

## On Student Access and Equity in a Reforming University: Makerere in the 1990s and Beyond

Joy C. Kwesiga\* & Josephine Ahikire\*\*

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### Abstract

This paper examines issues of access and equity in the context of the far-ranging reforms that have been taking place at Makerere University and in the Ugandan higher education system generally since the early 1990s. The analysis attempts to map out the contours of student access over time, outlining the major fault lines in student diversities which include, among others, location, class and gender, as well as the state (university) response to these diversities in the context of market based reforms. We argue that key to the reform programme was a reduction in the state's financial commitment in higher education and the implementation of alternative financial strategies especially relating to the introduction of the private sponsorship programme in 1992. Private sponsorship greatly expanded the intake of fee-paying students, and the total number of students in higher education in Uganda has expanded enormously. However, these apparent gains in terms of access to higher education have been offset by lack of necessary investment in facilities, with resulting problems of over-crowding, excessive teaching loads, large classes and falling standards. The analysis also interrogates the ways in which government/private dynamic plays out in the context of a highly fractured education system, dominated by urban-based schools, particularly located in the south of the country, and how the various affirmative actions measures have in a way, reproduced social and class privilege.

### Résumé

L'article analyse les questions d'accès et d'équité dans un contexte de profondes réformes, à l'Université de Makerere, en particulier, et dans le système de l'enseignement supérieur ougandais, en générale, depuis les années 90. Cette ana-

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\* Professor of Gender Studies, Vice Chancellor, Kabale University, Uganda.

\*\* Senior Lecturer, Department of Women and Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala Uganda.

lyse essaie de définir l'évolution de l'accès des étudiants dans le temps, en établissant les éventuelles failles au niveau de la diversité de condition des étudiants, incluant les éléments suivants : l'emplacement, la classe, le genre. L'étude essaie également de définir la réponse de l'État (université) face à cette diversité, dans le contexte de réformes basées sur le marché. Le cœur de ce programme de réforme est la réduction de l'engagement financier de l'État envers l'enseignement supérieur et la mise en œuvre de stratégies financières alternatives, notamment celles liées à l'introduction du programme de sponsorat privé en 1992. Le système du sponsorat privé a considérablement augmenté l'admission d'étudiants payant leurs frais d'étude, et le nombre total d'étudiants dans l'enseignement supérieur ougandais s'est donc considérablement accru. Cependant, ces acquis apparents en termes d'accès à l'enseignement supérieur ont été obscurcis par le faible niveau d'investissements utiles au niveau des infrastructures, provoquant ainsi des problèmes de sureffectifs, de charges d'enseignement excessives, de salles de cours démesurées et de faible niveau général. L'étude examine également la façon dont la dynamique gouvernementale/privée intervient dans le contexte d'un système d'éducation extrêmement fragile, dominé par des écoles urbaines, particulièrement celles du sud du pays ; elle vise également à montrer comment les différentes mesures de discrimination positive ont dans un certain sens reproduit les privilèges sociaux et ceux de classe.

### **Introduction**

There is a changing face of Makerere University brought about by a reform process that led to an overwhelming explosion in student numbers, characterised as a 'flood of humanity' (GMD 2004). Key to the reform was the implementation of alternative financial strategies relating to reduced state commitment in higher education. Market orientation was the envisaged alternative, and the key to this orientation was the introduction of the private sponsorship programme in 1992, which greatly expanded the intake of fee-paying students. By 1999 Makerere had moved from a situation where none of its students paid fees to one where 80 per cent paid fees, accounting for more than half of the university's total revenue (Musisi and Muwanga 2003: 22). According to Obong (2004) overall student enrolment rose by 340 per cent between 1993 and 2000. Where once only day programmes had hitherto existed, three types of students – day, afternoon and evening – now existed. From under 10,000 in the early 1990s, the student population increased to just over 40,000 by 2004.

This enormous expansion was predicated on a far-reaching change in the higher education sector beginning from the late 1980s when it was argued, as according to the World Bank, investment returns from higher education were lower than those from basic education. The argument underlying the reforms was that higher education was not cost-effective, as it diverted national re-

sources to serve individual students. These resources, it was argued, should benefit a larger stratum at the lower levels of the education system. Student allowances such as for transport, books and living expenses were the first obvious target, but soon the privatisation logic was to go beyond student cost-sharing. It went as far as requiring tertiary institutions to contribute towards their own upkeep, and this is the one clear genesis for the introduction of privately sponsored student programmes (PSSP).

Makerere, as a pioneer of PSSP in the East African region, leads the way in making fee-paying students a major source of income. Presented as a model of institutional reform, Makerere University is noted as having 'more than doubled enrolment ... introduced a semester system and established new courses, degrees, departments and faculties ... despite declining financial support from government' (World Bank 2001: 53). The underlying factor here is that, as Makerere opens its doors wider and wider each year, the state barely keeps its own doors ajar, clearly demonstrated by the actual numbers of applicants each year, the numbers admitted on state funding and those unable to attain admission. Government-sponsored students at the public institutions only doubled from 2,000 in the year 2001. Because of the three additional public universities the increase to 4,000 government-sponsored students made no difference in the case of Makerere University, as its own share remained around the original 2,000 students. In the academic year 2000–01 the state funded only 8.8 per cent of those eligible to enter Makerere University (Kwesiga 2000).

Increased access has thus been framed in such way as to free the state from substantial investment in the higher education sector. The state has been tacitly excused from funding higher education, and in the case of Makerere state funding has not only decreased but also more often than not is irregularly dispensed. From time to time the university has had to appeal to higher authorities or make frequent delegations to those in charge in order for this money to be released.<sup>1</sup> To amplify this further, in the 1997–98 financial year 60 billion Uganda shillings was approved but only 20 billion was actually provided. The university raised 10 billion from its own sources to survive the year. For the 1997–98 academic years, the wage bill alone fell short by 1.26 billion shillings. As a result the university had to raise an extra 125 million shillings a month to meet staff salaries (Kwesiga 2002).

The massive expansion of Makerere University at a time of declining state funding makes a compelling case for analysing the question of student numbers and access. Indeed what *is* the access question in this paradoxical human explosion? What is the nature and implication of this expansion? This paper deals with the question of access in the context of the above reforms through a

critical appraisal of the sloughing process that Makerere University has undergone in the recent past.

The analysis is divided into three main parts. First is an overview of access factors in Uganda's higher education system and the issue of inequality in terms of gaining entry into Makerere University. Clearly demonstrated is the fact that Makerere, as the historically premier university in the country, has over the years assumed a specific character, with glaring regional, religious, gender and rural-urban disparities. The second part maps out the different responses to diversity, ranging from allowances for needy students to quotas and affirmative action interventions to tackle disadvantage or offer incentives for the different categories of students. The efficacy and contradictions of this response are equally analysed. The last part of the paper deals with the question of access outcomes in the contemporary period, particularly addressing the issue of student numbers in relation to the university's mandate and its social relevance in the context of reforms. The impetus for this analysis revolves around the implications of reforms for equity and access. What type of access has been pursued and with what implications? To what extent is the university able to fulfil its mandate in the context of policies that increasingly diminish the role of the state in the tertiary sector? And finally how do the different interventions to deal with disadvantage interface with changes brought about by the liberalist reforms in which Makerere University is clearly engrossed?

### **Access Patterns in Uganda's Higher Education System**

Educational access has been a subject of debate worldwide since the 1960s, and the debate has revolved mainly around questions of exclusion and discrimination in relation to educational opportunities. Article 1 of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1962) defined discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth that impairs equality of treatment in education. Access therefore refers to three main areas. The first relates to entry. As the beginning point, entry is an important benchmark reflecting the level of openness of the institution in question. For higher education, entry as a quantitative indicator demonstrates how narrow or how wide the sector is, compared to existing diversity in the country. The second aspect of access is the equal opportunity to take part or share in the system. In other words, what does the system offer and to whom? The third area is the output/outcome of entry and participation, pertaining to equality of educational results or gains. In effect

we are talking here about issues of numerical representation as well as about the outcomes of inclusion (Ramsay et al. 1998).

Fundamental to access and equity in higher education is the extent to which the system responds effectively to full diversity as a key indicator of its quality. Underlying this is the fact that inequalities are a result of social, educational and economic factors rather than levels of ability and potential. This means that the system has the obligation to redress the impact of educational disadvantage as a matter of social justice and national vitality (Ramsay et al. 1998: 20). In general, therefore, educational access denotes the existence of specific structures of discrimination within the institution, the broader environment or both. With regard to Makerere University the most apparent access question has been that of entry. From its inception Makerere was a special institution seen as the ultimate goal of academic achievement in Uganda. Established in 1922, Makerere remained the only university in Uganda until the early 1990s. Three other public universities only came onto the scene after 2000: Mbarara University of Science and Technology (1989), Kyambogo University (2002) and Gulu University of Agricultural and Environmental Science (2003). A host of private universities have also been established.<sup>2</sup> In addition there are ten National Teacher Colleges, five Uganda Technical Colleges and other varied colleges in the fields of health, forestry, agriculture, wildlife and tourism.

