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HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA – A CASE OF ERITREA

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Abstract

Education has long been recognized as a central element in development. The human capital formation is receiving increased attention from policy makers and scholars in different parts of the world particularly in developing countries. Eritrea is a newly born nation in Africa and is striving hard to develop its higher education. An attempt is made in this paper to analyze the educational trends, the strategies and challenges for higher educational development in the country. Furthermore, the paper also delves the development of higher education in the country since independence. The paper provides some implications for the for the policy purpose to develop higher education so as to curb the use of expatriate manpower in different sectors of the economy .

Keywords: Higher Education, Africa, Eritrea, Human capital, economic growth, poverty.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as a central element in development. It is a vital input in modernization where the developing countries particularly in Africa began their drive for social and economic development since their independence. Education is perceived as a means not only of raising political and social consciousness, but also of increasing the number of skilled workers and raising the level of trained manpower (Tilak, 1994; Rena, 2000:1). Ultimately, the human capital formation is receiving increased attention from policy makers and scholars interested in promoting economic development in Third World countries. Models of endogenous economic growth stress the importance of investment in knowledge, including basic education, as a critical factor in economic expansion. Specialists have long argued that education should form a principal component in any development strategy (Akkari, 2004: 144). In line with this, Education is widely accepted as a leading instrument for promoting economic growth. For Africa, where growth is essential if the continent is to climb out of poverty, education is particularly important (Bloom, et al., 2006:1).

Therefore, the investments in education are justified by the contributions which education makes to economic growth, poverty reduction and social welfare. Education contributes to economic growth directly by increasing the productivity of labor, the principal asset of the poor. It also facilitates the development of new technologies, and integrates these

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technologies into economic activity (Psacheropolous, 1994). Education is also a welfare indicator per se, reflected in improved health and reduced infant mortality. Education also creates positive social externalities by promoting institutions of civil society, improving social equity, strengthening national cohesiveness, and lowering crime rates (Psacheropolous, 1993; Tilak, 1994; Rena, 2000; Varghese, 2004).

Indeed, it is understood that higher education can lead to economic growth through both private and public channels. The private benefits for individuals are well established and include better employment prospects, higher salaries, and a greater ability to save and invest. These benefits may result in better health and improved quality of life, thus setting off a virtuous spiral in which life expectancy improvements enable individuals to work more productively over a longer time further boosting lifetime earnings. Public benefits are less widely recognized, which explains many governments' neglect of tertiary schooling (Thompson, 1981; Tilak, 1992; Rena, 2000; Varghese, 2004). But individual gains can also benefit society as a whole.

1.1 Literature Review

A series of studies have taken into account the broader impacts of higher education. It is interesting to analyze some of those studies that were undertaken about higher education and its impact on economic growth. The inattention to higher education within development initiatives lies in the shortage of empirical evidence that it affects economic growth and poverty reduction (Tilak, 2003). After World War II, several economists, including Shultz, Milton Friedman, Gary Becker, and Jacob Mincer, developed the "human capital" theory to examine the benefits of education for individuals and society. Friedman and his wife Rose originally suggested that there was no evidence that "higher education yields 'social benefits' over and above the benefits that accrue to the students themselves." On the contrary, they hypothesized that higher education may promote "social unrest and political instability" (Milton and Rose, 1980).

In contrast to this early view, recent evidence suggests that higher education is a determinant as well as a result of income, and can produce public and private benefits (Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky, 2006). Higher education may create greater tax revenue, increase savings and investment, and lead to a more entrepreneurial development. It can also improve a nation's wealth and health, contribute to reduced population growth, improve technology, and strengthen governance. With regard to the benefits of higher education for a country's economy, many observers attribute India's leap onto the world economic stage as stemming from its decades-long successful efforts to provide high-quality, technically oriented tertiary education to a significant number of its citizens ((Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky, 2006:1).

Conventional rate of return analysis shows higher education in a less favorable light than it shows primary and secondary schooling. Psacharopoulos and Patrinos reviewed 98

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country studies from 1960–1997 and found that the typical estimates of the

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Unfortunately, there are no comparable studies investigating such spillovers in a developing country like Eritrea.

Another channel for improvement is through research and development, which can boost economic growth and productivity growth. In a recent World Bank study, Lederman and Maloney conducted a cross-country regression analysis that showed that the rate of return on R&D was 78 per cent (Lederman, and Maloney, 2003).

Bloom, et al., found a positive and statistically significant correlation between higher education enrollment rates and governance indicators, including absence of corruption, rule of law, absence of ethnic tensions, bureaucratic quality, low risk of repudiation of contracts by governments, and low risk of appropriation (Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky, 2006).

Bloom and others in their recent study (2006) experimented with different combinations of primary, secondary, and tertiary education, for both the production function effect and the technological catch-up effect, but none of the alternative combinations showed an improvement in fit. No other component of education was significant in affecting technological catch-up. They analyzed whether Africa is close to the production possibility frontier. Africa can only benefit from technological catch-up if there is a gap between current production and the production possibility frontier. They also analyzed the GDP difference between the predicted level of GDP and the initial level of GDP to determine the extent of the production possibility frontier gap (Bloom, Canning, and Chan, 2006).

