scrutiny because of perceived problems of low quality offerings. The challenge of ensuring that the for-profit sector, and private higher education in general, contributes to national goals for higher education is considerable in a context where there are few constraints on these emerging institutions.

The courses taught in most private higher education institutions are generally similar across the continent and narrow in their program coverage. The most common ones are computer science and technology, accounting and management, banking, finance, marketing, and secretarial science. The courses are generally targeted toward the needs of the local market.

Most private institutions hire academic staff from public institutions. Characteristically, most of the academic staff continue to hold part-time positions in these public institutions. In some countries, the massive flow of academic staff from public institutions to newly established private institutions has seriously constrained certain departments in public universities. For many academic staff, however, these private teaching positions have become an important source of extra income.

The general trend, then, has been to moonlight at the newly established institutions while maintaining bases in major public universities. In some cases, lured by highly lucrative salaries and benefits, academic staff have been reported to join private institutions full-time by abandoning their public institutions. Unable to control this growing trend, some universities and departments enter into negotiations with academic staff whose disciplines tend to have an attractive market value at private teaching institutions and elsewhere.

There still looms a strong public perception across Africa that public institutions are academically better than private institutions – even when a few of the private institutions hire the best academic staff and maintain new and up-to-date instruments, equipment, and facilities. It is plausible that this prevalent attitude emanates from the rigorous selection process prior to enrollment and fierce competition for admission in limited, yet "free," public universities. As student enrollment escalates across the continent, the entrance requirements for the limited spaces in public institutions have become increasingly rigorous so that those students that are admitted are clearly the nation's best. In general, private institutions primarily enroll those students who cannot make it to public institutions – for numerous reasons – and that continues to affect the general perceptions of private institutions as secondary to public institutions.

Whereas the emergence of private higher education as a business enterprise is a growing phenomenon, a number of issues plague its development, including legal status, quality assurance, and cost of service. The status of

many private postsecondary institutions in Africa is shady. Many operate without licenses, commensurate resources, or appropriate infrastructure. The quality of service by many is also shoddy, even at a few of the institutions that possess better equipment, newer buildings, and better facilities than the major universities in their country.

The quality of education at many private postsecondary institutions has also been an issue of some concern. Many multinational businesses across the world provide educational services today that are driven by profit motives. Multinational companies and a few foreign-based universities have established satellite campuses in countries where there is a big market for higher education. These transplanted institutions are often criticized for lack of accountability or social responsibility and for potentially threatening and eroding the cultural fabric of a nation.

Private higher education is a growing trend in much of Africa and is being propelled by a variety of forces. The forces behind this private diversification and expansion are both internal and external. A thorough examination of the process of diversification of private institutions must take into account national as well as international economic, political, and educational realities.

Gender

Gender imbalance is a common phenomenon in the continent's educational institutions. Cultural, sociological, economical, psychological, historical, and political factors foster these inequalities. While a number of efforts are now underway to rectify gender imbalances, much still remains to be done across all of the educational sectors. The gender imbalance in higher education is acute in virtually all African countries and in most disciplines. Various efforts and initiatives have been made to increase the participation of female students in postsecondary institutions.

- In Ethiopia, according to Habtamu Wondimu (2003), efforts have been made to improve the female enrollment rate – which has been only about 15 percent for the past several years – by lowering the cutoff in the grade point average required for admission. This "affirmative action," he notes, has improved the admission rate of female students. The higher attrition rate among women, however, continues to plague the overall status and numbers of women in Ethiopian higher education.
- In Malawi, where only 25 percent of the student population is female, an affirmative selection policy for women has been implemented (Chimombo 2003).
- In Mozambique, the proportion of female students has gradually increased since 1992. The ratio between genders remained high (at the

range of between 2.79 and 3.06) between 1990 and 1996 but fell to 2.45 and 2.59 in 1998 and 1999. This improvement was partly due to the opening of private higher education institutions, where, on average, 43 percent of all students enrolled in 1999 were female; only 25 percent of students enrolled were female in the public sector (Chilundo 2003).