Nevertheless the higher education sector in Uganda still lags far behind the lower levels. There exists a steep educational pyramid in which less than one percent of students who began school in 1980 had made it to university by 1993. Although private programmes in public universities and the establishment of private universities have indeed widened the tertiary sector this pyramid in many ways still pertains. Two things explain the pyramid. One is the colonial legacy. Historically it is a well-known fact that in the colonial period higher education for the colonised was not a priority. What was seen as essential was the production of assistants for technicians and senior colonial administrators. The 1980s World Bank philosophy, with its emphasis on basic education for the developing world, only seems to be a reincarnation of this legacy. The second factor is that post-colonial changes in the education system have disproportionately expanded primary and secondary school enrolment. In the 1980s, for example, the government expanded secondary schools, a move which enabled rural-based communities to access those levels of education, although it was not accompanied by adequate infrastructure development. Since then the government has further opened up educational access through the establishment of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in 1997. The number of private providers has also soared at the primary and secondary levels of the education system.

The establishment of many private schools, along with the relative increase in enrolment at primary and secondary levels, greatly increased the number of eligible candidates for university admission, yet actual admissions at university level remained static. For example, in 1995 and 1996, enrolment in all primary schools was 2,636,409 and 3,068,625 respectively, an increase rate of 16 per cent. In the secondary sector a transition rate of about 45 percent of primary sector enrolment has been realised (UNICEF 2003). This means that the higher education sector should be prepared for not less than 100,000 students. Yet even with the introduction of 'open up' reforms, Makerere barely satisfies 30 per cent of the demand for higher education.

Although the establishment of new public and private universities widened access to higher education, demand still outstrips supply by far. Moreover Makerere remains the key institution. The increase in the number of public and private universities has predominantly created a stratification rather than wide choice. In the stratified higher education sector Makerere clearly remains the number one choice for the majority of students. Most students apply to Makerere as their first choice; other public universities come second, while private universities constitute the third choice. Hence Makerere remains the premier university due to its historical and infrastructural landscape.<sup>3</sup> Entry into Makerere remains a national and very political issue.

A mapping of Makerere's 80 or so years points to clear consistencies on who could easily access entry. Over time a steep differentiation developed, mainly rotating around class, region, gender, the urban-rural divide and religion, what Kasozi (2003) refers to as the major fault lines along which resources have been unjustly distributed. Makerere catered for a male-dominated population, largely from the south, urban-based and predominantly Christian. The humanities, rather than science-based programmes, attracted the majority of students. With the introduction of private sponsorship programmes, the well-to-do have easily accessed government sponsorship while the disadvantaged have been either concentrated in private programmes or kept out of higher education altogether. Furthermore, those from disadvantaged positions generally stick to the humanities in order to maximise their chances, leaving science-based courses to those from 'good' schools. Hence access to higher education has been filtered through a complex web of class.

Within this web, regional and gender differences have generally tended to stand out as critical points of access. Historically the region in which one is located has had a decisive influence on whether he or she will enter Makerere or not. A few districts take the lion's share of places. The pattern is most evident among those who receive government funding, as this is based on how

well one performs at secondary level. For example, apart from highly urbanised districts in the disadvantaged regions of the north and the east, most parts of those regions are at a disadvantage. The war in the north that has raged on for close to two decades has meant even further marginalisation, making an already bad situation for social services (particularly education) worse. Makerere admission lists for government sponsorship clearly point to region as destiny. An overall mapping of regional disparities for government sponsorship over a selected period clearly depicts critical regional disparities (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Makerere University, Government Admission by Region over a Selected Period

Region	District	1993/1994		1994/1995		2002/2003		2004/2005	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Northern	Adjumani	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Apac	2	0	2	0	3	2	1	0
	Arua	70	5	45	6	24	1	9	0
	Gulu	5		12	3	19	1	10	2
	Kitgum	0	0	1		0	9	0	0
	Lira	21	1	12	4	4	0	3	0
	Moroto	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Moyo	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Nebbi	7	0	7	1	0	0	1	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3</b>
Eastern	Bugiri	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
	Busia	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
	Iganga	18	0	22	6	8	29	15	11
	Jinja	130	18	91	8	156	22	79	5
	Kamuli	14	10	9	3	0	3	2	0
	Kapchorwa	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
	Katakwi	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Kumi	3	0	7	2	4	9	3	6
	Mbale	34	19	53	20	34	17	12	7
	Pallisa	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0
	Soroti	9	0	6	0	24	0	11	0
	Tororo	50	28	40	14	35	28	15	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>31</b>

**Table 1:** Makerere University, Government Admission by Region (contd.)

Region	District	1993–1994		1994–1995		2002–2003		2004–2005	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Western	Bushenyi	37	13	22	23	49	47	41	40
	Hoima	4	0	9	3	2	2	5	0
	Kabale	34	3	44	14	37	9	35	17
	Kabarole	19	8	31	10	5	3	9	2
	Kamwenge	7	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
	Kanungu	4	0	2	0	6	1	1	0
	Kasese	12	0	1	3	5	8	2	7
	Masindi	7	0	4	0	10	1	10	0
	Kibaale	1	0	11	2	2	0	0	1
	Kisoro	4	4	5	0	1	0	1	0
	Mbarara	59	25	56	24	80	24	63	19
	Ntungmo	6	0	19	0	12	0	14	0
	Rukungiri	25	15	11	40	3	10	13	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>96</b>
Central	Kalangala	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Kampala	291	157	2		388	335	402	327
	Kayunga	8	0	15	11	0	0	2	7
	Kiboga	0	0	0	0	0	1		1
	Luweero	16	8	31	14	99	47	72	51
	Masaka	55	5	40	9	75	9	50	10
	Mpigi	141	143	122	112	29	23	54	38
	Mubende	9	0	6	3	17	2	20	1
	Mukono	78	76	58	70	95	85	98	89
	Nakasongola	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Rakai	0	14	5	6	1	2	0	1
	Wakiso*					292	260	304	348
<b>Total</b>		<b>598</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>873</b>

**Source:** Makerere University, Office of the Academic Registrar, Admissions.

**Key:** \*New district created in 2002, principally around Kampala City, carved out of Mpigi District. This also explains the sudden drop of Mpigi share in 2002.



As demonstrated by Table 1, regional imbalances in Makerere's government sponsorships have widened from bad to worse. If we take the northern region versus the western, for example, the difference in favour of the west was 72 slots in 1993 but 263 in 2004. In the case of northern versus central, the disadvantage for the north was 886 slots in 1993 and went up to 1,876 in 2004. Overall Table 1 clearly brings out the educational advantage of the central region, closely followed by the western region. Kwesiga (2002) notes that, between 1928 and 1937, about 70 per cent of students at Makerere came from Buganda. By the early 1990s the picture was so clear that the south in general, and the central in particular, principally concentrated among 25 to 30 schools out of the 800 with advanced level countrywide, scooped the majority of places (see Table 2). In the 2004–2005 intake, 25 schools, 90 per cent of them from the central region, took 1,336 positions out of the total of 2,694. In the 2005–2006 (government sponsorship) intakes the first twenty-five schools were all from the south, and twenty-one of these were from Buganda alone. The first northern school was 109 out of 265, with three candidates in total. For the 2006–2007 intake the first twenty schools took 1,098 out of the 1,614 slots for direct entry merit sponsorship. In total the central region took the lion's share of 41.8 per cent, followed by the western region with 27.4 per cent, while the eastern and northern regions had 21.2 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively.

**Table 2:** Admission of Direct Entrants from Top Twenty-five Best-Performing Schools and Other Schools for Selected Years

	Number of Students Admitted*			
	1993–1994	1994–1995	2002–2003	2004–2005
First Ten	561(32)	537(30)	760(30)	830(35)
Second Ten	330(19)	265(15)	464(18)	336(14)
First Twenty-five	996(57)	893(50)	1370(54)	1256(53)
Other Schools	750(43)	888(50)	1148(46)	1115(47)
Direct Entry				
Admissions Total	<b>1746</b>	<b>1781</b>	<b>2518</b>	<b>2371</b>

**Source:** Makerere University, Admission records.

**Key:** \*The percentage (in brackets) refers to the proportion of slots to the total government sponsorship for each intake.

The regional disparity question does not necessarily talk to issues of individual disadvantage, since a person hailing from one region could study in schools

based in another region. Rather, what is at stake here is the structural disadvantage in terms of schools and their location within Uganda's education landscape. It is well documented that the process of establishing formal education in Uganda was uneven (Wandira 1972). The first schools established by the colonial administration were all in Buganda, starting with Mengo in Kampala (1898) and followed by others such as Namilyango, Kisubi, Budo for boys and Gayaza for girls. The roll-out of government education investment was slow and dire for the northern and eastern regions. Tracing the expansion of this service throughout the country shows that the initial imbalance has persisted to date, with most leading schools still located in the south. Consequently entry opportunities are much more diverse in the south than in the north.

The question of equality or merit amongst unequals builds on the numerical imbalances in educational institutions. Old schools were established with comprehensive learning infrastructure such as laboratories, educational materials and appropriate teaching accommodation. Whereas the 1980s, for example, saw a rapid expansion of schools in all regions of the country,<sup>4</sup> this expansion only created a larger pool of schools with poor learning infrastructure principally, leaving the old schools as an island of (southern) privilege. The majority of schools operate on a bare minimum with no laboratories, insufficient classroom space and poor teacher accommodation. A consideration of school facilities across the regions lays bare the regional differentiation with regard to learning infrastructure (see Table 3). Since both well-equipped and poorly equipped schools sit one examination, it is not hard to imagine the reproduction of privilege into higher education.

