



Private Surge amid Public Dominance in Higher Education: The African Perspective

Mahlubi Mabizela*

Abstract

This article lays a foundation for the debates that follow in the rest of the volume. It particularly focuses on the broad pertinent issues such as the historical development of private higher education in Africa. While we may largely talk about ‘private surge’, it argues that this may be a case of ‘resurgence’ as antecedents of private higher education existed at the same time as the establishment of public sector institutions or even before in some instances. The article also explores issues of the definition of private higher education as a way of preparing the reader to understand what the rest of the articles in the volume refer to when discussing the subject. It then discusses underlying factors in the establishment and growth of private higher education, pointing to issues that seem to be unique to the continent and other developing countries. It then concludes by arguing that private higher education has a future in the continent, especially because it is required by the systems of higher education and the challenges and lessons this poses for governments. The article draws extensively from the rest of the articles in the volume, partly as a way of introducing their debates but also as an illustration of the richness of knowledge they contain, and it also draws from other international literature.

Résumé

Cet article pose les bases des débats qui suivront dans le reste de l’ouvrage. Il est axé sur les grandes questions pertinentes telles que l’évolution historique de l’enseignement supérieur privé en Afrique. Même si nous pouvons parler largement « d’essor du privé », il souligne que cela pourrait être un cas de « nouvel essor » du moment que des antécédents de l’enseignement supérieur privé existaient au moment de la mise en place des institutions du secteur public, ou même avant dans certains cas. L’article explore également les questions de la définition de l’ensei-

* Director, Higher Education Policy and Development Support, National Department of Education, South Africa.

gnement supérieur privé de façon à préparer le lecteur à comprendre ce à quoi le reste des articles de l'ouvrage font allusion en examinant cette question. Il examine alors les facteurs sous-jacents de la création et la croissance de l'enseignement supérieur privé, soulignant des questions qui semblent être uniques pour le continent et pour d'autres pays en développement. Il conclut ainsi en affirmant que l'enseignement supérieur privé a un avenir dans le continent, en particulier parce que cela est nécessaire pour les systèmes d'enseignement supérieur, et à cause des défis qu'il présente pour les gouvernements et des enseignements qui peuvent s'en tirer. Cet article s'inspire largement du reste des articles de l'ouvrage, il est en partie un moyen de présentation de leurs thèmes de discussion, mais aussi une illustration de la richesse des connaissances qu'ils contiennent. Il s'inspire aussi d'autres formes de littérature internationale.

Introduction

This article, firstly, gives a brief overview of the history of private higher education in Africa, illustrating contrasts that exist within the continent. Secondly, it tackles some concepts relating to the *privateness* and *publicness* of HE institutions¹. The purpose of such a discussion is to create awareness of the thinking involved in understanding the sector by researchers of private higher education. Of course, it is also to challenge further thinking, the theorisation and the scholarly engagement of existing understanding and theories in order to develop a new knowledge of understanding in the sector.

Thirdly, the article introduces a well-covered discussion in the rest of the articles, which is the understanding of establishment and growth of the sector in Africa. In this article, though, the focus is global rather than specific to individual countries. Indeed, the coverage includes a discussion of 'local pressures' universally rather than tackling individual issues specific to individual countries. These issues are well covered in the individual country articles in this volume.

Lastly, by way of introducing the discussions contained in the rest of the volume, this article references them extensively. As such, there is no need to elaborate on each one of them here.

A Brief Overview Background of Private Higher Education in Africa

Higher education (HE) in Africa presents some interesting paradoxes. Ironically, it is the African continent that houses the world's oldest university still in operation, the Al-Azhar, in Egypt (Teferra and Altbach 2004). Yet, Africa has the most undeveloped system of HE and relatively the fewest universities. It is the same continent that began the world's first distance HE institution in the form of the University of South Africa in 1945, which is now one of the biggest, so-called mega-universities, in the world. Yet, Africa continues to have the low-

est access rate to HE and the least research output. Even though private higher education institutions (PHEIs) were among the first in the continent, they are now largely overshadowed by public HE institutions. In fact, private HE in the continent is largely thought of and regarded as a new phenomenon. Historic as these HE institutions may be, HE in sub-Saharan Africa is relatively new compared to other global regions.

Due to colonialism, many states began providing their own university education post-independence, which is since the late 1950s. However, in some African countries colonisers offered HE during the colonial period, but this was mainly from the metropolises and they focused on the elite. Some of these institutions or ventures were private initiatives, hence private HE in certain instances is as old as public HE in the continent (see Ajayi, Goma and Johnson 1996; Mabizela 2001). However, due mainly to a lack of funding from the private sector and the role of policy control by the state, the state was able to take over those private initiatives and turn them into state-owned institutions. Indeed, the phenomenon of turning private or church-owned institutions into state-owned, or public institutions, is not unique to Africa but found in other continents as well. Levy discusses in details the church-state separation which gave rise to the private-public distinction in HE in the South Americas (see Levy 1986).

Using the benchmark of the establishment of state universities after independence in African states in the late 1950s, therefore, formal PHEIs started even later. Indeed, as explained above there were antecedents of PHEIs even during the colonial period, which date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the start of HE in some African states (see Onsongo and Otieno in this volume; Mabizela 2001 and Ajayi et al. 1996). The nature of operation of some of these older generation PHEIs took the classic structure found in the public sector and some started as post-secondary education providers. Contemporary PHEIs², largely established post-1990 but also with antecedents (see Onsongo in this issue), are characterised by a single programme focus (often business, commerce, information technology or computer studies). They range from a few enrolments to thousands of students; many are for-profit and are even listed on stock markets. In certain respects, therefore, it would be appropriate to talk about the resurgence of PHEIs in some countries and a surge in others.

Private establishments, such as churches and foundations, have had centuries of involvement in the provision of HE, sometimes long before state involvement. Levy (1986) covers the historical evolution of this relationship, together with that of the state, in detail. Such involvement of the state was aimed at widening the access to education for the broader populace rather than it remaining the privilege of a few, mainly the rich and those belonging to church or religion.

Thus, in turn, education was labelled a 'public good' as it had to produce artisans and professionals who would serve the state, and therefore the public.