- Most Tanzanian institutions have been taking steps to improve the participation of female students, who currently make up between 25 and 30 percent of enrolled students. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Dar es Salaam was able to register 49 percent females in the 2000–2001 first-year intake. As in Ethiopia, the grade-point-average cutoff point for female candidates has been lowered to enable more females to qualify for admission (Mkude and Cooksey 2003).
- Uganda's gender disparity is reported to have decreased in the past ten years. Women constituted 27 percent of University of Makerere's total student intake in 1990–1991 but today account for 34 percent of the enrollments. Like institutions in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Tanzania, Ugandan universities are giving preferential treatment to female students. With awarding of additional points, the proportion of female students enrolled has risen to 34 percent (Musisi 2003).
- In Zimbabwe, university entry qualifications have also been reduced to increase female enrollments (Maunde 2003).

Significant gender disparities remain, however, in the more competitive faculties and departments and in the hard sciences, where female student participation is particularly low. In Kenya, for instance, female students make up about 30 percent of total enrollments in the public universities but only 10 percent of enrollments in engineering and technically based professional programs (Ngome 2003). The female student population in the natural sciences across African public higher education is consistently lower than that of male students. The pattern appears to be a universal phenomenon around the world, though the proportion of the disparity across countries can and does differ significantly.

There are, however, examples of exceptions where female students outnumber their male compatriots in African countries. In Mauritius, even though overall enrollment shows a more or less even gender distribution (47 percent female), these enrollments do vary by gender across faculties, with a predominance of male students (76 percent) in the Faculty of Engineering and a predominance of female students (68 percent) in the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities (Baichoo, Parahoo and Fagoonee 2003).

In Lesotho, more females than males are enrolled in education, social sciences, and humanities (arts) programs. Overall, the total number of females

represents about 56 percent of all enrolled students in the University of Lesotho (Ntimo-Makara 2003). In Uganda, the private universities, Uganda Martyrs and Nkumba, report female student enrollments of over 50 and 56 percent respectively (Musisi 2003). In Tunisia, female student enrollments went from 21.1 percent in 1987–1988 to 50.4 percent in 1999–2000 and currently stands at 51.9 percent – the first time more women than men were enrolled at the university level (Millot, Waite and Zaiem 2003).

Female academic staff are even smaller in proportion than female students in African institutions. In Guinea, out of 1,000 academic staff members only twenty-five – a mere 2.5 percent – are female (Sylla 2003). Out of 2,228 academic staff in Ethiopia, 137 – or 6 percent – are female (Wondimu 2003). In Congo, Nigeria, and Zambia, no more than 15 percent of all university academic staff is female. In Uganda, female academic staff occupy fewer than 20 percent of the established academic posts (Musisi 2003). In a few countries, the figures are a little better: Morocco, Tunisia, and South Africa, have 24, 33, and 36 percent female academic staff respectively (Ouakrime 2003; Millot, Waite and Zaiem 2003; Subotzky 2003). The underrepresentation of female academic staff in higher ranks and qualification levels and in certain fields of study is particularly severe. For instance, in 1997, men in South Africa constituted 90 percent of professors, 78 percent of associate professors, and 67 percent of senior lecturers, but only about 47 percent of the junior ranks (Subotzky 2003).

Overall, gender disparities are common trends across the continent's higher education institutions. The disparity increases in magnitude as one climbs the educational ladder. The gravity of the disparity is most severe in the academic ranks with some variations in different fields and disciplines. Gender issues in African higher education are complex and require and deserve further study.

As we discussed above, a variety of initiatives have been implemented to remedy this unhealthy scenario. While a few of these initiatives have been productive, others have yet to achieve any real change. These initiatives continue to be plagued by subtle resistance, implicit and explicit oversight, a lack of serious recognition, and ignorance.