Educational infrastructure indeed says a lot about access outcomes. Table 3 shows critical consistencies with the patterns of accessing higher education. The pattern of the privileged south shows in the number of schools as well as in relation to facilities that directly feed into academic excellence such as classrooms, libraries and laboratories and in relation to other 'cushioning' infrastructure such as dormitories. In numerical terms the eastern region (excluding what has been termed the Far East, which takes in the districts in Karamoja) shows a relatively better performance in terms of facilities than in access outcomes with regard to higher education.<sup>5</sup> However the dominant pattern of central and west still remains in terms of facilities for academic excellence. A related factor is the inflation of pass marks over time. The 'triple A' phenomenon has changed the conception of passing, because it is total. Where a triple D was sufficient to bring one to a Bachelors Degree in Social Sciences in 1987, a triple B score in three principal subjects was 'risky' by the year 2000. In many schools students were even forced to offer four principals as opposed to the standard three. This however served to increase the load and further

**Table 3: School Facilities by Region**

	Government Schools	Private Schools	Class Rooms	Dormitories	Incinerators	Kitchens	Laboratories	Latrine Blocks	Libraries	Offices	Staff Rooms	Store Rooms	Teacher's Houses	Workshops
Central	195	516	5797	1782	170	661	816	2033	403	1883	669	978	2429	175
East	179	315	3482	531	38	372	415	1460	213	1047	387	583	1137	6183
Far East	10	2	80	48	0	11	24	69	9	24	10	18	75	380
West	248	259	3756	1701	56	456	511	2018	271	1096	459	807	1775	13413
North	132	107	1624	458	16	187	270	1034	113	423	181	311	1006	5862

**Source:** Ministry of Education and Sports (2004), Statistical Abstract for Secondary Schools Facilities, Department of Educational Planning.

distort the learning process, specifically further weighing down on those in rural schools with no adequate facilities. In some (not uncommon) cases, rural schools are not even able to offer particular subjects due to shortage of teachers and space.

The question of region and location is closely tied with the urban-rural divide which then brings in the differentiation within the four regions, which are not homogeneous as well. For example, the central region includes the capital city Kampala and its environs, as well as such districts as Kalangala, Rakai, Sembabule and to some extent Masaka. Though geographically located in the central region, the latter districts sit rather uncomfortably in the region when it comes to schools and related (urban) amenities. These districts largely fall in the countryside of the central region. The same applies to the other regions too, where it is principally in the urbanised/dominant districts where 'good' schools are located. As a newspaper education pull-out (*New Vision*, 17 January 2005) put it: 'A candidate must be in an urban setting in order to join a good school. Those who sit in rural schools...continue to be doomed'. In effect, therefore, we are talking about a few dominant (urban) schools largely located in the south in general, but particularly in the central region.

The issue of regional imbalance has been debated over time. In the 1970s the military regime initiated the idea of allocating regional quotas for admission to Makerere. This was not successful due to lack of a clear policy instrument to institutionalise the concern and to determine the varying needs. From the 1990s the question became even sharper as government funding for higher education dwindled while the number of eligible students increased exponentially. At a more general level regional imbalance and the concerns that surround it led to demands for the establishment of public universities in all regions, i.e., away from the central region. Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) in the west and Gulu University in the north were an apparent response to this demand. In the pipeline is a public university in the east, to be established in either Soroti or Tororo to fulfil the need to share the national cake more equitably. However, Makerere remains at the centre of public focus. Admissions tend to dominate the headlines in the press despite the existence of the two other public universities, with inequality of access often the major concern. *The Monitor* newspaper, for instance, carried a report on the 1994–95 intake to the effect that only ten schools had 'swept' the Makerere intake: 'The district distribution shows imbalances, with Kampala, Mpigi, Iganga Masaka and Mbarara taking the lion's share, while some remote districts like Kotido and Bundibugyo send a few or none at all' (*The Monitor*, 6 January 1996).

The report went on to note that a further analysis of the few students coming from remote districts showed a pattern. Most of them had studied in Kampala schools, which meant that for some years no high school in those remote districts sent any student to Makerere. In a letter to the Commissioner for Higher Education, Dent Ocaya-Lakidi of Makerere University suggested four interventions to address the problem of regional inequality (Kasozi 2003: 138). The first was that the merit system should be abandoned and admissions be based on national need in critical areas of national development. Second was that admission should be subjected to a quota system per district. The third related to government sponsorship and recommended that a loan system be established and sponsorship decentralised to districts. When the letter was tabled at the Forum of Vice-Chancellors, the view was that such positive discrimination would eliminate one injustice but create another, since better-qualified students would be denied entry in favour of the less-qualified. The general public debate highlighted the concern about whether or not positive discrimination would not compromise standards. The vice-chancellors suggested remedial classes for potentially good students instead of positive discrimination. The vice-chancellors seemed to emphasise merit. The fact that merit was contextual was pushed aside.

In 2003 Makerere University sought to set up a special senate committee to look into the criteria for correcting the regional imbalance. However, according to the deputy registrar in charge of admissions, at the time the question of regional balancing was seen as complex and potentially explosive. Instead, more viable solutions to close the regional gaps were to be sought in upgrading schools in disadvantaged areas. In a not very surprising turn of events, ahead of general elections the following year, district quotas were suddenly introduced in 2005. What interests are at stake and how far district quotas have addressed regional inequality is a question we deal with later in this chapter.

Closely intertwined with class and regional diversities is the question of gender disparities in education in general and in higher education in particular. Formal education as established by the colonial project was gendered in that men and women were placed differently in terms of the nature and purpose of education. The numbers of women were minimal, and their education was narrowly defined and directed only towards enhanced domesticity. According to Nakanyike colonial and missionary education was specifically focused on educating women as future wives through what was termed a 'practical down-to-earth curriculum' in most girls' schools (1992: 178). Boys on the other hand were oriented towards higher education. Indeed the founding motto of Makerere University – 'In all things let us be men' – could scarcely be more telling.

The gender gap in higher education did not arise only from the marginalisation of women in the education system and the domestic-oriented curriculum. There were also specific discriminatory practices. For example Makerere University was established in 1922 but only admitted women in 1945, and by independence in 1962 only about 77 women had been admitted. Moreover the first women to join Makerere were still subjected to a different curriculum and regulatory framework:

In March 1945 the first women students were admitted to Makerere College. Only one was a direct entry from school through the ordinary channels ... [F]our of these had no secondary schooling but had been trained as Primary School Teachers ... [and] their admission to the College was a venture of faith ... Their course consisted of four subjects, of which three, English, Social Studies, and either History or Art, were to be taken with men students, and a fourth, Educational Studies, by themselves (Kwesiga 1998: 3-4).

Colonial policy towards women's education was basically to regulate the pace of girls' education lest it lead to societal breakdown. Government was therefore even more cautious than the missionaries in their approach to women's education in general and higher education in particular. Government's hesitation to allow women to enter higher education went beyond Makerere College. For example the 1952 Education Annual Report warned against 'unqualified' women going to study overseas. All this moral caution and bias was directly reflected in the meagre funding provided for girls' as opposed to boys' education by the colonial government.

Although independence and the processes of struggle towards its attainment brought about slight changes in women's education, the situation remained heavily skewed in favour of men. Throughout the early independence period the few women who accessed education beyond primary schooling originated from well-to-do families. Additionally they had to struggle in the face of gender ideologies within the school and family environs. The schools reproduced gender-based stereotypes through specific subject combinations (e.g., home economics, office practice) that limited girls' choices to enter various higher education institutions (Kwesiga 2002). At family level, factors militating against women's education have included the work burden, parents' choices of who is to be educated and to what level and deep-seated ideologies about femininity and masculinity.

The years of turmoil (1971–1986) had a significant impact on the gender terrain in Uganda. The destabilisation brought about changes in gender identity as men and women struggled to survive in a country fraught with economic dislocation and political uncertainty. Hence colonial ideologies such as

men as breadwinners came under relative stress. Education of girls in some cases paid off more in terms of actual returns to parents and encouraged them to send girls to school. However this response 'from below' did little to change the level of access to higher education. The university (read state) therefore offered little space for the consumption of energies from below, creating a glaring gender gap in which female enrolment hovered well below 25 per cent (Kwesiga 2002).

We have seen that there are critical points of diversity in Uganda's education system and how these have historically determined entry into Makerere University. Social class as a constellation of one's location either by space (region, urban/rural) gender and religion, among others, has gained notable prominence, especially with the change in the financing of higher education. In the next section of this paper we attempt a comparative analysis of Makerere's response to these and other points of diversity and what this has meant for student access.

### **Responding to Diversity: The Needy Students Scheme Versus Affirmative Action and Quotas at Entry**

Despite the pervasive privatisation and constant shrinkage of state funding, the notion of 'national ownership' of Makerere University has remained central. In fact the shrinkage of state funding has made the issue of inclusiveness much more apparent, in that the ratio of students locked out of government sponsorship has grown bigger and bigger. The quest to address issues of diversity and inclusiveness has seen various policies intended to address inequalities at different levels. We can divide these policies into four main components.

