

FINANCING HIGHER EDUCATION IN UGANDA

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The Role of Higher Education in Uganda

In Uganda the term higher/tertiary education refers to the level of education beyond full secondary education (i.e. after senior six). The category includes universities which offer courses leading to the award of degrees in addition to diplomas and certificates. Non-university higher/tertiary institutions (e.g. national teachers' colleges ,Uganda colleges of commerce, Uganda technical colleges) do not, independently, award degrees (Tiberondwa,2001 : 187 ;Uganda Government,2001 :9).

The Current Situation in Higher Education in Uganda

In Uganda, as in many other countries in Africa, higher education is in a crisis, which manifests itself in several ways such as (eg Musisi & Muwanga, 2003 :9-15):

(i) *Resource constraints*

In Uganda, higher institutions are severely under funded: for example, according to a 2002 study ,most institutions of higher learning in Uganda are run on deficit budgets(Kasozi,2003a :60-61). Expenditure per student is declining while enrolments are increasing rapidly. The situation is even worse for private institutions according to Kajubi (1999 :13) who observes that the difficult economic and political conditions make it difficult to raise fees and the association of public institutions with high quality education and better employment opportunities and the inertia of colonial tradition of free tuition, accommodation and meals for all students, all

militate against private institutions particularly in the areas of science and technology. Ironically according to Blair (1998 :406-407), a very high proportion of higher education funding in Africa/Uganda is not spent on tuition but on student welfare, housing and food.

(ii) *Inadequate staffing*

Large outflows of staff to other sectors or countries (e.g. see Kasozi, 2002: 19-20), deteriorating salaries, inadequate housing, transport and declining standards of living and a freeze on recruitment as one of the doses in the structural adjustment programme (SAP) prescription by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund are some of the causes of this. The situation is so bad that for example of the 1813 established academic teaching posts in Makerere in 2002, only 952 (53%) were filled (Makerere, 2003 :vi). The situation is worse at the professorial levels which are filled at between 30-40% (Tiberondwa, 1998 :22 ;Tiberondwa, 2001 :196 ;Kasozi, 2003a :52-53).

To worsen the situation, many of those teachers who remain are not of impeccable quality as Kajubi laments that we still have a large number of staff without postgraduate training and research experience, to say nothing of professional training in teaching methods. The result is that teaching methods are formal, involving rote learning and recall of information on the part of the students, to the neglect of critical thinking, discussion and creativity (Kajubi,2001:225;also see Kasozi,2003b:123) . Also many of those staff who remain ,because of low salaries are moonlighting which makes it very difficult to inspire commitment especially in private institutions (Kajubi,2001 :225 ;Kasozi,2003b :126; Lubwama,2004, April 9-22).

The few teachers are overloaded with teaching and marking and thus have less time to do research (Tiberondwa, 1998 :22) and to relate enough with students (Ssekamwa,1997 :10), which students in turn complain for example that supervisors are not accessible (Tiberondwa, 1998 :19).In turn, the staff

(e.g. in Makerere) are perpetually disgruntled sometimes to the extent of striking (Musisi & Muwanga,2003 :13).

(iii) *Deteriorating infrastructure*

There is overcrowding in classes, libraries, laboratories (including computer ones), offices, estates and so on. For example regarding laboratories, Kasozi (2003a :56) reports that while ideally each student should have at least 0.25 square metres of space, not all institutions among the 29 surveyed had achieved this feat with some providing as low as 0.04 square metres. Regarding computer laboratories, Kasozi (2003a :58-59) reports that while ideally each student should have a computer, no single institution had achieved this. While the best institution provided one computer per eight students, there was even one institution providing a single computer to as many as 388 students.

Regarding library books while in a tertiary institution there should be a student: book ratio of 1:50, no single institution had achieved this feat; indeed one institution provided a single book for a student! (Kasozi, 2003a :58-59). In particular in the case of Makerere, Ssekamwa (1997 :7) reports that while the Main Library was built to accommodate 1500 students at a time when the University had a capacity of 2000,the University now has a student population of over 35000! (Makerere University,2004, February 16-22). In addition to the lack of space, there is also a lack of maintenance (Ssekamwa, 1997:6; Tiberondwa, 1998:17),and declining resources available for the acquisitions of books, journals and equipment.

(iv) *Inefficiencies*

Nwankwo (1981) defines efficiency in terms of the optimal relation between inputs and outputs in an enterprise. An activity is being performed efficiently if a given quantity of outputs is obtained with a minimum of inputs or, alternatively, if a given quantity of inputs yields maximum outputs (Nwankwo, 1981:86). There are two concepts of efficiency when we consider the overall context: (a) internal efficiency and (b) external efficiency. An internally efficient educational system is one which turns out

graduates without wasting any student-year or without dropouts and repeaters (Nwankwo,1981 :89).