Research and publishing

Long before the world entered into what is being called the knowledge era, research was recognized as a central priority for higher education. Since the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, research has been a defining element for many academic institutions and systems (Ben-David 1968; Ben-David 1977). In the increasingly global world that is largely being shaped

by knowledge and information, establishing a strong research infrastructure has more than ever before become a sine qua non in this highly competitive world.

Universities, as creators and brokers of these products, are situated at the center of the knowledge and information supermarket. For all practical purposes, universities remain the most important institutions in the production and consumption of knowledge and information, particularly in the Third World. This is particularly so in Africa, where only a few such institutions serve as the preeminent and dominant centers of knowledge and information transactions.

By all measures, research and publishing activities in Africa are in critical condition. The general state of research in Africa is extremely poor, and its research infrastructure is inadequate. Scarcity of laboratory equipment, chemicals, and other scientific paraphernalia; a small number of high-level experts; poor and dilapidated libraries; alarmingly low and declining salaries of academic and research staff; a massive brain drain out of the academic institutions; the "expansion" of undergraduate education; poor oversight of research applicability; and declining, nonexistent, and unreliable sources of research funds all remain major hurdles to the development of research capacity across the continent.

Most countries in Africa have practically no funds allocated to research in the university budgets. Expenditures on research and development (R&D) in Ghana, for example, show a declining trend from around 0.7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the mid-1970s to 0.1–0.2 percent of the GDP in 1983–1987. There is little evidence to suggest that this trend has changed. Paul Effah (2003) reports that the University of Ghana received only US$1.4 million to fund the operations of its ten research institutes in 2000.

In Uganda, the amount earmarked for research at Makerere University for the financial year 1999–2000 was a mere US$80,000. As a consequence, research in the country has remained underdeveloped and heavily dependent on donor funding (Musisi 2003). In Malawi, a mere 0.7 percent of the whole University of Malawi budget was allocated to research and publications in 1999 (Chimombo 2003).

Tracking frontiers of knowledge is crucial for research and development. Having access to indicators of the knowledge frontiers, such as journals, periodicals, and databases, is a major prerequisite to undertaking viable, sustainable, and meaningful research. In much of Africa, these resources are either lacking or are extremely scarce. The escalating cost of journals and ever-dwindling library and university funds have exacerbated the problem. Many universities in Africa have dropped most of their subscriptions, while others have simply cancelled their subscriptions altogether. Such extreme

measures cannot be surprising in light of the fact that some of these universities cannot even pay salaries on a regular basis.

The local publishing infrastructure has traditionally been weak and, generally, unreliable. The paucity of local publications is complicated by many factors, including the small number of researchers with the energy, time, funds, and support needed to sustain journals; the lack of qualified editors and editorial staff; a shortage of publishable materials; a restrictive environment that inhibits freedom of speech; and a lack of commitment to and appreciation of journal production by university administrators.

It is remarkable that even though the state of research in much of Africa remains precarious, many researchers report that academic promotion depends to a large extent on publishing. Even when the environment does not appear to support research, publishing, as a universal tool of measuring productivity, remains a yardstick for academic promotion in Africa. It is a stark contradiction that African academics are expected to publish their work in an academic context that does not even provide them with access to the journals, databases, and other publications that are vital in keeping abreast of international developments in science and scholarship (Teferra 2002).

Many of the research activities that are undertaken on the continent are largely funded – and to a certain extent, managed and directed – by external agencies, such as bilateral and multilateral bodies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and others. Estimates of the percentage of external support for research in Africa range from 70 percent to as much as 90 percent. The ramifications of this external funding, especially with regard to what is researched, are far reaching and have become the focus of discussions at numerous national, regional, and international forums.

Academic institutions in many countries are frequently linked by their participation in an international system of knowledge distribution. Universities in the large industrialized nations are the major producers and distributors of scholarly knowledge. Academic institutions in other countries, particularly in developing countries, are largely consumers of scholarly materials and research produced elsewhere.