The first component is the failed Needy Students Scheme, which aimed at tackling disadvantage within the admitted student body through provision of special allowances. The second is affirmative action tackling disadvantage at entry.<sup>6</sup> The third is affirmative action as an incentive relating to such schemes as those for biological children of members of staff to motivate the latter and ensure staff retention in the face of inadequate salaries. The scheme to encourage talented sportsmen and women in a bid to strengthen sports in the country also falls in the category of affirmative action as incentive. The fourth and most recent intervention is the quota system. This entails both a quota for each district and a preference for science-based and other courses considered critical for national development. We deal with each of these in some detail to demonstrate the different turning points and the interests shaping these responses. We look the ways in which these responses relate to the context of



reforms and the attendant manifestations of liberalism embedded within these reforms.

### **Equity from Within: The Needy Students Work Scheme**

The Needy Students Work Scheme can be seen as an attempt to address social and economic gaps in the face of liberalising reforms in the university. From the inception of Makerere in 1922 up to the end of the 1980s, once a student was admitted, the government virtually met all study and living expenses. It was free university education. All staff (academic, administrative and support, expatriates or local) were fully catered for from state funds, not only in terms of their salaries and wages, but also for their housing, leave expenses and other related allowances. Student expenses covered tuition fees, board and lodging, books and any necessary equipment. Once in every academic year, students received allowances, popularly known as ‘boom’, to cater for day-to-day expenses and for transport to and from their home districts.

Through the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, Makerere like all other institutions in Uganda suffered serious setbacks. The state progressively limited admission figures to what was affordable, as opposed to who qualified, and the end of the 1980s saw the introduction of cost-sharing, following a recommendation of the Education Policy Review Commission Report 1989. In particular, ‘boom’ and related personal and travelling expenses were abolished. Students protested against these liberalisation strategies with strikes and riots, leading to even fatalities. The Needy Students Work Scheme, aimed at addressing social disadvantage amongst students, was introduced at this time, partly in response to the student unrest.

Discussions on ‘The Needy Students Work Scheme’ were concretised in the 1990–1991 academic year. The aim, according to a letter from the Dean of Students, was ‘to assist those students who were unable to raise enough money for their personal needs. The money was not a free gift but was to be worked for’ (Dean of Students 1994). The original plan was to administer this scheme at district level, where local government councils (then known as Resistance Councils) would identify the most needy, and such students would have to work during their long vacations. The scheme was for all public tertiary institutions, although it became more visible at Makerere University. Owing to the many practical difficulties that arose, the scheme was short-lived. Government abolished it in the 1994–1995 financial year, although Makerere continued to administer the scheme until the 1995–1996 financial year.

According to a number of people talked to, the idea of addressing social disadvantage was noble, but the policy had many flaws. The very mention of the scheme invited a sigh. A number of the administrators in Makerere only



remembered it as a source of further problems rather than a solution, but with scanty information even on the problems. For one deputy registrar it was merely a ploy to reward government supporters. But one former student (1989–1990 intake and part of the needy) argued that she registered herself as needy due to fear for the worst: ‘We knew that following on the heels of the abolition of allowances would be the requirement for us to pay tuition, since the debates at the time were on whether or not the state should pay for higher education’. The major flaw often mentioned by the different actors was the lack of clear criteria for identifying who was needy and who was not. As indicated by the former students’ views, registration was based on self-identification. Conditions for qualification were not spelt out. A student who joined the university a year after the scheme was introduced described his process of joining the scheme as follows: ‘We saw the posters inviting those who felt they were needy to assemble at the Faculty of Arts Quadrangle. We went there and became needy!’

A deputy registrar observed that initially there was an attempt to assess students at entry into university based on the contents of their rooms. A team went around the university halls of residence assessing the beddings and other things that students had in the rooms. Apparently students discovered this and tried to make their rooms look ‘needy’, even to the extent of borrowing old beddings. Student committees were given the opportunity to identify deserving beneficiaries, but reports were that these were equally compromised in the process. The administration then changed strategy and tried to assess the students’ background at village level using the RCs. In the words of one deputy registrar ‘everybody became needy at this point’. RCs were said to give false information. In essence, however, the task according to one former registrar was a challenging one on the part of the RCs. More often than not a village would send one or two students to Makerere University. RC officials at village level could therefore not afford to deny these students (sons or daughters of the soil) the privilege of accessing allowances. Therefore this strategy also had to be abandoned, since virtually every admitted student became needy. In the first year of its operation 5,000 of the 7,000 students applied to join the scheme. As shown below, the number of ‘needy’ students almost doubled within the space of five years.

The statistics in Table 4 show a steady rise in ‘needy’ students over the years. We also see the highest number coming from dominant (urbanised) districts. Through discussions it was noted that figures for districts could not be relied upon. This is because, as students realised that transport allowance depended on how far from Kampala they were from, there was a tendency for them to indicate a far-off district of origin in order to maximise their allowance.

**Table 4:** Needy Students by District over Selected Years

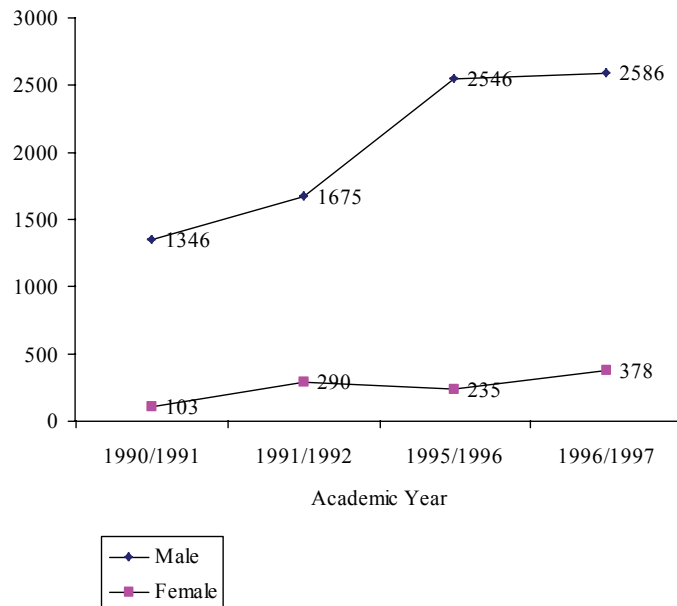
District	1990/1991	1991/1992	1995/1996	1996/1997
Apac	61	86	54	77
Arua	105	124	173	175
Bundibugyo	2	3	5	8
Bushenyi	107	155	215	201
Gulu	49	67	116	108
Hoima	21	26	30	47
Iganga	52	89	121	121
Jinja	29	42	59	63
Kabale	99	147	189	174
Kabarole	55	65	68	82
Kalangala	1	3		
Kampala	25	27	71	87
Kamuli	37	36	69	66
Kapchorwa	12	12	12	9
Kasese	15	10	37	41
Kibaale	2	11	20	14
Kiboga	2	5	4	6
Kisoro	21	36	63	66
Kitgum	31	38	63	71
Kotido	13	11	15	10
Kumi	90	105	72	84
Lira	68	76	78	105
Luwero	19	29	57	65
Masaka	37	44	90	95
Masindi	13	17	31	43
Mbale	59	86	145	129
Mbarara	95	167	210	208
Moroto	9	9	9	9
Moyo	34	33	37	40
Mpigi	36	58	121	147
Mubende	18	37	41	49
Mukono	33	58	91	71
Nebbi	37	47	37	39
Ntungamo*	N/A	N/A	65	80
Pallisa	19	52	55	70
Rakai	14	13	41	48
Rukungiri	61	81	130	147
Soroti	113	126	101	108
Tororo	91	125	133	133
<b>Total</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>2156</b>	<b>2928</b>	<b>3096</b>

**Source:** Makerere University Archives.

**Key:** \*District created in 1995.

The needy students profile also indicates a skewed gender divide. Although the student population was predominantly male, the gender gap in needy students was much wider than the absolute numbers of males and female students. Hence a selection of seven halls of residence<sup>7</sup> over a selected four-year period shows that out of a total of 9,159 beneficiaries only 1,006 were female. Demonstrated in the chart below is the steep curve for male students as opposed to the more or less constant one for female students.

**Figure 1: Gender Divide of Needy Students for Selected Year**



One explanation for the gender divide in the scheme was that the term ‘needy’ was seen as demeaning, and while many male students used the scheme to improve their financial status, female students tended to avoid being identified with the scheme. Apparently, female students detested the work involved of slashing the compound and emptying dustbins. But a much more critical explanation lies in the nature of the scheme and the kind of politics underlying it. For example, one former female student had no idea of how people joined

the Needy Students Association because the needy students' space was fast turned into a male club.