Higher institutions in Africa are characterized by considerable internal inefficiencies manifested in such factors as (a)very low staff: student ratios (e.g. according to Kasozi,2003a:55 in 2002, Busoga University had a lecturer to student ratio of 1:3 !!) ; (b) bloated complements of non-academic staff (e.g. according to a Sunday Vision reporter,2004,March 21 of Makerere University's 4309 staff, only 1243 are teaching staff!);(c) high student drop-out and repeat rates(e.g. Tiberondwa,1998 reports high postgraduate student drop outs in Makerere because of fees); (d) low graduation rates (e.g. low PhD graduation rates are reported in Makerere - Tiberondwa,1998; and it is categorically declared that "it is extremely difficult to obtain a PhD... from Makerere" -Tiberondwa,2001:197); (e) high non-education expenditure in residence, catering, medical and other services; involvement in areas unrelated to the higher education mission (such as operation of security services, bookshops, garages, bakeries ,etc.).(Blair, 1998:408)

External efficiency of an education system refers to turning out graduates that the society, economy or higher levels of education want (Nwankwo,1981:89). Ugandan higher institutions of learning are currently experiencing significant graduate unemployment largely as a result of Uganda's economy showing no increase (or even a decrease) in the demand for skilled professional labour, and the declining role of the public sector as a major employer of higher education graduates.

There is also an imbalance between students undertaking humanities and social sciences as opposed to hard sciences (eg engineering). For example, only 15% of total tertiary enrolments in Uganda are in the sciences partly because in the past, humanities/social sciences led to readier employment by Government (Kasozi, 2003a:56).

(v) *Declining research output*

Over the recent decades, research output in Uganda and other developing countries has declined. For example, by the early 1990s, staff

and postgraduate research at Makerere had virtually ceased; thus in 1990, researchers at the University produced only twenty four scientific papers! (World Bank,1992 :23.This was partly because the critical shortage of senior academic staff meant lecturers were overloaded, teaching from morning to evening and marking leaving very little time for research (Tiberondwa,1998 :22).

This situation in Makerere although improved now, is representative of the developing world as Kasozi (2002 :7 and 2003 :48) observes, that while most knowledge that drives modern economies is 'manufactured' in universities, the developing countries' contribution to knowledge production is minimal, adding for example that a country ranking of published scientific papers per capita during 1981-1994 does not include a single developing country (citing World Bank,2000). Further according to him, developing countries are spending very little money in research and development (R&D).For example Uganda allocates only 0.18 per cent of its GDP to research (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003:12)

(vi) Inequalities in student /staff profiles

There is considerable lack of equity in the profile of both students and academic staff in terms of the income (the well-off families are predominating - e.g. see Eremu,1999 July 21) ; in terms of gender (females are very under-represented -Kasozi, 2003: 133-135 ;Blair,1998 :406-409 ;Kajubi,1997 :27) ;in terms of regions (e.g. Karamagi,2002 July 10 and Tumuhimbise,2004 April 17 decried the Central region's monopoly); and in terms of religions(especially Muslims - Kasozi ,2003b :141).

Sanyal & Martin (1998 :352) point out that the situation in Africa and hence Uganda has not been free from the effects of changes in the international context. In addition, the economic uncertainty, political and social upheavals have affected higher education. The sector has also been suffering from considerable destruction of infrastructure and facilities from civil wars. Blair (1998: 411-412) takes a slightly different view and argues that the root of the funding crisis in Africa's public higher institutions are the three major varieties of negotiated state funding namely:(i)incremental

budgeting (where institutions simply receive a flat, percentage increase on the past year's budget); (ii) adhoc negotiations (where the political skill and connections of institutional representatives is the key factor); and (iii) fixed agreements (where a pre-determined proportion of government revenue is available to higher institutions).

According to him, such bureaucratic funding provides no incentives for efficiency, entrenches conservatism, makes it extremely difficult to rapidly adjust the allocation of resources to meet changing requirements, and inhibits higher institutions from adapting to the demand for relevant skills.

There are even those who posit that the financial crises (in Makerere in particular) are due to financial mismanagement corruption Jack of transparency and the like (Mushengyezi, 2004, Allio & Ahimbisibwe, 2004.)

The Way Forward

Blair (1998 :413-439) and Sanyal & Martin (1998 :395-400) suggest at least three strategies for reform that can achieve the desired results without massively increasing public funding, including (i) the development of variety in higher education institutions;(ii) encouraging public institutions to diversify their sources of funding ;(iii) redefining the role of government in higher education.