It will be extremely difficult – perhaps even impossible – for Africa to compete effectively in a world increasingly dominated by knowledge and information unless it consciously, persistently, and vigorously overhauls its potential and its most crucial institutions: its universities. Africa should and must do much more to develop its universities – its only institutions that generate and utilize knowledge and information. The international knowledge system has centers and peripheries in the production and distribution of knowledge. Africa, as a continent, finds itself on the very edge of the

knowledge periphery (Altbach 1987) and appears to be increasingly isolated from the center.

Research and publishing must be strengthened. Governments, major donor institutions, NGOs, and bilateral organizations should and must direct their policies toward prioritizing the revitalization of these important areas of African higher education if Africa is to cope effectively with the challenges of the present and the future. The current situation, in which donor agencies and international organizations fund the large proportion of Africa-based research, presents additional challenges. While it is unlikely that major research funding will be available from indigenous sources in the near future, it is important to ensure that the research that is taking place, regardless of the source of funding, meets the needs of African scientists and the broader interest of African societies.

Academic freedom

Academic freedom makes it possible for new ideas, research, and opinions to emerge; for widely accepted views to be tested and challenged; and for critics to comment on and scrutinize the status quo. Academic freedom is an ideal that faces challenges all over the world. There is, however, little doubt that academic freedom is crucial in nurturing national academic and scholarly cultures. Ideally, academic freedom ensures that academics will be able to teach freely, undertake research of their own interest, and communicate findings and ideas openly and without any fear of persecution.

A civil society thrives on tolerance and freedom of expression. A country with robust freedom of expression allows a great variety of perspectives and views to be considered, entertained, and contested. Academic freedom is a crucial element of a civil society, and the development of a civil society is stunted in the absence of freedom of expression and academic freedom.

Most African governments are intolerant of dissent, criticism, nonconformity, and free expression of controversial, new, or unconventional ideas. Aman Attieh (2003) notes that since 1992 serious violations of freedom of speech and expression by security forces, opposition groups, and militant groups in Algeria have silenced not only scholars but also the citizens as a whole. In Kenya, Charles Ngome (2003) writes, unwarranted government interference and abuses of academic freedom have eroded the autonomy and quality of the higher learning institutions. The summary expulsion of over forty university professors and lecturers from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia in the mid-1990s (Wondimu 2003) also epitomizes a gross violation of academic freedom and illustrates the intolerance of academic freedom that governments in many African countries have.

In such an environment, the academic community is often careful not to overtly offend those in power. This contributes to the perpetuation of a culture of self-censorship. Those who courageously speak their mind and express their views often find themselves facing dictators capable of using terror, kidnapping, imprisonment, expulsion, torture, and even death to silence dissident voices.

The stability of a culture of academic freedom in a nation is measured by that nation's tolerance of open and frank debates, criticisms, and comments. As African countries slowly move away from one-party authoritarian and autocratic rule to elected democratic governments and leadership, it is hoped that academic freedom will eventually improve in African academic institutions. African universities have a special responsibility to build a culture of academic freedom in teaching, research, and learning, as well as in societal expression. Developing such a culture in the postcolonial context of political instability and dictatorship will prove a daunting task.

The brain drain and the issue of capacity building

One of the most serious challenges facing many African countries is the departure of their best scholars and scientists away from universities. The flow away from domestic academe takes a form of internal mobility (locally) and regional and overseas migration. The term "brain drain" is frequently used to describe the movement of high-level experts from developing countries to industrialized nations. Much of the literature reflects this particular phenomenon – often pointing out its grave immediate and future consequences – within the context of capacity-building issues. In much of the literature on academic mobility, we read about the brain drain of academics in the context of migration overseas. The classification and the terms we use here reflect that idea of brain drain, and we are aware that the movement of high-level expertise is an area of much discussion and debate.