Because of the loose definition of a 'needy' student the estimated original fund of Shs 26 million earmarked for Makerere University rose to Shs 55 million by the time the scheme was abolished. The original fund was Shs 15,000 per student but was eventually raised to Shs 26,000. The scheme was politicised, especially after 1 February 1992 when the Makerere University Needy Students Association (MUNSA) was formed. According to records the Chairpersons of the scheme used it as a vehicle to attain leadership of the Students Guild. MUNSA was also used to hold university management at ransom each time the funds from government were delayed. For instance, on 22 November 1994, MUNSA members locked up the administration building and the library until management agreed to address their issues. MUNSA officials used the scheme as a vehicle to make more demands from government.<sup>8</sup> A lot of time was spent in correspondence and meetings between government and university officials, MUNSA and the Students Guild.

The scheme failed mainly due to inadequate planning and comprehensive articulation of diversity. Though part of the blame can be placed on the 'dependency syndrome' of university students, the broader problem stemmed from the erratic reforms and an equally erratic response to the contradictions arising from those reforms. Had the scheme been adequately conceptualised, Makerere could have run it on its own through the study-work concept which students in many parts of the world have long embraced. The needy students' scheme was a victim of the policies and politics that had begotten it. The idea of bridging the socio-economic gap amongst the students was hence abandoned. The Makerere of the twenty-first century, where self-sponsored students are the majority, seems to call for a rethinking on needy students. The majority of self-sponsored students study through hardships of seeking 'dead years', carrying on with retakes and poor living conditions. Hence many individual students would be very willing to take part-time jobs, but there is no established study and work schemes at the moment.<sup>9</sup>

#### **The Female Scholarship Initiative (FSI): A Donor-Funded (Female) Needy Students Scheme**

The government needy students' scheme collapsed in 1996. The idea of tackling disadvantage in the face of privatisation was then resurrected in another form through a donor-funded initiative for female students. The Female Scholarship Initiative (FSI), fully supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York under a five-year agreement, was designed to focus on social and geo-

graphical disadvantage as well as targeting the science deficit for females. Starting in 2002, the initiative had benefited a total of 435 students by 2005.

Selection for the FSI follows a meticulous weighting system that basically addresses equity on the basis of social disadvantage as well as the nature of the programme. The cardinal aim of the project is to get females into science disciplines, although there are also (limited) slots for humanities. Hence 70 per cent of the fund goes to sciences and only 30 per cent to humanities. Each programme, science or humanities, is given weightings based on the percentage distribution of females in a particular study programme. High weightings accrue to study programmes where females are grossly under-represented.

The FSI specifically targets the socially disadvantaged, weighted by criteria such as what parents do for a living, whether or not both parents are alive and the number of school-going children in the districts. Additionally points are awarded on the basis of who paid fees at secondary level. A candidate earns more weighting if a person other than the father paid these fees. Other considerations include the candidate's district of origin and the secondary school they went to. The disadvantaged status of a district is determined based on the UNDP Human Development Report 2000 for Uganda. Districts with a similar Human Development Index (HDI) are grouped together and a score assigned to them. The poorer districts in terms of the HDI get the highest possible score while the better off districts get the least score. Secondary schools are categorised on the basis of a weighted average score based on the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education performance. The maximum possible score for a school is awarded for the worst-performing schools and the minimum for the best-performing schools.

The three-year experience of the FSI demonstrated that targeting social disadvantage is complex. It is not easy to ascertain socio-economic levels from information provided through filling in a form. Cases of fraud and misinformation were common, with many applicants providing false information in order to access the scholarship. A GMD team had to carry out actual visits to the districts and homes of the applicants and beneficiaries. Those who were discovered to have provided false information had their scholarships withdrawn.<sup>10</sup> Another major limitation of the scholarship initiative was the limited impact in terms of competitive and professional courses, particularly in science, due to the rigid admission system. Although there was a 30:70 bias in favour of science, the problem is that the scholarship was given only after university admission, when the weighting system had already placed students mostly in courses not of their first choice. For example, if a candidate obtains the requisite points for Medicine but gets cut off on the basis of the limitation of government slots, that candidate may be placed in BSC on government spon-

sorship. Since she is already on the government list, she automatically does not qualify for the FSI. Courses like medicine, agriculture and veterinary medicine, therefore, are still under-represented in FSI.

Furthermore, the bias in favour of science indirectly reproduces privilege. The FSI sub-committee in fact found it difficult to secure candidates to pursue sciences because most of the applicants for science were not actually needy. It was therefore concluded that females who pursued sciences, especially at Advanced level, were not needy. They came from well-to-do families and were able to attend schools that had the facilities for science education. Subsequently, the committee recommended that the percentage for science be reduced to 60, since the primary focus of the scholarship was to bridge the socio-economic gap. The operation of the FSI shows that the idea of a mechanism to address educational disadvantage is not totally discredited. What is rather at stake is that the state is detached from the need for more targeted investment to address disparities. Such a scheme is seen as okay as long as it does not involve government investment.

#### **Equity at Entry: Affirmative Action and Quotas**

In Uganda affirmative action has been the most common response to imbalance. The Uganda Constitution (1995) recognises the need for affirmative action and has many clauses aimed at eliminating discrimination on the basis of gender, age and disability. At the general level of political structures affirmative action programmes in favour of women and other 'marginalised' groups (youth, persons with disability, etc.) were instituted as soon as the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took over power in 1986.

In the education sector affirmative action has a much longer history. It has been practiced in one form or the other, since girls were formally brought on board in the formal education arena in Uganda. In the 1920s a senior education officer in charge of female education had a distinct role of enabling more girls to attend school, although this policy was soon abandoned. The periodic commissions which reviewed the system and made recommendations to government have all expressed concern about low participation levels of women in formal education.<sup>11</sup>

Affirmative action programmes have ranged from lower school fees for girls (up to the early post-independence era) to admission to key mixed government-aided schools with a lower score cut-off for girls in comparison to boys (still in practice today). A Schools' Incentives Scheme in the form of specific support awards for schools with programmes to support girls' education was operational during the 1990s. Other related areas include alternative forms of education to enable pupils to take classes in conformity with their life

modes, for example, the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja programme (ABEK) or Complementary Primary Education (COPE), both of which allow learners to perform family roles (e.g., livestock rearing, crop farming and trading) along with formal study. When 'partial' universal primary education (UPE) was introduced in 1997, it was a policy to ensure that two of the four pupils per family who enjoyed free education had to be girls (from 2000 UPE encompassed all children of school going age).<sup>12</sup> However all these affirmative action practices remained at lower levels. Affirmative action at tertiary level (at Makerere University) was only instituted in the 1990s. Why did Makerere introduce affirmative action in the 1990s and not before? In what ways does affirmative action interface with the reforms in the same period?

***Affirmative Action: The 1.5 Points Scheme for Female Undergraduate Students***

Affirmative action for female undergraduates, the '1.5 points scheme', has been the most far-reaching policy response to the gender gap in higher education in Uganda. The 1.5 scheme in effect adds one and a half points to the scores of eligible female applicants for undergraduate programmes. Through an approved weighted score for each programme, admission is then decided according to merit. This was a decision by the Makerere University Senate. What accounts for this particular translation of gender access into policy? What is the impact of the 1.5 policy and other related initiatives within the changing environment of a university undergoing massive reforms?

One way to understand the visibility of gender as an access issue would be through the perspective of a 'moment of opportunity'. The beginning of the NRM regime coincided internationally with the end of the United Nations Women's Decade and the conference in Nairobi at the end of 1985. This was the height of the women in development (WID) crusade that sought to integrate women into the development process. Among the forward-looking strategies that emerged as a consensus from the Nairobi UN Conference was the participation of women in decision-making structures. Some of the women who attended the Nairobi conference returned to Uganda to develop a new organisational terrain which specifically focused on forming non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to advance women's interests. One such organisation formed in this period was Action for Development (ACFODE), which conferred with other women's organisations to generate a list of demands in the context of a state 'still finding its feet' (Ahikire 2004). Following on some of the gains in terms of reserved positions in political structures, women activists advanced similar concerns with regard to university education. Under ACFODE leadership women activists lobbied university management for af-

firmative action for some time before a proposal was presented and accepted by senate. Although debates ensued and it was not a sail-through situation, at a special meeting held on 14 June 1990, Senate passed the 1.5 policy by a forty to fourteen vote. The fact that there had to be a vote is indicative of potential for opposition. But much more informative is the opening remark of the chair at the same meeting:

He reminded members that the meeting would address issues which had been raised by the Chancellor of the university which included measures to be taken in order to increase intake into the university generally and increase the number of female students admitted into the university in particular... [and] also told members that there was need on the part of the university to be sensitive to public outcry and to respond to it as favourably as possible (Senate 1990).

From the above it is clear that women activists had succeeded in factoring the question of women's access into the broad discussion of 'opening up'. That the senate meeting passed the policy to take immediate effect in the 1990–1991 academic year admissions cannot be distanced from the fact that a meeting of deans and directors with the chancellor was due to take place the following day.

The 1.5 scheme delivered numbers. Female representation in the student body rose from 24 per cent in 1989 to 30 per cent in 1990 and by 2004 stood at 37 per cent for government-sponsored programmes and at 42 per cent for private programmes with a global percentage of 46. Senate records indicate that when the scheme commenced in 1990–1991, 51 per cent of the female candidates admitted into the university benefited from the scheme (Senate 1997).