Just as the church was involved in the establishment of some of the oldest and prominent HE institutions in the world, so it was in the establishment of some of the oldest HE institutions in colonial Africa. Examples are: Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, established in 1826; the South African College (which later became the University of Cape Town), established in 1829; and the South African Native College (which later became the University of Fort Hare), established in 1916 (see Onsongo in this volume; Ajayi, Goma and Johnson 1996 and Mabizela 2001). These institutions were established through private initiatives but, as was the case elsewhere in the world as illustrated above, the state got involved largely because of its financial strength and eventually took over the provision of HE. The historical split of the partnership between the church and the state in the provision of HE, as well as the late entry of the state in the church-initiated provision of HE in some African states, brought about the language of public and private provision of education, long before private enterprise established its own HE institutions.

The tradition of the involvement of the church in the provision of HE continues in the private HE sectors, and can be found across countries and continents. Prominent among these is the Catholic Church which, for example, has HE institutions in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, DR Congo, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Indeed, this is not only the domain for Christianity but for Islam as well, for example the chain of Agha Khan³ universities in East Africa (Zanzibar) and Arab countries as well as other country-based Islam HE institutions such as in Ghana, Niger, Uganda and Sudan.

The above illustrates the spread of the private HE sector in the continent as well as the significant involvement of the church in it. What it does not illustrate is the commercialisation of the sector, at least, in the form of private for-profit institutions. This is due to at least two reasons. Firstly, commercialised PHEIs are relatively new institutions. They largely fall in the category of contemporary PHEIs, the majority of which were established in the late 1980s onwards. They are often not church-based.

Secondly, the for-profit nature of institutions in other countries is not made as explicit as is the case in South Africa (see Levy 2003). Thus, while African states also have for-profit HE institutions, in South Africa they are clearly legal for-profit institutions. To this extent, South Africa is, therefore, different to other African states. In this regard, Levy (2003) observes that South Africa 'epitomizes certain internationally striking forms in contemporary private higher education growth'. This article, however, does not tackle this matter but cites this

peculiarity in order to illustrate the diverse nature of private HE sectors in the different states within the continent.

Indeed, Africa has diverse HE systems influenced by different historical, economic and political systems and experiences. This diversity of influences also reflects on the establishment and development of PHEIs. In laying the foundation of analysis that follows, this article, therefore, examines some of the above-stated influences, exploring why the sector has developed fast in some countries while in others the establishment and growth is rather slow. For instance, on the one hand, Botswana, with a population of about 1.7 million and one of the relatively stronger economies in the region, has only one public university and no private university, except for Damelin and NIIT (National Institute of Information Technology), which are owned by companies in South Africa and India respectively. These are not universities but providers of specialised tertiary education programmes that are narrowly focused on specific labour market demands (see TEC 2005:28). Moreover, private providers in Botswana are as yet to be regulated. On the other hand, Mauritius, with a smaller population size of 1.2 million and less economic strength than that of Botswana with respect to GDP, has five private providers operating at university level and regulated by state policy.

Even more in contrast, Mozambique, with a population of 18.8 million and one of the poorest countries in the region and in the world, has five public HE institutions and five PHEIs (Mario, Fry, Levey and Chilundo 2003)⁴. Teferra and Altbach (2004) observe that there are African countries with larger populations than others but with less higher education enrolments. One explanation that can be provided for these seeming contradictions is that the rich countries have the resources to put into higher education, including affording huge subsidies for university education. Since the poor do not have resources, the only route to provide HE is through private institutions. This is one way in which private institutions become elitist because the majority of the population cannot afford high fees charged at those private institutions. However, this still does not explain why some countries with resources are not attracting private providers as illustrated in the example of Botswana and Mauritius above. The answer does not only lie with population sizes as illustrated in the Botswana versus Mauritius example above. There are many factors that contribute to the establishment and growth of PHEIs. This article explores some of the nuances that seem to attract private HE providers to some countries and less so to others and seeks to provide analysis for the phenomenon. However, it is prudent though to look at definitional matters first especially if the discussion keeps referring to education systems in different countries.

Defining, Articulating and Differentiating Private Higher Education

First, not all post-secondary education is higher education. Higher education is generally defined as education leading to the award of degrees and post-graduate qualifications offered primarily at universities. Whereas, further education (sometimes interchanged with post-secondary education) leads to vocational training qualifications offered at training colleges. Together, these form tertiary education and this is the distinction used in the discussions that follow⁵.

The definition of private HE largely depends on variables adopted by a particular country. Chances are that such a definition may not be universally applicable often in part but sometimes *in toto*. For instance, in some countries private institutions are so known because they were founded by private organisations (such as churches or stock market companies) but are financially supported by the state, for example, this is legally possible in Senegal. International examples include Canada and Sweden.

In some countries the state in part supports private HE because it significantly absorbs demand and therefore relieves financial, political and social pressures on the state, such as is the case in Tanzania. International examples include Brazil, India and Japan. While government policy entitled Bilgi University in Turkey to apply for state funds it did not take up the offer because it saw it as creating dependency on government fiscal constraint (see Van Lutsenburg 2001:37).

Yet, in some countries, such as in Ghana, private HE institutions must affiliate to public institutions for purposes of quality assurance but they continue to function independent of direct state financial support and management accountability. Indeed, in many countries, private institutions are established and operate independent of state or the public sector but are required to operate within the law and regulations set by government. These differences illustrate how private institutions are regarded in different countries making it difficult but not impossible, therefore, to coin a universal definition of private HE.

What all the above examples point to, firstly, is that the same variables such as ownership, governance, financier or sponsor, affiliation and function can be invariably combined and used differentially to yield completely different understandings. Secondly, they point to the centrality of state, state or government policies in determining the *privateness* or *publicness* of institutions. In other words, the variables are relative to the approach adopted by the state towards PHEIs. Besides, the state is an active participant and not a dormant common denominator. Sometimes state involvement clearly results in visible benefits to PHE sectors, for example in Kenya and South Africa. Strict policies regulating PHEIs in these countries have led to serious institutions remaining which have quality-assured academic programmes and facilities.