In a speech in 2000, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argued:

The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.²

1.2 Methodology and Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The information obtained from various books and articles on education in Africa and the Ministry of Education, the State of Eritrea, Bulletins and reports, the Asmara University administration (Registrar), the World Bank reports, are discussed and this assisted in the drawing of conclusions and recommendations. The Heads of some higher learning institutions in Eritrea are consulted and discussions are held with them.

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An attempt is made in this paper to analyze the higher education and its impact in economic development of Africa. This paper also provides some review of relevant literature. It mainly delves with the education in Eritrea. The paper is been divided into five sections. The second part deals with the higher education in Africa along with a brief note on financing of education in Africa. Section three devoted to explain higher education trends in Eritrea post independence period. Section four discusses some of the major challenges in Eritrean education and the final section ends with some concluding remarks and recommendations.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Enrollment rates in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world. Although the gross enrollment ratio has increased in the past 40 years – it was just 1 per cent in 1965 – it still stands at only 5 per cent (Bloom, Hartley, and Rosovsky, 2006:3). Africa's recovery and sustainable development will therefore depend on many important factors, including the expansion – both quantitative and qualitative – of the continent's stock of human capital through education (Thompson, 1981; Rena, 2005b).

The key role of education, despite the economic and political difficulties in most African countries and concentrating on developing theories and fashions during the past decades, is now accepted as indispensable for any effective development. All African governments were certainly convinced of this key role of education in the early years of their independence. African governments have accordingly placed heavy emphasis on expanding educational opportunities from primary school to university in the two or three decades since their independence (Alexander, 1988; Abdi, 2003; Bloom, Canning, and Chan, 2006).

2.1 Financing Higher Education in Africa

Some African universities are beginning to take privatization initiatives. The University of Zambia and Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique have generated significant benefits in enhanced capacity, information and income by establishing internet nodes linked to local electronic networks, which sell subscriptions to non-university business, organizations and individuals. Ghana and Nsukka have been fairly successful in their initiatives. Ghana indicated a profit of 9% on a total income of US dollars 22,700 in 1991 (Saint, 1992). Its policies and methods of operating the consulting center are very popular and might prove to be useful model for other universities. Nsukka claimed a profit of US \$ 35,238 through its consulting activities over the period 1982 - 1991, on a turnover of US\$ 90,398, with the consultants receiving 50% of the profits and the university and department receiving 30% and 20% respectively (Anyona, Gravenir and Mse, 2005).

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3. HIGHER EDUCATION IN ERITREA

3.1 Country Profile

Eritrea is located in Africa bordering on the Red Sea and includes the Dahlak Archipelago. It has an area of 46,770 sq mi (121,144 sq km), population (2005 est.): 4,670,000 (including about 350,000 refugees from the Sudan). Capital: Asmara. It is bordered on the northeast by the Red Sea, on the southeast by Djibouti, on the south by Ethiopia, and on the northwest by Sudan. Eritrea also includes the many islands of the Dahlak Archipelago, which is located in the Red Sea. When we look at the educational profile: at tertiary level, there was one University, Eritrea Institute of Technology (3 colleges) and 4 other colleges located in different parts of the country. The total number of students at all levels was about 186,000 in 1991 and reached to about 700,000 in 2006. Eritrea places strong emphasis on education. The Macro Policy of Eritrea states, among other things, that in the long term, Eritrea will be producing "knowledge intensive" goods and services able to penetrate the world market (Government of Eritrea, 1994). The emphasis on education is also reflected on the government's policy on poverty eradication.

After the liberation of Eritrea, despite the scarcity of resources and the shortage of academic staff, the University of Asmara was re-established and resumed its academic work on October 10, 1991 with a few hundred students and five faculties to mention a few, faculty of natural science, social science. It is now struggling to accommodate many more courses including Engineering, pharmacy, agriculture etc., and a greater population of students than it was originally designed to cater for. Table-1 provides the information on the University students and their enrolment during the period 1991-92 to 2002-2003.

The university's total student enrollment in degree programs increased from 2,836 in 1995-1996 to 3,912 in 1999-2000, an increase of 28% in 4 years. In 1999-2000, total enrollment at the institution topped 4,500. In addition, the university awards 1202 in 2006 out of which 948 with degree, 209 with diploma and 45 in Masters in select fields. The university has graduated batches for the 14th time since independence with a total of 10,160 students of which 70% are in degree.

In the past, access to university level education was indeed very low. Of those who attend the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination, for example, only between

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5. This Eri-British Institute is started in mid- 2004 and it is accredited by the Edexcel in UK. Financial aid to students who cannot meet their educational financial requirements is an essential contribution towards achieving equity of access especially in private universities where the fees charged is quite high.

6. The proposed college in this town is College of Social Sciences and Arts currently exists in EIT not started till September 2006. But it is officially declared recently that the college will be shifted soon in early 2007, whereas the Agricultural College, in Hamalmalo (Keren) is started in the academic year 2005.

7. As stated earlier in this article Asmara University (and other distance learning programmes from outside) produced about 45 Post-Graduates in 2006. However, this programme is temporarily stopped in 2006. If this trend continues, it would be difficult for Eritrea to attain its own teachers for higher education development and it will take much longer time than expected.

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