The development of variety in higher education institutions.

Uganda should diversify higher education by opening non-university institutions and private ones.

Non-university institutions

Non-university institutions include polytechnics, short-course technical institutions, community colleges, distance education colleges and adult education colleges. Africa should emulate the "Four Tigers" of East Asia in embracing these institutions more than universities, because: (i) they are more efficient on account of being cheaper and running shorter courses, with lower per student costs and lower dropout rates; (ii) they respond more

flexibly to market demands: for example in Makerere, it was the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) that inaugurated self-sponsored degree programs in 1992 (Ssekamwa, 1997 :3-4) ;(iii) they help to improve access of minority groups and women to higher education. Indeed Prof. Kajubi, Vice Chancellor of Nkumba University recently made a case for such institutions (Muhereza,2004).

Their disadvantages however include the fact that:(i) they are seen as second rate, and are even more under-funded than universities ;(ii) they can be diverted from their original mission and be upgraded to fully fledged universities (i.e. may suffer academic drift) as was the case for Makerere University (started as a Polytechnic in 1921 but in 1922 became a University College) or more recently as has happened to Uganda Polytechnic Kyambogo (UPK) Institute of Teacher Education Kyambogo (ITEK) and Uganda National Institute for Special Education (UNISE) which in 2002 were combined into Kyambogo University (KYU).

Private institutions

Private institutions offer a real alternative of higher education to students, their major advantages being that: (i) they increase provision of higher education at little cost (e.g. the case for the Islamic University in Uganda, IUIU) or no extra cost to the public; (ii) they respond more flexibly to markets. For example Kasozi (2003b: 145-146) describes Nkumba University (Entebbe), and Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), Nkozi, both private, as having curricula relevant to the market; (iii) they complement government institutions so that the overall national higher education system achieves all the objectives (Kajubi, 1997 :26-27).

On the negative side, private institutions suffer at least the following demerits: (i) they show greater variation in quality than public institutions: for example in Uganda, and its neighbours, the opening of private universities was received with

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usually seen as expensive yet second rate with inferior facilities (Kajubi,1999:13; Kasozi,2003b :chap three). On the basis of experience elsewhere in the world, there must be a future for private higher institutions in Africa/Uganda once a reasonably level playing field and a fair regulatory framework exists (Blair,1998 :419-420).

Such a framework, according to Blair, should (a) avoid restrictive regulations, particularly on tuition thus ensuring institutional autonomy; (b) have an accreditation mechanism; (c) allow foreign programmes to be offered; (d) provide technical assistance to higher institutions in curriculum development; (e) enable state scholarships to be held at public and private institutions; (f) ensure speedy consideration of applications for the establishment of new higher institutions, allowing the market to determine the success or failure of the venture; (g) provide tax exemptions for private institutions so that they are placed on the same footing (income tax free) as state institutions. In Uganda such a framework in the name of the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act was passed in 2001 (Uganda Government, 2001) but whether it is fulfilling all Blair's prescriptions above especially (c) is still debatable.

Encouraging public institutions to diversify their sources of funding

Another major strategy for the reform of higher education is for public institutions to reduce their reliance on government by diversifying their sources of funds through (i) soliciting donations and grants; (ii) embracing income generating activities, and (iii) cost sharing with students among others:

Soliciting donations and grants

All higher institutions receive a proportion of their funds through donations and grants from business, alumni and international donors. For example Makerere (2003:66) reports that in the year 2002, "most of the capital budget totalling 22 billion was funded by development partners [or donors]". However, reliance on donors is undesirable, and now many donors are looking for evidence of self- sustainability for projects that they provide

initial assistance for. The success of African universities in mobilizing resources from their business communities and alumni is almost non-existent (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003 :25; Blair 1988: 421-422).

(i) Establish foundations/offices to raise funds in a professional way

For example, Vice Chancellors will have to spend an increasing proportion of their time talking to potential donors and business people in order to secure funding. There are prospects for the private sector to contribute significantly to higher education because in so doing the private sector would be ensuring the quality of graduates - their future employees (although some may feel they are sponsoring future staff for competitors).

(ii) Develop alumni associations for long-term financial benefit.

While alumni can be very significant sources of funding for higher education for example because graduates are generally well off in African countries, most alumni associations (e.g. Makerere Convocation) in higher institutions in Africa are dormant. If alumni (or old boys or old girls) associations at school level can work so well in Africa/Uganda at lower levels , why not at higher levels?.

Embrace income generating activities.