Together with the position of the state in the equation and its policies as already discussed, the above-mentioned are variables relevant for determining whether institutions are private or public. Therefore, they are variables used to define what is private (or public) HE. A simplified definition of PHE, therefore, is all tertiary education that is non-state and may sometimes be quasi-public. For instance, it would be HE offered at institutions that are non-state owned and non-state financed, therefore, not accountable to the state but to the owners of the institution and not governed by the state but by the rules set by the owners. Regardless, such institutions would still be expected to comply with state policies or regulations.

The pioneering works of Geiger (1986) and Levy (1986) on private HE already recognised that the sector is regarded and understood differently in different countries. This is because the sector takes a different nature and character almost in each and every country, influenced by its context such as existing various demands, whether perceived or real (e.g. excess, alternative education, differentiation, better education); state policies; economy and politics. Thus, cross-country comparative studies of private HE are often problematic, but it is possible to delineate regional or historical patterns.

The general character of demand-absorption of private HE institutions (especially in developing countries); the proliferation of private universities alongside non-university institutions; their range of offerings from post-secondary to HE; the specialisation of many of these institutions in business and commerce fields and computer and information technology studies; the range in their sizes from very small to large institutions with regard to their student enrolments; the often questionable quality of education they provide and the combination of for-profit and not-for-profit institutions are all typical of contemporary private ('new' generation) HE sectors internationally (see Kruss, Salerno and Beverwijk in this issue as well as Altbach 1999 and Levy 2003). These characteristics of the contemporary private HE institutions sectors are not specific to developed or developing countries, but universal. This is also the general character of private HE institutions in Africa which is presented by the papers contained in this volume.

Why Are Private HE Institutions Established? Why Do Private HE Sectors Grow?

Almost all African countries have HE institutions that were privately established from 1990s onwards. Indeed, there were antecedents prior to independence, thus the 'old' generation PHEIs were established shortly after independence alongside public universities that were also established at the time. The fastest increase took place in the 1990s due to unprecedented demand for HE.

The 1990s generation of PHEIs is herein, thus, referred to as the 'new' generation of private institutions and it exists alongside the 'old' generation and public sector institutions. The characteristic features of these two groups of institutions have been discussed in the section above.

In a quest to better understand why PHEIs are established, scholarship often goes beyond what seems to be obvious in terms of types such as religious institutions; for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. Analysis of why these types were or are established often reveals a better understanding of a system and sometimes existing social problems.

There are a plethora of reasons why PHEIs are established and private sectors grow. These reasons occasionally differ from country to country but are sometimes similar. While we may have superficial semblances, the circumstances and contexts diverge, perchance explaining the lack of PHE in relatively strong economies like Botswana, and the relatively higher number (15) of PHEIs in small and weaker economies like Mozambique.

Global Pressures

The contemporary or new generation private HE is largely a direct consequence of the hegemonic neo-capitalist and neo-liberal post cold war social context. Concomitant to the fall of the 'iron curtain' in 1990, thereafter, private provision of HE in many developing countries boomed. In some instances, such a boom was and still is a direct influence of the global politics of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) accompanied by privatisation of public services; General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the phenomenon of globalisation. Within SAPs, whose implementation by some African states dates back to the 1980s, was the privatisation of social institutions including education. In a way, this also meant opening opportunities for the creation of private institutions to offer services originally provided publicly. Assie-Lumumba (2004:77) observes that the prescription by the World Bank in this regard had been 'almost an obsession', meaning that the Bank saw privatisation as the only solution or way forward for development in Africa.

Despite being a programme introduced in the 1980s, the consequences of SAPs can still be felt now. In a recent study of HE in the different regions of the continent, Assie-Lumumba (2004:76) observes that universities are revising their visions and mission statements and strategic planning based on 'frameworks and technical guidance provided by the World Bank'. Under the guidance of lending institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, many African states in the 1980s implemented SAPs which meant prioritisation of primary and secondary education and, therefore, total neglect of HE (see Assie-Lumumba 2004; Teferra

and Altbach 2004). Thus, not only were primary and secondary education levels prioritised but there was active divestiture from HE by the state, under the belief of the infallibility, efficiency and effectiveness of the private sector⁶ (see World Bank 1989).

Indeed, such advice was attached to the conditions of the Bank's lending to developing countries. This resulted in education systems bloated with primary and secondary education graduates in the mid to late 1990s (see Onsongo in this issue). These students could not be accommodated in the existing public HE institutions, primarily because the sector had not been grown, resourced or developed concurrently. In fact, during this period (of SAPs) HE admissions were constricted. Thus, an opportunity or gap for the establishment of institutions was created and this gap was and is being taken up through private initiatives.

The context of globalisation has put pressure on national HE systems to provide competent human resources to live up to the challenges of knowledge-based economies. Simultaneously, it puts pressure on governments to allow free trade, which favours countries with stronger financial resources and stronger trade capacity, and this has been made to include services such as HE. Globalisation, therefore, has broadened the scope of HE with regard to curriculum as well as its structural organisation and in relation to international demands for knowledge. Thus, Subotzky (1999:404) observes that governments have encouraged closer links between business and higher education in pursuit of international competitive advantage. Such a collaboration and knowledge production method impacts on the organisation of HE institutions in that the role of the state is gradually replaced by private enterprise and the objectives are different. Private enterprise pursues monetary interests while the state should pursue growth and social development imperatives.

By their nature, which includes establishment, accountability and management structure, private HE institutions lend themselves to the 'marketisation' of HE. This is where HE institutions regularise their operations to resemble those of a market system, such as 'managerialism', being influenced by closer ties with actors in the market system. This is also reflected in the curricula of many private HE institutions wherein the focus is not on subjects which require high input costs as found, for example, in science and engineering, but on those that are relatively inexpensive to offer such as business and computer studies. Furthermore, Kruss (in this edition) observes that private institutions are predominantly businesses that have

identified a market to supply higher education and training in response to a demand for graduates that are directly employable, equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to contribute directly to the workplace and economic growth.