The evidence from Makerere University admissions indicates that, with regard to government-sponsored programmes, the 1.5 point scheme makes a big difference between eligibility and actual admission. Results of a review of the 1.5 scheme commissioned by the Gender Mainstreaming Division in 2004 demonstrated that a substantial 31 per cent of females enrolled would otherwise have been left out. On the other hand the 1.5 scheme has had more impact in humanities than in science as Table 6 indicates.

Thus, despite the 1.5 scheme, critical gender gaps persist in science. Significantly the female representation in 2002/2003 shows percentages of more than 50 per cent, which means that the science deficit tended to minimise the effect of the 1.5 scheme. It would have otherwise delivered much greater numbers.



**Table 5:** Percentages of Females Admitted to Makerere University over a Selected Period

Academic Year	M	F	%F	
1984/1985	1071	312	23	
1986/1987	1192	368	23	
1987/1988	1330	343	21	BEFORE THE 1.5 POLICY
1988/1989	1266	400	24	
1989/1990	1281	407	24	
1990/1991	1547	658	30	
1991/1992	1400	621	30	
1992/1993	1312	678	32	
1993/1994	1381	742	34	
1994/1995	1974	680	26	AFTER THE INTRODUCTION
1995/1996	1558	686	30	OF 1.5 POLICY
1996/1997	3487	1952	35	
1997/1998	3696	2115	36	
1998/1999	5157	3214	38	
1999/2000	8098	4942	38	
2000/2001	8259	5183	39	
2001/2002	8158	6129	43	
2002/2003	8119	6536	45	
2003/2004	8214	6941	46	

**Source:** Kwesiga (1998); Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2002).

**Table 6:** Percentage of Females Admitted for Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts Degrees over a Selected Period

Academic Year	B. Science	B. Arts	B. Social Sciences
1988/1989	13	24	29
1989/1990	13	15	29
1990/1991	21	34	41
1991/1992	17	30	37
1992/1993	23	40	39
1993/1994	21	41	37
1994/1995	26	43	38
1995/1996	17	38	33
1996/1997	20	35	39
1997/1998	18	40	36
1998/1999	17	40	44
1999/2000	20	44	44
2000/2001	20	46	47
<b>2001/2002</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>54</b>

**Source:** Kwesiga (1998).

#### *Admission of Children of Makerere University Staff*

As competition for entry became stiffer, with entry pegged to what the state could fund, Makerere staff realised that their children were being increasingly edged out. As already noted, the required grades (cut-off) continued to rise as more students applied for admission. Makerere University staff whose salaries continually declined in real terms felt disadvantaged, as they could not afford to place their children in 'Grade A' schools. The question then was, why should these children be disadvantaged despite their parents' service to the community, simply because the state could or was only willing to fund a limited number.

A special scheme for the children of staff was therefore suggested as a long-term strategy to attract, motivate and retain senior staff and to reward

long-serving staff. As a result, university policy, as approved by Council in 1993, provided for admission of the biological children of staff under the specified categories. The children would be given special consideration for admission to a course of study in the university provided that the points obtained were not more than 2.5 points below the cut-off for that course of study. Other conditions related to the parents' tenure in the university and the intake capacity of the various courses of study. The key point, however, was that initially the children of staff who qualified for admission according to the said criteria automatically became government-sponsored. In the first year of its operation a total of forty-six students were admitted under the scheme.

There was some opposition to this scheme, especially in government circles, on the grounds that this would create a special class of students. Hence the university was required to take great care in setting the parameters within which this scheme would operate. Yet in 1996 the points for the scheme were increased to 4, and soon there were in fact two schemes rather than one. The first was admission of eligible biological children under government sponsorship with 4.0 points or less below the cut-off point for a particular course of study. The second was a fee rebate for those admitted on private sponsorship (50 per cent day and 30 per cent evening). A total of 222 children benefited by accessing university education on government sponsorship from 1992–2004, while 420 benefited from a fee rebate in the period between 1997 and 2004.

In 2005, however, the Admissions Board noted that the two-pronged scheme was not only inconsistent but also failed to achieve the objective of increasing access for the children of staff. The board observed that the number of children admitted under government sponsorship was very low compared to the number of applicants. It was further noted that the government policy on admission under government sponsorship with a science and district quota did not cater for children of staff. A new policy passed by Senate (and still to be approved by Council) was therefore proposed to take the scheme out of the government equation of sponsorship. The new scheme, to be named Waiver of Rebate, was to take effect in the 2005–2006 academic year. With a concession raised to 5.0 points below the cut-off, the children would access programmes of their choice with a 100 per cent tuition rebate. One way to understand the fact that members of staff could accept to the lowering of admission standards was that this was almost the only avenue possible in the context of a university facing an access crisis. The staff response was in line with the “sharing of the spoils” thrust that resulted from stiff competition for static resources.

### ***Admission of People With Disabilities (PWDs)***

The AA for People with disabilities was put at 4.0 points below the cut-off points of courses applied for. The allocation of 4.0 points to students with disabilities, like the 1.5 scheme, was a result of the general representation trend at the national level. People with disabilities have representation in the national parliament and in local governments. In addition PWDs have lobbied to gain entry the public decision-making arenas, including educational institutions. For instance, as the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001) was being amended in 2003, PWDs managed to get slots on councils of public universities. It is in this context that Makerere University established the scheme in 1992, although it only picked up momentum in the 1995–1996 academic year.

Under the scheme the priority order when considering applications from PWDs was in the following order: blind, deaf, low vision, hard of hearing, candidates with mobility appliance, candidates with physical disabilities. Later these categories were expanded to include albinos and people with chronic medical problems such as sickle cell anaemia and asthma. No quota or capacity limitations were set. Candidates applied for courses they felt they could manage as long as they qualified for the particular course (with not more than 4.0 points below the cut-off point). As an affirmative action programme this scheme was important in opening up access for these categories of students. However one would have expected that admission of PWDs would over time breed other spill-over benefits for students, such as ensuring more user-friendly physical facilities. Although at one time some faculties (such as Social Sciences) had a small fund, apparently drawn from locally generated funds, to assist such students, the overall university environment did not change to increase access for PWDs once admitted. Access to many lecture halls and other facilities remained the same, predicated on the ‘able’. There was also a case of a lame student who had to drop out of medicine at the third year because the instructors demanded so. According to one deputy registrar the student progressed well until she reached the stage for clinicals, and the lectures were of the view that clinicals and crutches could not go together. This example demonstrates a larger limitation of interventions from above. In this case AA for the disabled ensured entry but did little to ensure equitable and quality access within the system.

### ***Admission of Talented Athletes***

In 1993 the University Council approved yet another special scheme to consider the admission of talented athletes in a bid to recognise and encourage young talent and contribute to national sports development. The constituency

for this scheme was mainly the Ministry of Education and Sports, whose express aim was to encourage sports in the country. Candidates were supposed to have excelled (first to third position) at national level in a sporting field. Initially the bonus was 2.5 points below the cut-off point for a specific programme of study. Up to ten places were to be reserved for athletes on government sponsorship, and the candidates were to be encouraged to continue participating in their sports. In 1995 the Ministry issued a procedure to be followed with effect from 1996. The initial selection was to be done through the National Council of Sports and its associations, who would forward the list of nominations to Makerere through the Ministry of Education. The concession was also effectively raised to 4.0 points.

However, a review of the scheme in 2005 indicated that rather than creating an incentive for promotion of sports it was acting instead as a reward system, as an end in itself to the beneficiaries. Since no stated requirements to keep the scholarship existed, most students tended to abandon their sports once admitted. In some other cases students admitted on the basis of sports talent lacked the bare basics of the sport on the basis of which they were admitted. All this pointed to loopholes not only in the initial nomination from the Ministry and the National Council of sports but also in relation to the entire rationale and framing of the question of access.

### ***The Science Shift and the District Quota***

In March 2005 the Ministry of Education announced that government had decided to recast university sponsorship in favour of programmes critical to national development. The idea was that emphasis on science and technology was necessary if Uganda was to develop. Consequently 3,000 university places amounting to 75 per cent of the total government sponsorship in public universities were allocated to science-based programmes. Apparently this 'science shift' was a mutation of Makerere's own proposals to government. In 2004, Makerere, in a bid to justify a tuition fees increment, proposed that government should introduce a student loan scheme to improve access to university education, while at the same time providing bursaries and other subsidies in sciences and other critical areas for human resource development (Ebila 2005). The government chose to act on the second part of the proposal only, and not by increasing its commitment but rather by reallocating the more or less traditional 4,000 places for the public universities.

In the same vein district quotas were introduced to address regional imbalances in higher education, although cynics read a populist agenda into the policy, noting that it was announced just months away from the 2006 general elections. According to the policy the remaining 25 per cent of university placed

(1000 slots) left over from science were to be filled through district quotas, as well as the other schemes of sports and disability. At the first intake in 2005 each district was allocated sixteen slots. Makerere University therefore acted on a kind of directive indicating the slots per division and per programme in the case of merit-based science admissions. However implementation of the district quota was apparently intricate. The selection went through stages. The first priority was given to people who had schooled in their home district. Hence, in consideration of the sixteen slots, the highest competitors would be those who originated and had done their schooling in the particular district. The minimum qualification was put at the bare minimum of two principal passes for university education. While districts such as Kampala, Bushenyi, Arua and Gulu easily filled the quota, some districts, including Nakapiripirit, Kaberamaido, Kotido, Adjumani, Katakwi, Moyo and Bundibugyo, could not do so. At the first stage, for example Bundibugyo filled only five places, 30 percent of its quota. The second stage for those districts that could not fill the quota was to 'fish' for candidates, in other words, take those who originated from the districts but had studied in schools in other districts. In this case people who originated from such districts but had studied in 'Grade A' schools had an edge over those who went to marginal schools. And as only flat/absolute points were considered for district quotas, the quotas were 'flooded' by humanities, according to one deputy registrar in charge of admissions.