Possible activities here include (i) provision of continuing professional education/ vocation courses; (ii) undertaking contract research; (iii) providing consultancy services; and (iv) external hire of institutional facilities/conference management:

(i) Provision of continuing professional education/vocational courses

There is strong demand from the private sector for courses that update practicing professionals, which higher institutions should address during evenings, weekends and vacations at full cost plus an overhead.

(ii) *Undertaking contract research*

Contract research is defined as research that an outside organisation wants carried out and is prepared to pay for. Higher institutions have a comparative advantage in providing contract research by being relatively well-endowed in terms of equipment and expertise.

(iii) *Providing consultancy services.*

While consultancy services are seen by many as the quickest and potentially most successful route to the generation of significant funding, this optimism is misplaced because the many staff engaged in consultancy, do so for their own benefit, and at cost to the institution through lost time and free use of facilities. (Blair, 1998 :426) . Nevertheless Blair suggests that the effort is worth making (best through a private company with professional management e.g. the Makerere University Consultancy Bureau, MUCOBU), as the potential advantages to a higher institution through organized consultancy are overwhelming: (a) the cash flow produced benefits members of staff thus attracting and retaining them in the academic career ;(b) a surplus should result that can be spent at the university's discretion ;(c)consultancy brings closer contact between higher institutions and the industry/commercial sector producing better communication and understanding: thus making the institutions more relevant to the community.(also see Musisi & Muwanga, 2003 :24)

(iv) *External hire of institutional facilities/conference management*

Most higher institutions do rent out their facilities, but not in a business-like manner. The potential exists to provide a service to the private sector through such activities, while generating a positive contribution to overheads. In summary, we can point out that virtually all the above income generating activities are undertaken in some form or other in most African/Ugandan institutions of higher learning. However they do not take place in an organised, coordinated fashion. There is also a major disincentive to these activities in public institutions: in most African countries the

generation of income through such activities effectively reduces the government's budget allocation.

Consequently a primary area for reform would be for governments and public higher institutions to agree on a fixed government budget allocation for any accounting period, and to allow and encourage these institutions to generate additional income that they would retain and utilize at their discretion. Indeed, governments could operate a formula whereby a proportion of its funding was tied to the generation of matching funds through income generating activities. There are those who express the fear that if higher institutions pursue income generation, they may lose sight of their primary mission/objectives of teaching and research and that the quality of both will deteriorate (Blair, 1998:427).

However, Blair allays such fears, saying that the experience in the developed world indicates that the opposite occurs, citing the example of Warwick University(UK) which embraced income generation with gusto, and although once derogatively described as a 'business university' is rated among the best in the UK. However, while having optimism in income generation, we should not be overly euphoric because as Blair (1998) asserts, "they are unlikely... to generate really significant funding Even in the developed world...it is rare for institutions to generate more than 10% of the their revenue through income generation....; in Africa, a target of perhaps 5% is probably the best...." (Blair ,1998 :427-428).

Cost sharing with students

Several studies, according to Blair (1998:428), have recommended that African universities should aim to generate income equivalent to 30% of their recurrent expenditure from students fees. The philosophy behind these tuition fees can be summarized as follows:(i) as a result of attending a higher institution of learning, students will benefit through significantly greater lifetime earnings and therefore should pay at least a proportion of the cost ;(ii) students in higher institutions often come from families with some ability to contribute to the cost of higher education (e.g. see Eremu,1999,July 21);(iii) tuition fees are a means to secure additional funds for the institution

(if public finding is still in place);(iv) tuition fees will make institutions more responsive to student needs and make them treat students like clients with consequent improvements in efficiency, quality and level of service;(v)if students pay for their education they will value it more and have an incentive to complete the programmes quickly in order to reduce the costs, and they will be less likely to take action (e.g. striking) that disrupts their education;(vi) pressure/incentives will be applied for institutions to privatize non-core activities (e.g. catering, cleaning, security) thus offering further opportunities for dialogue with the private sector ;(vii) institutions will have to relate to the market for graduates: they will have to react quickly and adapt to changing markets or lose the market share in terms of students; (viii) even full cost student fees would represent only a relatively small proportion of the total private costs of attending a higher institution of learning.

For example Kasozi (2003a: 60) notes that in Uganda there is an alarming gap between fees and unit costs. According to him, while the fees are about \$1000 for universities and \$300-500 for other institutions, the actual unit costs are over \$1500 for most of the universities and over \$500 for other institutions; (ix) extrapolating from the ability of many Ugandan students to pay secondary school fees ,their perceived inability to pay at tertiary level is exaggerated. (Blair, 1998 :429-432). It is probably such reasons that have prompted some people to implore Government to stop sponsorship of higher institutions of learning (e.g. see Tayebwa, 2004,).