Kruss's observation is based on a study of the South African private HE sector. Indeed, it is true that in some countries on the continent global pressures have partly led to excess demand, such that private HE institutions become demand-absorbing, because of shortage of spaces in the public sector as well as demand for specialised education which would lead to a quick entry into the labour market. Thus, the nature of contemporary or new generation PHEIs is such that they are largely profit-driven; demand absorbing; specialised and, therefore, not involved in research and in turn not involved in the production of new knowledge. These are partly as a result of global pressures.

Local Pressures

The differentiation into global and local pressures does not necessarily mean that the two operate mutually exclusively. Some of the issues discussed here owe their existence to global pressures. They are separated as such because the issues covered below tend to dominate the local scene. Depending on ones' vantage point, whether public or private, these issues can be seen as either push or pull factors; however, this article shall not separate them in that manner.

Public Failure: Perceived or Real?

The establishment of private institutions due to public failure has become a cliché both within the private and public HE sectors and researchers of the sector. The engagement of this topic in the past, both from the point of view of contestation and matter-of-fact, has been and continues to be extensive (see Tilak 1996; Levy 1986; Geiger 1986; Altbach, 1999). Indeed, in some cases such failure is only perceived and not real.

Public failure, or what is perceived as such, has many facets. It may be one or a combination of the issues discussed here, or even more, and here they are in no particular order. First, to the extent that shortage of public funds to meet rising demand for HE in Africa is responsible for the creation of excess demand, which, in turn, leads to the establishment of private institutions, is in fact public failure. Moreover, it has been observed that Africa has the lowest participation rates in HE in the world, at 2.5 percent in 2002/03. Recently the demand has grown fast and it is still growing, hence private institutions are being established (see Teferra and Altbach 2004).

The establishment of private institutions in order to absorb existing excess demand is apparent in many Sub-Saharan African states following the massification of HE, to the extent that exceptions are almost non-existent. South Africa is the only exception in this region. In fact, this is a characteristic feature of PHEIs in mass HE systems and of contemporary private education sectors (see Geiger 1988). Almost all sub-Saharan states had single universities at inde-

pendence resulting in the creation of exclusivity and elitism of HE. Thus, excess students accumulated over years, creating overwhelming demand, which lately forced these HE systems to massify. The newly-established private institutions contribute to that massification.

Where private HE institutions are demand-absorbing, as is the case in many sub-Saharan African states, these states have little choice but to allow the operation of privately-established HE providers. Banya (2001:161) argues that government-supported universities alone cannot realistically solve the HE crisis on the continent. Further motivation for private operators in massifying states and low-income developing countries is the view that HE is both a public and a private good (see Van Lutsenburg 2001). Thus, HE students should share the burden of its provision, hence the privatisation of public institutions and allowance of private operators. In Tanzania, for instance, new policies are being adopted wherein costs are being shared equitably between government and users of university services (see Ishengoma, Teferre and Altbach 2004:29). Moreover, public spending on HE is not easily and entirely justifiable as it is largely accessible to the rich and general middle class families, and less so or even not at all to the poor and disadvantaged groups (see Van Lutsenburg 2001).

Second is the failure to provide enough variety or differentiation of institutions and programmes. The public failure theory suggests that when governments are faced with a tough choice of using their financial resources wisely, they will do so to favour the majority of voters. This results in the minority preferences being least attended to and, as such, the creation of a gap for a privately-established service to attend to their needs (see Levy 1996:55). This is often the case with religious-based institutions. Religious institutions may have been started with the objective to train church ministers and offer exclusive space to practice religion but, in many countries, they have expanded to offer programmes in secular fields of study such as commerce, information technology, natural and social sciences. The Catholic Church-established institutions in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and the DR Congo offer examples of such secularised curricula at religious institutions. The need to expand to other fields of study, as Onsongo (in this volume) observes, 'could have been triggered' by existing demand for such programmes and the need to generate income to sustain themselves.

Differentiation also implies, that which is different to what is currently provided. For instance, as Obasi (in this volume) points out in Nigeria that some private universities offer programmes that are not offered at the public universities. Moreover, some private institutions include a range of post-secondary programmes which may be classified as further education and training (FET) and which are then made a base for higher education programmes as is the case with some private institutions in South Africa.

Third, the failure to understand and provide what is in demand in the 'market'. Market, in this case, refers to both students (and parents) and the labour market. In South Africa, for instance, it was found that the existence of partnerships between public higher education and private providers in the delivery of higher education was largely due to public failure in not providing learning programmes at flexible times and convenient places (Mabizela 2005). Moreover, many distance education students that enrolled with public institutions required face-to-face support tutorials or even lectures that distance education institutions are not offering. Private institutions partnered with them to provide these services.

From another point of view Van Lutsenburg (2001:30) observes that public sector institutions 'tend to lack incentives to adopt technological innovations as rapidly as is common in the private sector where competitive pressures often force the adoption of new technologies'. In other words, this is a lack of ability to adapt by the public sector in order to fulfil the existing demand in the 'market'. Indeed, this is one of those aspects that the private sector often uses in order to lure students away from the public sector institutions over and above inducements such as free tuition made available on a competitive basis or material goods such as computers. Sometimes the lack of failure of public institutions in this regard is perceived and not real.

Fourth is the failure to provide security for those within its institutions. Incidents like strikes and violent cultism, as happens in Nigeria, comprise push factors for both academics and (potential) students from the public sector institutions (see Otieno and Obasi in this volume). Besides insecurity, a related point is uncertainty often caused by strikes and boycotts and perceptions associated with such disruptions. Kruss (this volume) reports that students strongly emphasized the secure environment as critical to their choice, citing the small campus size in a safe location, leading to their preference of private institutions over public universities, which were seen to be lacking in this aspect.

In other words, public failure is a basis for a number of specific reasons for the establishment of PHEIs.

Fifth is the issue of poor working conditions for lecturing personnel at public institutions. Banya (2001:164) observes that the conditions at some African institutions are so dire that academics are 'without access to books, professional journals, or electronic networks and unable to attend conferences, take sabbaticals, or even find chalk for their blackboards, many African academics lose self-esteem'. On an empirical study of the sector, Wesonga *et al* (2003) observed that poor working conditions were responsible for academic flight to institutions such as the United States International University (USIU) in Kenya. Nigeria also provides another example. Kruss (this volume) also cites the workplace

relevance and 'real life' practice orientation which were stressed strongly as the motivation for selecting a private institution.