The internal mobility of scholars can be best described as the flow of high-level expertise from the universities to better-paying government agencies and private institutions and firms that may or may not be able to utilize their expertise and talent effectively. As the state of African universities has deteriorated, academics have sought employment opportunities outside universities, consequently draining institutions of their faculty members. Major public institutions in many countries have lost significant numbers of their key faculty to emerging private higher education institutions and other commercially-oriented institutions, perhaps not only in their physical removal, but in terms of the time, commitment, and loyalty. In many countries, academic staff often hold more than one job outside the university to

help ends meet and, as a consequence, may spread themselves too thin to fulfill their university responsibilities of teaching, research, and service.

Academic staff are also lured away by a variety of government agencies, where salaries are often better and the working environment more comfortable. In many cases, the salaries and benefits in universities are lower than comparative positions in and outside of the civil service. For instance, a comparative salary analysis in Ghana in 1993 revealed that salary levels in sectors such as energy, finance, revenue collection, and the media were all higher than those of the universities (Effah 2003).

In many of the emerging private institutions, salaries and benefits are rather handsome when compared to salaries and benefits in academe. In Ethiopia, for instance, a private college is reported to be paying academic staff a monthly salary as much as three times what a public university is paying. In Uganda, the migration of senior staff from tertiary institutions, especially from Makerere University, was of paramount concern in the early 1990s. The relative improvement of employment conditions, salaries, the standard of living, and fringe benefits to the academic staff, Nakanyike Musisi (2003) holds, have combined to halt this exodus and brain drain from Uganda. However, the growing and better-paid private sector and the higher-level civil service continue to lure seasoned academicians away from tertiary institutions. The internal brain drain, though rarely discussed, is nonetheless an issue of great importance to higher education. It is especially important because it is something that African countries can themselves at least partly solve.

Civil strife, political persecutions, and social upheavals instigated the massive exodus of highly trained personnel from countries such as Somalia, Liberia, Ethiopia, Togo, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Rwanda and Algeria have also seen systematic killings of academics and intellectuals because of their ethnicity and religious predilections.

Regional migration – academic migration to regional and neighboring countries – has also brought about serious shortages of high-level academics in some countries. Many academic departments have lost their preeminent faculty members to regional universities in other parts of Africa. For instance, several senior scholars from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, hold faculty positions at the University of Botswana. Southern African countries such as Zambia have also been complaining about the migration of their graduates and academic community to South Africa and Zimbabwe. Some have observed that expatriate Zambians staff entire departments in some institutions in these countries.

A 1998 study shows that in 1990, nearly 7,000 Kenyans with tertiary-level education migrated to the United States (Ngome 2003). In the same year,

nearly 120 doctors were estimated to have emigrated from Ghana. Between 600 and 700 Ghanaian physicians, a number equal to about 50 percent of the total population of doctors remaining in the country, are known to be practicing in the United States alone (Sethi 2000); and yet, according to Paul Effah (2003), an analysis of existing vacancies in the tertiary institutions in Ghana indicates that about 40 percent of faculty positions in the universities and more than 60 percent of those in the polytechnics are vacant. Munzali Jibril (2003) reports that two-thirds of the 36,134 faculty position in Nigeria remain vacant.

Quoting several sources, Habtamu Wondimu (2003) describes the large number of Ethiopian academic staff who quit their teaching profession to take other jobs or go abroad for training or other reasons and do not come back. Though the number varies from institution to institution, the estimate of the brain drain from Ethiopian universities might be as much as 50 percent. In Eritrea, one of the critical bottlenecks to the university's development plans, according to Cheryl Sternman Rule (2003), has been the shortage of qualified academic staff and its excessive dependence on expatriate staff.

In Rwanda, as Jolly Mazimhaka and G.F. Daniel (2003) report, skilled personnel and professionals have been either killed or have gone into exile, leaving a huge vacuum in the intellectual labor force, a phenomenon that has greatly affected every domestic sector and curbed the process of national development. Even before 1994, when the infamous genocide took place, many sectors of the national economy suffered from a serious shortage of professionals and management staff; the war and genocide have aggravated this situation.