### **The Efficacy of Makerere's Response to Diversity**

In various ways the different schemes have expanded access and diversified the student population in higher education in Uganda. Affirmative action for females and people with disabilities in particular have brought about dramatic changes in quantitative composition. A female student is no longer a rare minority in the university, and there is more likelihood of meeting a disabled student than, for example, ten years ago. However there are fundamental fractures in the way the access issue has been framed. As already observed, the dominant responses to diversity have not required any substantial reordering. As opposed to the needy students work scheme, for example, which required well thought-out policies and commitment of resources, affirmative action and quotas merely redivide and subdivide the already meagre government sponsorship. The 'struggle for the spoils' approach to government sponsorship partly explains Uganda's bloated education system, in which schools, teachers, parents and students alike are under immense pressure. This accounts for the not uncommon phenomenon of 'pumping' in schools, where students are placed under immense pressure to cram and pass exams with pure A grades.

Worldwide, the use of affirmative action and quotas as ways to address social imbalances have received their share of criticism. While, for example, affirmative action remains an instrument for making inequality within institutions visible, it may not necessarily address the heterogeneity of the social group in question and may in some cases deepen inequality. This is the question that has dominated debate in South Africa on the issue of addressing racial imbalance. On the issue of affirmative action for black South Africans, Shubane, for instance, argues that the ‘group approach might benefit individuals who might least need affirmative action benefits ... [as] a blanket approach mostly benefits those best equipped to claim the benefit (1995: 14).

Looking at the scheme for female undergraduates as the most visible of all the other schemes in the past, it can be seen that one basic weakness was a simplistic view of gender relations, with access conceptualised on the basis of the individual. Stemming from the liberalist Women in Development (WID) approach, affirmative action tends to generate “blanket” strategies (Eisenstein 1986). Yet it is understood that girls do not constitute a homogenous category. Some are from families with higher socio-economic status who usually have access to better-facilitated schools. Their parents are in a position to pay for tuition and meet all expenses for private sponsorship. Indeed some views are that the approach still favours the elite, since it tackles access at the very apex of the education system while glossing over the factors that bar the majority of girls from attaining secondary school in the first place.

The same can be said for the science shift and the district quota interventions. They are based on individualised strategies rather than tackling the structural weakness within the education system. The consequence is that the well-to-do always emerge as the key beneficiaries. If we take the example of the science shift, it is very clear that the ad hoc move by the government to fund only science-based courses directly benefits those from schools that offer them in the first place. For example, in the 2005–2006 intake, of all those admitted to the BSc programme in Medicine and Dental Surgery, ninety were from urban schools, principally from the central region, with the exception of only three schools from the west.<sup>13</sup> Districts such as Kotido, Yumbe and Pader did not have science candidates (Ahimbisibwe 2005).

How does the science policy speak to the broader national context? The individual-based science policy deepens inequality by rewarding those who have been privileged to attend good schools. In its ad hoc nature the policy indicates no plan to provide science laboratories and related materials for schools. Asked about the representation of females in science as compared to arts, the Dean of the Faculty of Science had this to say:

The problem is not so much here but rather the source of these students from secondary. You know generally secondary schools and HSC [Higher School Certificate] in particular, the number of students who opt to take science is small. It is hardly 20 percent ... and proportionately the number of girls could even be small. So our catchment area is very small for girls to come to university .... [Y]ou will find a large proportion of girls taking arts and a smaller fraction for sciences (Survey for Gender Equity in Higher Education in Selected Commonwealth Countries 2004).

In Uganda, science as a field has an extremely weak institutional structure right from the primary and secondary schools. Schools, especially the historically disadvantaged ones, as already noted, are not able to invest in science. As Kasozi (2003) observes, most of the 'mushrooming' secondary schools in the country do not focus on science and technology. Of course these schools in themselves are not the problem. Rather they are a manifestation of a highly fragmented and inequitable education system.

More importantly, the teaching of science is circumscribed by a punitive rather than an enabling orientation, hence the minuscule numbers attracted to the field. In the case of girls, gender oppression aggravates the other factors where school practices, familial ideologies and peer influence all construct science as too hard for them. Teachers already hold assumptions about girls in science and either discourage them or do not bother to encourage them.

On the urban bias the individual-based interventions, whether we talk about affirmative action or quotas, tend to benefit urban-based schools. Well-resourced urban primary schools lead to best secondary schools and ultimately to university eligibility and final selection. Through a review of the 1.5 points scheme it was established that Grade A schools contributed 71.3 per cent of the beneficiaries (GMD 2004). This goes for the science-based admissions as well as for the district quotas. Since affirmative action is applied across the board, the privileged have an added advantage of increasing their points to gain entry to the programmes of their choice more than those from poorer schools and poorer families, who often have lower, though still eligible, marks. Basically what affirmative action does is that it stands at the very end of the tunnel only to tap those whose privileged position in society enables them to come out. It largely leaves the structure of the tunnel intact.

With particular reference to affirmative action for female students, an additional question of dented legitimacy exists. There is a peculiar emergence of a discourse on the female students as sex objects less interested in academics and not be taken seriously. Ridicule of female students depicting them as inferior and incapable has been rife and is on the increase. The '1.5 girls', as they



are popularly called, are supposed to be the underdogs of the academy, 'Bakateyamba' in Luganda. There are claims that the 1.5 scheme has made girls lose confidence and motivation, that it has lowered standards, that it is unfair to boys, that it confirms the academic inferiority of girls. Press reports for example often express open hostility. In 1995 it was reported that failures at Makerere had shot up to 900, and one opinion had it that this was a 'Curse of Lazy Makerere Girls':

It is not difficult to see one source of the problem. When the NRM introduced the 1.5 bonus points for females only, girls who were not academically fit for the hill end up on campus. They then turn the campus into a beauty salon ... with their sugar daddies picking them in limousines. They neglect studies. When exams come the backdoor females ... cry foul after failing. It is now up to those who approved the 1.5 boost to lazy girls, otherwise the Hill of the Intellectuals is going to the dogs (*The Monitor*, 14 August 1995).

Such hostility towards the 1.5 scheme ultimately has to do with the limited opportunities for government sponsorship. The real contest is not about the 1.5, rather it is about the changing context of access, where government sponsorship is at the heart of it all. Agaba, for example, a third-year male student (Social Sciences) observed that some male students think that the 1.5 points for females denies boys the right to be admitted to courses of their choice. In analysing the African experience with higher education, Ajayi and Johnson (1996) note that, though affirmative action is needed to compensate for historical imbalances, great caution should be taken so that 'discrimination against past oppressors does not become institutionalised' (1996: 162). Turning this argument round, it could be argued that past oppressors have devised a mechanism of 'new subordinations' in the face of declining privilege.

### **Unpacking Numbers and Access Outcomes**

The backdrop of the above responses to diversity remains, as it were, the liberalist higher-education reforms. As Makerere evidently increased its revenue through fee-paying students, the government even more conveniently defaulted on payment of its sponsored students (Musisi and Muwanga 2003). Together with the move to increase the marketability of university courses, the private sponsorship programme brought the student population to the 40,000 mark, as already indicated. Different lenses to this change project different positions. For some the move shows Makerere on the road from elite/ivory tower to mass education. For others the marketisation has only increased false access. We will now explore these issues, basically dealing with access outcomes and what they mean for the university community (students and staff) and for society at

large, and offer a critical appraisal of the Makerere reform process in view of the nature and outcome of student access.

On Makerere's reform process, Musisi and Muwanga argue as follows: 'Since 1992 the sorry state of affairs at Makerere has been reversed. In less than ten years, Makerere University's student population has expanded almost fourfold with the vast majority now paying fees' (2003: 1).

This view captures the dominant discourse on Makerere reforms. In terms of access the Makerere model, otherwise referred to as a reversal, emits the quantitative message of growing numbers, and any gaps that would otherwise destabilise the 'model thinking' are referred to as challenges. The language of challenges denotes a linear process with no contradictions. Our view is that the language of models and challenges tends to mask the deep-cutting fractures in the university function, masking too the contradictions and deepening inequalities engendered by the reforms.

We use both general and specific examples from the Faculty of Social Sciences<sup>14</sup> to examine the successes as well as the ruptures in the Makerere model. The Faculty of Social Sciences is one of the university units with the largest expansion in student population in the last ten years. It comes fourth after the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education and the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. The student explosion in the Faculty of Social Sciences began in 1995, when intake jumped from the previous 483 to 793 students, almost doubling again by 2000–2001, when the intake had increased to 1452. The Faculty of Social Sciences is also one of those units where an increase of fee-paying students as income generation is real. The sudden increase in numbers has not been matched with expansion of other requirements – teaching, office and accommodation space, library collections, laboratory and other related scholastic materials. A lecture room originally meant for 80 students now has to accommodate over four hundred. In the specific case of first year, when the students offer three subject combinations, one is lucky to get a place to stand inside the lecture room, hence the language of attending lectures by 'rumours'. Teaching and administrative staffing levels have remained relatively static. Paradoxically the university in the very same 1990s decided to ban recruitment on the basis that the wage bill had expanded beyond what the resource envelope could afford.