In as much as the above issues may be perceived, Kiatev (1999:16) argues that the 'dynamics of private education evolution and development in a given country may give useful clues to identify weaknesses in the public education system'. Therefore, whether some of these are perceived or not, the approach for wanting to make the situation better should be to treat all of them as real.

The Convenience of Location and Flexibility of Time

Many private institutions are located in urban areas just as some public institutions are. Often the difference with private institutions is that they are located conveniently for commuting and part-time students, perhaps because of the advantage of being newly established (see Mabizela 2005). The location of private institutions is also decided based upon the business and marketing acumen of the owners of these institutions.

As such, private HE institutions often allow for large numbers of part-time enrolments and offer teaching after hours and in the evenings. In this way, the target is employees who would naturally afford to pay fees (see Onsongo in this volume). Public institutions cannot change their locations unless they open satellite campuses at geographically convenient places and diversify in their modes of delivery, such as by offering part-time programmes. Otherwise, they face the risk of being out-competed by private institutions. Thus, private institutions become institutions of choice because of their convenient location and flexible mode of knowledge delivery.

The drive to be located at the urban areas by private institutions is motivated by the possibility of large numbers of potential students, which would translate into more revenue. Moreover, the pool of students in urban settings offers a working elite able to pay for expensive education programmes as opposed to rural areas. In other words, urban areas serve as catchment areas. Furthermore, urban areas have developed an infrastructure which offers convenience for private institutions. Unfortunately, this continues to perpetuate urban-rural disparities with rural areas always being under-resourced and under-served. Onsongo (in this edition) observes that the urban location of private HE institutions implies that people living far from the city are not able to access part-time (evening and weekend) programmes they offer.

Moreover, urban setting offers more potential of employability to graduates than rural areas do. Urban environment offers a wider choice of career options, thus it is easier for institutions to establish themselves in urban areas.

Credentialism and Promise for Mobility

Credentialism is discussed at length by Kruss (in this edition). This is pressure, perceived or real, among people to obtain a qualification with the hope that it will improve ones' chances of employability or, if already employed, will improve chances of promotion or job progression. Levy (1986) observes that institutions may or may not provide the knowledge necessary for a better job, 'but they surely provide the requisite credentials for these jobs'. Thus, credentials have a higher value than the knowledge provided simply because it is the credential that gets recognition without testing the subject knowledge. Credentialism is often underestimated yet it is also a characteristic feature of contemporary PHEIs. Many contemporary private HE institutions cash in on that pressure by offering short certificate programmes. Thus, it is one thing to obtain a certificate and another to be an employable graduate. Kruss (in this edition) observes that some students choose to study at a private institution because it promises to offer them internationally-recognised, quality programmes that will enhance their employability.

Kruss also observes that 'an internationally recognised qualification was typically venerated, simply because it is international and not South African, and thus seen to be more valuable'. The perception among students is that such a qualification then opens up greater global opportunities than a locally accredited one. Thus, she concludes that

the strength of all the students' belief that private providers can prepare more effectively for employability is thus evident, whether it is the belief of relatively privileged students that the qualification will ensure mobility or the belief of non-traditional students that the credentials will ensure employment (Kruss, this edition).

Kruss argues that the 'mobility' sub-sector attracts students by claiming to meet a demand for education that is 'better' than what the public sector can provide. She observes that in South Africa qualifications from contemporary private HE institutions promise mobility, 'whether in the sense of an internationally recognised and portable degree, or in the sense of a degree that is more oriented to the workplace and offers direct employability, and hence upward socio-economic mobility'.

However, the fact that there are successful private HE institutions and some that are not successful suggests that the sector is not necessarily a solution to the public sector problems or that it is always a better option to it. In this regard, it can, therefore, be concluded that the sector also offers hope which may not necessarily be found in the public sector. Nothing is fundamentally wrong and ille-

gal about providing hope. However, it is knowingly providing false hope and cashing in on that hope that becomes a fraudulent activity.

In Conclusion

The reasons for establishment of the new generation PHEIs are not based on ideological or political reasons as was the case in some countries prior to the 1980s. For instance, ideological and political reasons led to the growth of the private HE sector in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Bolivia (see Levy 1986). These included lack of academic freedom; suppression of individual rights; suppression of free speech; dictatorial bureaucracy; ideological indoctrination; etc. The fact that the establishment of contemporary PHEIs is not based on these reasons gives both good and concerning situations. It is good in the sense that the altruistic intentions of the public sector are not being questionable. However, it may be that people provide false reasons which are being made public, while the real reasons lie hidden. Whatever the case may be, literature has to analyse on the basis of what is publicly declared as reasons for establishing private HE institutions.

To some extent, the absence of ideological and political reasons for the establishment of private HE institutions may be an indication of how powerful states are in deciding what is taught both at public and at private HE institutions. This further underscores the centrality of state in the establishment of private HE sectors. To another extent, this is an indication of how agreeable the citizenry and the labour market are with the state in what is regarded as taught matter or curriculum, to the extent that they are even replicated at the newly established PHEIs.

Nonetheless, all the factors cited in the discussion above, both global and local, impact on different countries differently. Central to how the impact is experienced and how they affect each country are that country's policies on education and, to some extent, its policies on other social aspects such as development and equity. The establishment and growth of private HE institutions flourishes in countries where state policies favour the existence of the sector and where there is purchasing power. Of course, market forces determine the size and extent of such purchasing power. Thus, the strength of the economy does play a major part, as clearly demonstrated in the case of Mauritius and Botswana.

However, it should not be forgotten that some PHEIs survive on philanthropy rather than on for-profit. Therefore, this means that purchasing power alone is not enough to guarantee the existence of the private HE sector, hence favourable policies are key drivers. The combination of these factors, therefore, explains why, for instance, PHEIs exist in Mauritius rather than Botswana whereas the

two countries are almost similar in terms of the strength of their economies as well as their population sizes. It explains why South Africa does not have a private university or struggling foreign institutions, while Kenya boasts 18 private universities (see Otieno in this volume), even though its economy is not as strong as that of South Africa. The strength of economy not only provides better purchasing power, but also the demand of skills by the labour market, thus creating a supply gap from the HE system that leads to the establishment of PHEIs to assist in filling up skills needs.