However, higher institutions must debate a rational scheme of needy student support as a component of financial reform. (Blair, 1998 :430). The way forward is to steadily, in a phased manner, introduce full cost recovery fees (because research has indicated that moderate or graduated price increases do not discourage students from pursuing higher education - Blair ,1998 :432) ,while developing needy student support systems. However, needy student support should be closely targeted so as to provide support where it is needed by excluding students who can afford and those less likely to succeed in their studies. To achieve this, support mechanisms need to (i) go beyond the traditional tests to evaluate need (e.g. by taking

into account the occupation, educational background, assets and type of housing the student's family has); (ii) impose strong penalties on cheats (Blair, 1998:434).

To maximize advantages to all parties of having the beneficiary of higher education contribute directly to its cost through fees, it is essential that the bulk of financial support to students is given in the form of a loan that is repayable ,although experience with such loan schemes in developing countries has so far been disappointing with non-repayment being as high as 80% in Kenya. Moreover such loan schemes should not be limited to government loans only - the private sector should also construct such schemes(Blair,1998 :434-436).

Redefining the role of government in higher education.

At present government involvement in the financing, management and administration of public universities in Africa is far too great and a major disincentive to the required reforms (Blair, 1998:437). However, he opines that, irrespective of what reforms are adopted, government will still have a major role to play in higher education thus (Blair ,1998 :437-441 ;Musisi & Muwanga,2003 :20-22):

(i) Government has to develop a logical policy framework

Having developed a national system of higher education, as distinct from one single (Makerere) university, Uganda must develop policies that provide linkages between higher institutions and the primary and secondary sectors of education to avoid fragmentation (Kasozi,2002), provide a well-defined legal/regulatory framework, and provide linkages to national environments such as civil service procedures and pay scales, labour market policies and policies concerning national science and technology investment. According to Blair (1998), a national council of higher education may be appropriate.

However as per his submission, to be effective, such a body should (a) be autonomous of government (b) draw representation from all components of the higher education sector and from government and the private sector (c)

its responsibilities must include assessing priorities for both enrolment growth and future investment in the higher education sector. According to the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (Uganda Government,2001 section 5), the Uganda National Council for Higher Education(NCHE) generally fulfils these ideals according to Blair.

(ii) *Government develop incentives and market oriented systems to implement policy.*

In the type of conducive environment envisaged, it becomes imperative that governments use incentives to achieve the implementation of policies. The most effective means of increasing the autonomy of universities is to let market forces operate by requiring higher institutions to charge full cost fees and allowing students to select their courses on the basis of effective student support systems. In such an environment, the funding of student support systems rather than higher education institutions directly becomes the defining role of government. Government should channel its funding to institutions through students thus enabling students to fund the cost of their education at any recognized institutions.

(iii) *Government ensure increased managerial autonomy of public higher institutions.*

Achieving successful financial reforms of the type discussed in this paper requires an improvement in the broad policy environment in which higher education institutions operate. Government should enable these institutions to operate autonomously, with the ability to generate and retain income, cooperate with the private sector, be competitive, efficient, and able to deploy resources as they deem most effective. A key feature here is a revitalized role for the institutional Governing Council which, with reduced government influence, should become the institution's Board of Directors' holding Management accountable to it and none else (Mushengyezi,2004; Musisi & Muwanga,2003 :29-32).

(iv) Government support capital development of the institutions

This should be on a competitive basis open to private institutions as well.

(v) Government fund basic research and technology development and transfer.

In many fields these benefits cannot be derived by individuals or private investment alone, and therefore, the State is inevitably the major source of funding.

(vi) Government should ensure equity

Government should enable some disadvantaged groups secure support to attend higher education rather than dissipating scarce resources on subsidizing the rich (Musisi & Muwanga,2003 :32-35). This is already in operation in public universities in Uganda (Kabanga and Ssekamwa, 1996)

Conclusion

The basic theme in this paper is that Uganda's higher education institutions will only be revitalized by reducing their dependence on State funding, not increasing it. The higher education sector has to be freed up completely, with a level playing field created for all institutions (including existing State institutions) where by all such institutions are required to charge full cost, non-subsided fees (e.g. Tayebwa,2004,March 29), and government's role is primarily to provide financial support to needy and able students only, so that they can attend any higher education institution, including those developed by the private sector, and to recover most of this support from students once they are in employment. In such an environment, the private sector will almost certainly enter the field and develop institutions that will compete with the existing State institutions. Fair competition will result in all institutions being more efficient, effective and responsive, and opportunities for enrolment in higher education will be expanded at an ultimately reduced cost to the public sector.

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