Matora Ntimo-Makara (2003) points out that Lesotho's capacity to retain highly trained personnel is low. The South African job market provides better salary packages, and many leave. Lesotho's institutional capacity is eroded as a result. Students from Lesotho who study at and graduate from South African institutions seldom return home upon completion of their studies and instead take positions in South Africa. In Swaziland, according to Margaret Zoller Booth (2003), not only has the flight of schoolteachers created a negative climate for educational progress but the university has also suffered from the exodus of professors seeking better positions in other countries, particularly South Africa. To curb this problem, a review is being considered to improve conditions for the academics and staff.

Academics and other professionals in Nigeria have migrated to other countries, most notably the United States, South Africa, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, and member countries of the European Union. According to Munzali Jibril (2003), it is estimated that there are at least 10,000 Nigerian academics and 21,000 Nigerian doctors in the United States alone.

Reports indicate that many of the best and most experienced academics from South Africa are migrating to Australia, Britain, Canada, the United States, and other developed countries. It is ironic that while several countries complain about the loss of their highly skilled labor to South Africa, South Africa itself bemoans its loss of talent to other countries. It is useful to understand this "hopping" phenomenon in discerning the effects of brain-drain issues nationally, regionally, and internationally.

The causes of migration – be it regional or international – are a complex phenomenon. The reasons why scholars migrate or decide to stay abroad are products of a complex blend of economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological factors. The impact and chemistry of each factor varies from country to country and individual to individual and fluctuates with time – even for the same individual (Teferra 2000).

While African countries and many major regional, international, and nongovernmental organizations have tried to stem massive movements of African expertise, the results of these efforts are far from satisfactory. Even though various attempts have been made to stem the brain drain, efforts were rarely made to tap the expertise of immigrant communities at their new places of residence. As communication technology is slowly expanding across Africa and physical distance is becoming a less serious obstacle, an active policy of mobilizing the remotely stationed intellectual capital and vital resource of migrated nationals needs to be given more emphasis (Teferra 2000).

Africa is not alone in seeking to stem the brain drain. Developing countries on other continents and, indeed, many industrialized countries have also sought to minimize the migration of talent in an increasingly globalized labor market. These efforts have largely been unsuccessful. Migration from poorer to wealthier countries is commonplace, as is migration from smaller and less cosmopolitan academic systems to larger and more central systems. At present, there is a small exodus from the United Kingdom to the United States and several other countries because of lower academic salaries in Britain. The international migration of highly educated people is by no means limited to Africa. It is a worldwide and perhaps unprecedented phenomenon.

The challenges to capacity building in African institutions also emanate from health-related problems. Recent studies indicate that the impact of HIV/AIDS has taken its toll on the academics and students, and the scourge of this disease on African academic institutions is massive. The levels of sickness and death among faculty members from this disease have added to the teaching, financial, and administrative burdens already facing the rest of the academic community (Kelly 2001).

Social upheavals, political instabilities, economic uncertainties, real and perceived persecutions, and poor working and living conditions are often the most common variables facing the migratory community. Most African countries are yet unable to rid themselves of these economic, social, and political hurdles that drive away many of their highly qualified and trained experts.

Language of instruction

More than half a dozen languages are currently in use in African higher education. These include Afrikaans, Arabic, English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. Only Arabic and, arguably, Afrikaans are languages indigenous to Africa. Overall, Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese remain the major international languages of instruction at African higher learning institutions. At a time when globalization has become such a powerful force, the dominant position of European languages has become even more accentuated and evident. English has become particularly powerful, even dominating over other major European languages. The predominance of English is fueled by, among other things, the Internet and globalization.

In some African countries, languages struggle for dominance in the higher education sector. There is an interesting trend toward a transition in the language used as the instructional medium in Rwanda, for instance, where the core of the leadership in government and power is changing. This is also the case in Sudan, where the political predilections are shifting, and in Equatorial Guinea and, to some extent, Somalia, where perceived socioeconomic benefits appear to be dictating the choice of language for instruction. South Africa is discussing the future of Afrikaans as a language of higher education in a context of English domination. Language remains a volatile social issue in many African countries.