Are Private HE Institutions a Future of Higher Education in Africa?

In Africa and the world over, private HE is here to stay. Indeed, research shows that there is a huge demand for its existence. Historical antecedents elsewhere in the world show that the sector is sustained until some of its institutions attain the respectable academic status often afforded to some of their public sector counterparts. In some developed countries, the academic status of PHEIs even exceeds that of public sector universities in certain cases. However, private sector institutions often do not want to be like public sector institutions and, certainly, should not be in order to promote diversity of institutional types; programme specialisation; level of qualifications; geographical location and modes of delivery. In certain cases, of course, PHEIs aspire to attain some of the better traits of public HE institutions to the extent of blurred boundaries between the two sectors.

As much as the private HE sector has a future in the continent based on historical reasons, it is, however, not guaranteed. Over and above the policy challenges they face, it is largely down to private HE institutions to guarantee their own future.

First, and foremost, private HE institutions need to comply with the state's policies in fulfilling the state's higher education policy objectives. This may not be easy for PHEIs because their agenda may not necessarily complement that of the state, even though that agenda may not be fundamentally opposed. Indeed, state regulation of the private sector would seek to reflect its objectives so as to increase its potential for success in delivering on its agenda. As discussed above, many contemporary PHEIs may be driven by for-profit motive which could make them neglect, for instance, developmental imperatives of the state's HE objectives.

As argued earlier, the state is an active participant in the private HE sector. It has happened several times that private sector institutions have a confrontational relationship with government; sometimes winning court battles but not winning the war (see Salerno and Beverwijk in this volume). The best approach, of course, is to get the buy-in of the state; influence its policies on private HE

and have the sector positively contributing to the broader state agenda of HE. African countries are at different stages in doing this. Some have, others did and are revising, others have not, and some have not even thought about it.

Second, private HE institutions are facing a daunting challenge of competing with relatively long-established public HE institutions in many respects. One such area of competition combines a number of related issues such as building trust with communities, authorities and other HE institutions; building a reputation which may already be found at established public HE institutions; building the reputable image expected and associated with HE institutions which is often based on existing institutions and building on trusted quality of education. Levy (1999:19) observes that even when these new institutions call themselves universities they are met with derision. Lee (1999) argues that the survival of private HE institutions depends on their ability to experiment with new and different kinds of programmes so as to have variety for their clients. Therefore, this means that private HE institutions have to fight against many odds, both internally within their sector and externally, in order to guarantee themselves into the future.

Third, there is evidence that in some African states, such as Kenya and Nigeria, PHEIs identify with, and get involved in, community development issues. However, engaging the community should not be just for its sake. Instead, it should be of such a purpose as to assist communities to deal with daunting challenges they face. Indeed, this will guarantee any type of institution its relevance and, therefore, the purpose of its existence. Of course, private institutions, given their privateness, mostly engage in community activities as part of their community service responsibility/requirement, which for most firms comprises their marketing strategy anyway. In fact, in certain instances PHEIs even offer student aid programmes and other inducements in order to gain legitimacy.

Fourth, many studies have shown that private institutions are demand-absorbing. Thus, for as long as there is excess demand, PHEIs are guaranteed their existence. Crucially in this equation is that state policies are meant to regulate existence and operation of private institutions, because they can make or break their survival. Demand absorption does not necessarily imply students who could not gain access to public institutions because the points system of some public providers act to exclude students, given their low levels of attainment in school leaving examinations as Kruss (in this volume) found out. It also means providing options for relatively privileged students 'more likely to be able to meet the formal requirements for entry into public higher education, and thus able to make an active choice to attend a private institution' (Kruss, in this volume).

Fifth, PHEIs in many African states have broadened access of women to education and, therefore, assisted in states to meet their gender equity imperatives. This is certainly the case in countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (see Onsongo, this volume; Banya 2001; Mario et al 2003 and Wesonga 2003). Onsongo argues that 'access introduces the concept of equity, which focuses on the values of fairness and social justice in the way social educational opportunities and resources are allocated or shared'. However, in a study of four private universities in Kenya, Wesonga (2003) observed that student enrolment patterns at private HE institutions resembled that of public HE institutions wherein female students largely concentrated in the humanities and social sciences. A different perspective which arrives at a similar conclusion is that of Onsongo who argues that

since most private universities in Kenya are religious based, with little science and technology programmes, the system subtly channels female students into the traditional fields that do not give them any competitive edge over male students. This means that private universities perpetuate the subordination of women in the labour market because they do not equip them with skills that they need to compete with men. In this regard therefore, these universities fail to promote or enhance equality of outcome and equal educational effects on life chances, though they seem to be promoting equality of access.

Thus, broadening access and equity should not be accepted at face value but a deeper analysis is required in order to ensure that PHEIs are making a qualitative difference. Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated in many African states that the demand for HE among women exists and that PHEIs assist in making HE accessible to them.

Sixth, Assie-Lumumba (2004:76) suggests that 'the notion of life-long learning is embedded in the African tradition'. Indeed, there is identifiable demand for life-long learning in African states, hence the largely-used concept of non-traditional students. Public sector institutions are playing their role; however, they seem to have limitations especially with regard to the required flexibility. Private HE institutions, therefore, are occupying this gap.

These are some of the pertinent issues which indicate the need for broadening a higher education system in African states, which is largely possible with the participation of the private HE sector. Indeed, many of these elements are dependant on state policies and how private institutions relate to them.

What Challenges and Lessons for Governments?

The mushrooming of private HE has clearly brought about challenges to governments, especially with regard to the formulation of state policies. Governments are having to: balance the growth of HE systems; maintain or improve on quality; formulate unprecedented policies to regulate the functioning of the sector, bearing in mind that it has a plethora of different types, sizes, shapes, specialisations and levels of institutions; ensure equity in the system, primarily to the rich and poor and geographic spread as well as gender balance; and protect the interest of citizens against education of poor or inferior quality and unscrupulous operators.

The task of governments in formulating private HE policies is, therefore, not an easy one. The articles contained in this volume touch on some that are also contained in international literature. This section covers pertinent challenges facing governments as well as lessons emanating from experiences across the continent and some other parts of the world.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Affordable Higher Education

It is almost inevitable that education in general, and HE in particular, shall no longer be free in the various states of the African continent. This is indeed a sad reality because many African states cannot cope with the high demand for HE while they do not have enough funding to provide more learning resources. The establishment of PHEIs then becomes justifiable under these circumstances. However, PHEIs, especially for-profit ones, largely or only enrol students who are able to pay. This situation further makes education a privilege for the few or an exclusive right of those who can afford to pay. In this way, the poor and disadvantaged groupings (women, people living with disabilities and those living in rural communities) are left out of the system as they have always been.

In her study of South African private HE, Kruss (in this volume) observes that in the majority of cases, only those who can afford the generally high fees can choose to study at a private institution. Thus, in some countries the presence of private HE does not provide a solution but exacerbates an existing problems. Regarding gender equity, Onsongo observes that affirmative actions may not be the best intervention for enhancing gender equity in HE, but policies that encourage and increase opportunities for women and girls in education. She concludes that 'opening up the education market for private providers can be seen as one of such alternatives'. However, as argued earlier PHEIs tend to offer 'soft' programmes thus exacerbating the disadvantaging of women as they enrol in relatively large numbers compared to public sector institutions (see Onsongo and Wesonga 2003).

Quality Assurance

Governments have a role to ensure that public and private institutions provide quality education. This is quality as is required for human development; human resources development and, in turn, the development communities and economies. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) of South Africa describes the criteria for quality as fitness for purpose in relation to the specified mission; value for money judged in relation to the full range of HE purposes and transformation in the sense of developing the capabilities of individuals (CHE 2001). Assuring quality at both public and private institutions, fairly and equitably, would ensure that perceptions about quality and processes of either sector are dispelled. Indeed, a number of African states have put in place quality assurance bodies that serve this purpose.

In order to provide the minimum quality required, institutions need to have quality personnel (academics and administrators); good curriculum; appropriate facilities (e.g. buildings, infrastructure, teaching and learning equipment, etc.) and attract quality students determined by the national process in place. Kruss found out that some institutions in South Africa admitted students to programmes for which they did not qualify, such as MBAs. Some students were admitted to the programme without a Grade 12 qualification which is a minimum requirement for any HE qualification at public HE institutions, let alone a post-graduate qualification.

In the Nigerian HE system, Obasi observes that the enforcement of the criteria for the granting of licenses to private universities has had a positive impact on the quality of facilities for teaching and learning at the institutions. Indeed, the programmes of five private universities that were audited passed the accreditation process (Obasi in this volume). This shows the positive effect of accreditation and quality assurance set in place by the state.

Facilitation of Student Mobility across Sectors and Borders

Linked to the issue of quality is student articulation, defined as the ability of students to move from one institution to the other without losing their accumulated qualifications credits from the previous institution and to have their qualifications recognised by the receiving institution. Once private HE institutions are licensed and/or registered to operate and their programmes accredited by relevant bodies, the common practice is to still have them operate in the periphery of the public HE system. This implies that their programmes are acceptable on paper and not in practice. The challenge for policy makers, therefore, is to facilitate the mobility of students across public-private sectors. Moreover, regional accreditation bodies, at least across countries, need to exchange information, compare notes and collaborate in order to facilitate the mobility of students

across systems and borders. Salerno and Beverwijk (this volume) observe that accreditation credit-transfer and accumulation policies are being developed in Uganda to facilitate student mobility, discourage program duplication and encourage more efficient resource allocation.

Planned Growth of Higher Education Taking Account of Private Institutions

Planning HE growth in African states, perhaps in all developing countries, is no longer about public HE institutions only, but private HE institutions as well. Salerno and Beverwijk observe of Uganda that the planning process involves a parallel shift from an elite to a mass HE system and ‘from a model of central planning to one that is more market oriented’. They argue that striking an appropriate balance when managing the two shifts requires strategies that seek to neutralise a situation where ‘strong points of one tend to produce dilemmas and tradeoffs that adversely affect the advantages brought about by the other’. This, therefore, means that unpopular decisions are bound to be made and mistakes may arise.

Often, the establishment of private institutions is not a state-planned developmental phenomenon. They emerge, catching the state unawares (see Obasi; Salerno and Beverwijk in this volume). As such, certain unprecedented state policies which seek to regulate the mushrooming sector get challenged, legally in certain instances, by private institutions who find them unfair, especially in comparison to how these policies apply to public sector institutions. Incidents of legal challenges by private institutions of state policies have taken place in South Africa and Uganda. These challenges take place because the new policies are viewed as more stringent than they are with public HE institutions. Coombe (2001) acknowledges that there is some merit in the allegation that private providers in South Africa are being subjected to a more stringent regulatory supervision than public institutions – this practice is characteristic of other countries as well. However, he argues that ‘it would be difficult to sustain an argument that this is systematic and deliberate’. He further argues that this is principally intended to protect the consumer and improve the quality of private provision of HE.

Within the context of planning there is a need for new innovative ways of carving the role of the new institutions. Coombe (2001) suggests that both policy makers and private HE institutions ‘will benefit by a definition of their common interests in the advancement of the nation’s human resource development strategy’. In other words, this means that the development of the private HE sector should not be left to the vagaries of the market but planned with set purposes.