The development of vernacular languages into an instructional medium in higher education will continue to be confronted by numerous issues, including:

- the multiplicity of languages on the continent
- the controversy surrounding the identification and delegation of a particular language as a medium of instruction
- the developmental stages of languages for use in writing and publications
- a paucity of published materials
- poor vocabularies and grammatical conventions of indigenous languages that make it difficult to convey ideas and concepts

- a poor infrastructure for producing, publishing, translating, and developing teaching materials locally, and
- the pressures of globalization.

African universities rely on the knowledge system that has been conceived, developed, and organized based on Western languages. The Western world produces the majority of knowledge conveyed in those languages. African universities do not have the capacity to generate enough knowledge of their own, nor do they have the capacity and infrastructure to process and translate existing ones virtually from the Western world – yet. Most books, journals, databases, and other resources that are used in higher education institutions are imported, and these are communicated in Western languages. In the age of the Internet, globalization, and expanding knowledge systems, which are all driven by a few Western languages, no country can afford to remain shielded in a cocoon of isolation brought about by language limitations. Such isolation would prove both disastrous and, likely, impossible to achieve.

Many charge that the use of European languages in higher education in Africa has contributed to the decline of African higher education and the alienation of academe from the majority of the population. Others have argued that the use of metropolitan languages has contributed to national unity. Language conflict is by no means limited to Africa. It is a central issue in many developing countries as well as in a number of multilingual industrialized nations. Canada, for example, faced the possibility of the secession of the province of Quebec because of largely linguistic conflicts. Language also remains an issue of tension in Belgium, and it will remain one of the most significant challenges facing African academic development.

Student activism

Student activism is prevalent in many African countries. Students have protested alleged social, economic, cultural, political, and personal injustices, and they are vocal in defending their interests and benefits. Student protests about poor student services, delay of stipends, and/or removal of perquisites and benefits are dominant confrontational issues in many African countries today.

As universities have been forced to cut budgets and resource rationalization has become a reality, students have fought fiercely to maintain elements of the status quo. While students have been known to fight vigorously to ensure the continuation of their benefits or resist an increase in tuition and fees, they have not been much concerned about issues of academic quality or the curriculum. Self-interest seems to be the dominant force driving student unrest in Africa today.

University protests have led to government instability and have played different roles in political power shifts. In a few cases, they have even toppled governments. When such protests take place, officials conscious of their possible consequences take them seriously – often brutally crushing and subduing them. Hundreds of students have been seriously hurt, imprisoned, persecuted, and even killed during protests in Africa. According to a study by Federici and Caffentzis (2000), there were over a total of 110 reported student protests in Africa between the years 1990 and 1998. This study demonstrates that government responses to student protests were "inhumane," "brutal," and "excessively cruel."

Student protests are generally perceived as a reflection of the grievances of the wider community. As civil societies are slowly developed and opposition groups become legitimized and tolerated in Africa, it will be interesting to track how these protests are perceived and how they are going to evolve.

Conclusion

That African higher education faces severe challenges is unquestionable. This essay has provided a discussion of some of the key problems evident throughout the continent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The problems are difficult and may even be getting worse as the pressure for academic and institutional expansion comes into conflict with limited resources. Continuing political instability exacerbates the economic decline seen in many African countries, yet there are signs of progress as well. The emergence of democratic political systems and of a civil society is positive. The revival of academic freedom and the commitment by many in the higher education community to build successful institutions despite difficult circumstances shows the viability of academic systems. A recent recognition – by the international community, particularly the leading donor agencies and major lending institutions – that African higher education is a vital area for development is also positive. African higher education is at a turning point. Recognition of the aforementioned problems can lead to positive solutions with proper planning and effective leadership.

Note

Many of the insights and sources in this chapter come from our edited book, Teferra, D. and Altbach, P.G. (eds.) (2003). *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. This article is based on the introductory chapter in the book.

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