Notes

1. *Privateness* and *publicness* are concepts borrowed from the seminal work of Levy (1986) on private higher education in Latin America. In using these concepts, Levy argues that 'to evaluate privatisation in qualitative as well as quantitative terms, *private* and *public* can be defined in ideal-typical terms of *privateness* and *publicness*'. He then uses the ideal-typical categories of finance, governance and function to evaluate publicness or privateness on HE sectors.
2. Provider and institution are used interchangeably. However, 'institution' is a preferred concept rather than university. Institution is an encompassing term for all those providers operating in what in each country is regarded as HE, which is a sub-sector of post-secondary education. A university implies a particular type of institution within post-secondary system. So, HE institutions can be post-secondary but not necessarily universities while there may be those that offer both post-secondary and HE, especially some private providers as found in South Africa.
3. A unique feature about Agha Khan universities is that, although a largely Ismailia Muslim Community organisation, its higher education institutions are secular, at least outside Pakistan.
4. The number of private HE institutions in Mozambique was set at fifteen in 2006. This information, though, was gathered through an informal discussion. Thus, it is not clear what stage of official recognition the latest additions to the initial number of five private institutions are all at, hence the number which this article will refer to is that of officially recognised private institutions which is five.
5. The merits or demerits of this distinction and definition shall not be challenged or discussed in this paper. However, it has been adopted for purposes of clarity for better understanding of the discussions that follow.
6. Leading to implementation of SAPs, studies on the rates of return to different levels of education had shown greater social benefits from basic education as well as higher education offered at private institutions. Thus, the nexus of private efficiency and higher benefits from private HE provided a (further) rationale for public disengagement with HE; greater cost recovery from public spending and more private involvement. There was a belief that this would be the best route for Africa to realise sustainable development (see World Bank 1989). African academics have been generally critical of the World Bank studies which provided a background to the SAPs recommendations in Africa, mainly as having been not grounded in an African context.

References

- Altbach, P. G., 1999, 'Private Higher Education: Themes and Variations in Comparative Perspective' in Altbach, P. G. (ed.) *Private Prometheus: Private Higher*

- Education and Development in the 21st Century*, Chestnut Hill: Centre for International Higher Education, School of Education, Boston College.
- Altbach, P. G., 1996, 'Patterns in Higher Education Development: Towards the Year 2000' in Morsy, Z. & Altbach, P. G. (eds.) *Higher Education in an International Perspective: Critical Issues*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Ajayi, J.F.A., Goma, Lameck, K.H.G. & Johnson, G. A., 1996, *The African Experience with Higher Education*. Ghana, London and Athens: The Association of African Universities, James Currey and Ohio University Press.
- Assie-Lumumba, N'Dri, T., 2004, 'Sustaining Home-Grown Innovations in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Critical Reflection', *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* 7(1), pp.71-83.
- Banya, K., 2001, 'Are Private Universities the Solution to the Higher Education Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa?' *Higher Education Policy*, 14, pp.161-174.
- Coombe, T., 2001, 'Thoughts on the Public Policy Toward Private Provision of Education and Training', paper delivered at the 13th Annual IPM/APPETD HRD Education and Training Conference, Boksburg, South Africa.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2001, *Higher Education Quality Committee Founding Document*, Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Editorial, 2003, *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*. 1(1), Fall.
- Geiger, R. L., 1988, 'Public and Private Sectors in Higher Education: A Comparison of International Patterns', *Higher Education*, 17(6), pp. 699-711.
- Geiger, R. L., 1986, *Private Sectors in Higher Education*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kiatev, I., 1999, *Private Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A re-examination of theories and concepts related to its development and finance*, Paris: UNESCO, IIEP.
- Lazarus, S. L. (ed.), 2002, 'IFC and its Role in Globalisation: Highlights from IFC's Participant Meeting, Washington, D.C., 6-7 June.
- Lee, M. N. N., 1999, 'Corporatisation, Privatisation, and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia' in Altbach, P. G. (ed.) *Private Prometheus: Private higher education and development in the 21st century*, Boston College: Boston College Centre for International Higher Education and Greenwood Publishing Company.
- Levy, D. C., 2003, 'Profits and Practicality: How South Africa Epitomizes the Global Surge in Commercial Private Higher Education. Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE)', February, *Working Paper No. 2*, University at Albany, State University of New York, from <http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/publication/paper.html#WP2>.
- Levy, D. C., 1999, 'When Private Higher Education Does Not Bring Organisational Diversity: Case Material from Argentina, China, and Hungary, in Altbach, P. G. (ed.) *Private Prometheus: Private higher education and development in the 21st century*, Boston College: Boston College Centre for International Higher Education and Greenwood Publishing Company.

- Levy, D. C., 1996, *Building the Third Sector: Latin America's Private Research Centers and Nonprofit Development*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Levy, D. C., 1986, *Higher Education and the State in Latin America: Private Challenges to Public Dominance*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Mabizela, M., 2005, *The Business of Higher Education: A Study of Public-Private Partnerships in the Provision of Higher Education in South Africa*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Mabizela, M., 2001, *Towards a Contextual Analysis of Structural Patterns of Private-Public Higher Education in South Africa*, M.Ed. Dissertation (unpublished), University of the Western Cape, Bellville.
- Mario, M., Fry, P., Levey, L. & Chilundo, A., 2003, *Higher Education in Mozambique*, Oxford and Maputo: James Currey Ltd and Impresa & Livraria Universitaria, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane.
- Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE) at <http://www.albany.edu/~prophe/>
- Subotzky, G., 1999, 'Alternatives to the Entrepreneurial University: New Modes of Knowledge Production in Community Service Programmes', *Higher Education*, 38, pp. 401-440.
- Tilak, J., 1996, 'The Privatization of Higher Education' in Morsy, Z. & Altbach, P. G. (eds.), *Higher Education in an International Perspective: Critical Issues*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Teferra, D. & Altbach, P. G., 2004, 'African Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century', *Higher Education*, 47, pp. 21-50.
- Tertiary Education Council (TEC), 2005, *Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana: Challenges and Choices*, consultation paper prepared by the Working Group on the Tertiary Education Policy for Botswana, Gaborone: Min. of Education.
- Van Lutsenburg Maas, J., 2001, 'Investing in Private Higher Education in Developing Countries: Recent Experiences of the International Finance Corporation', *Institute of Economic Affairs*, September, pp. 30-37.
- Wesonga, D., 2003. 'Private Provision of Higher Education in Kenya: An analysis of trends and issues in four select universities', *Conference Proceedings of Meeting the Challenge of Higher Education in Africa: The Role of Private Universities*, hosted by United States International University, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Wesonga, D., Ngome, C., & Wawire, V., 2003, *The Role and Development of Private Universities in Higher Education in Kenya*. Final Report.
- World Bank, 1989, 'Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth' The World Bank, Washington D.C.