At the very general level the opening up and the introduction of private sponsorship programmes expanded access. The average intake figures show that 11,000 students would otherwise have been left out of university education. In a consideration of the university sector in East Africa, Nyaigottu-Chacha rightly observes that privately sponsored student programmes have opened up opportunities for tens of thousands of East Africans who meet university

admission requirements but would not otherwise secure admission due to the restricted intakes determined by limited government funding (2004: 103). Evening classes make it possible for employed people to pursue university education while continuing with their regular responsibilities (Nyaigotti-Chacha 2004). Furthermore, the diversification of courses offered at Makerere, though distorted by the overriding aim of income generation, have brought some critical and interesting subjects of study into focus. Here the importance of external programmes and the expansion of adult education cannot be over-emphasised.

However, the expanded access, and the changes accompanying it, carries one fundamental problem. This is the marketisation of education and the use of fee-paying students as a source of income. Expansion by increasing the numbers of fee-paying students proceeded without enough critical consideration of the consequences. Rapid and unplanned is how Obong (2004) characterises the expansion of Makerere University in the 1990s. The student and what he or she needs and gets out of expanded access has been largely marginalised.

As the effect of big numbers began to manifest itself, the first target became the student, and particularly female students. Alongside common comments such as 'students are not serious these days' are views and beliefs that females are performing poorly because they are just plain lazy, vain and even ready to stoop so low to cheat in exams. However, most of such beliefs are rarely founded on concrete grounds or are best based on over generalisations. For instance, female students from 'posh' (urban) families are perceived to be less serious to the ones from rural areas who tended to aim high in academics to obtain good degrees and thereby uplift the standard of their families.

Nevertheless, the fact that shortcomings of male students have not led to a construction of a typical male student as negative raises questions. Does this say something about the tendency to stereotype women, where an exception is turned into the norm? Is this something about the changing class composition of female students over time? Or is this a manifestation of the changing face of the university as a whole, where the (female) student is the most visible component of a fractured institution?

At another level evening students, more than those on day programmes, tended to carry the label of being 'unserious'. Lecturers often commented that day students performed better than evening students, and that evening students were not serious, dominated retakes, often drop out or abscond, etc. Evening always came second to day, as seen in the university practice of 'Day and Evening' in the consideration of programming and of results. As expected, private students thence constituted a secondary class, critical victims of the reform process. Worst of all however was the additional secondary status of evening. The chances of government-

sponsored students graduating on time (76 per cent) were more than five times higher than the chances for private students (15 per cent).

The question of what lies beneath the accusations about student seriousness requires, therefore, a much more critical lens. Indeed what is the level of seriousness of the university as a whole? In a typical ad hoc manner that left the 'model' fairly undisturbed and unquestioned, the university administration in 1998 made a decision to appoint a senate committee to investigate the causes of student failure that had apparently reached unprecedented levels in undergraduate humanities courses (Obong 2004). A summary of the report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Poor Performance presented in December the same year makes the following points:

- Many students registered in core courses with big class sizes not attending lectures, or simply standing in lecture halls due to lack of sitting space and audibility.
- Faculty dictating or giving ready-made notes to students, or conducting public lectures instead of the normal lectures.
- Faculty giving only one class assignment, which could be multiple-choice questions, for the whole semester.
- Faculty returning course assignment scripts at the end of the semester when students have already completed semester examinations.
- Students plagiarizing each others' class assignments and the lecturer assessing without detecting this.
- Faculty in the humanities courses examining students with multiple-choice examinations, even where these might not be appropriate.
- Departments abandoning class tutorials and seminars.
- Classes being conducted as early as 7 a.m. on Saturdays and at times on Sundays.
- As many as 60 percent of the students in some big classes failing semester examinations and as many as two-thirds of postgraduate students failing to complete their courses within the scheduled time period.

**Source:** Obong (2004: 118)

Clearly the above issues were not purely about student performance. They raise broader questions about the entire university function, encompassing the learning environment as well as the output of the institution. Academic staff in the various units have not been blind to the question of numbers. With regard to the Faculty of Social Sciences in particular, lecturers have attempted to raise the problems of teaching loads, marking and the whole issue of the student-staff ratio. The response from administrators has been that lecturers are

still stuck in the past. The argument is that teaching does not have to involve physical delivery of a lecture all the time. ICT is paraded as the remedy. In meetings of senate it is not uncommon for people in social sciences to be reminded that the essay form of assessment is 'conservative'. Structured and multiple-choice questions are supposed to be a remedy for the heavy loads. The voices of those who bear the burden of large loads is a 'murmur' in the face of the powerful force of those who gain from the income generated.

At the 47th Graduation Ceremony on 1 April 2005, the university chancellor talked about numbers. In effect re-echoing the murmurs of teaching staff, Prof. Apolo Nsibambi (himself a former lecturer at the university) expressed concern at the overwhelming student numbers and the negative impact on the quality of teaching.<sup>15</sup> On 10 July 2005, the *Sunday Vision* newspaper carried a story about 'Rot in Makerere'. Apparently an undercover reporter went to the university to investigate the public outcry about cheating exams and ended up sitting for two exams. The spirit of the story was that the numbers had brought about laxity:

One need only play their cards well...I could have been hired by a rich part-time student to sit the exams. Just as one can walk through the main gate and exit through the southern gate unchecked, it is possible to illegally walk into the examination room undetected (*Sunday Vision* 2005)

The story raised eyebrows but was not surprising. The chancellor immediately ordered a probe, asking the university to investigate the exam scam reports. The vice-chancellor responded two days later with an unsurprising denial. He had instituted an internal investigation which established that the story was false. But whatever the truth of this particular story, Makerere will inevitably have to address the issue of standards in its reform path. The rumours and scandals about standards result directly from the unplanned and unfocused innovations.

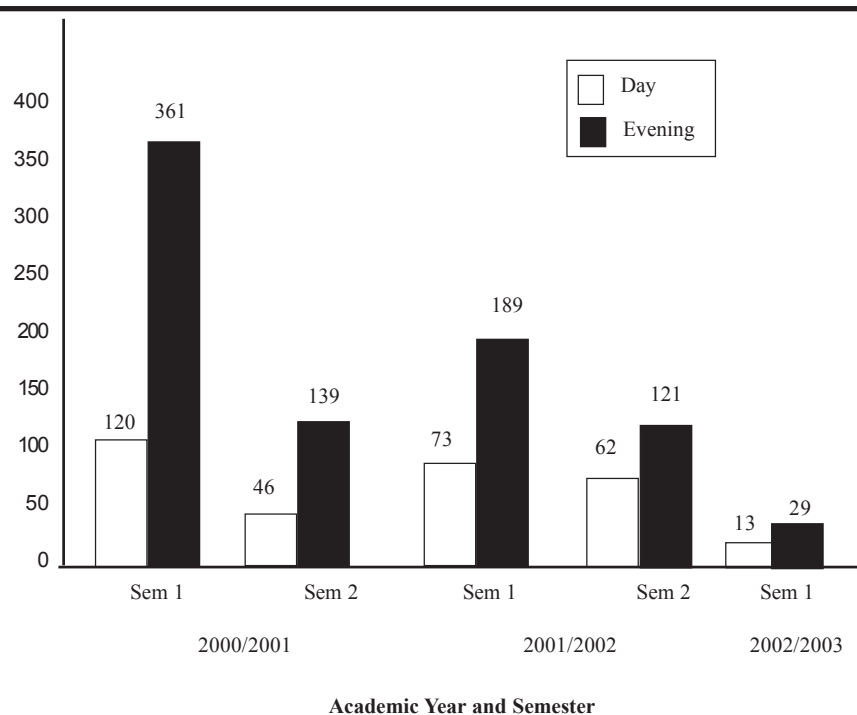
The clear message is that both students and lecturers have devised survival mechanisms in a situation that in effect oppresses both of them. Lecturers are compelled to teach both day and evening to make ends meet in what Altbach sees as a kind of 'on-campus moonlighting' (2005: 2). They therefore prepare notes which they read in class or place at photocopiers for collection (See examples in appendix.) A walk through the Faculty of Social Sciences would leave one in no doubt that photocopying is a booming business. Students need not attend lectures; they can simply photocopy notes. Apart from attempts to cheat or employ 'mercenaries', students have another strategy of manipulating the fluid system. They cried – both males and females – in explaining why they

missed tests or failed them. Reasons range from sickness (where others have to go back to the village for treatment) to lack of money.

Another murmur that could not find space for legitimate expression was about private students subsidising the government-sponsored ones. A concern was that Makerere had over time evolved into a parasitic university. Although the fees paid by private students were relatively less than the unit cost, the private sponsorship programme evidently provided a stopgap for what would otherwise be a miserably cash-strapped university. It provided for payment of allowances (known as 'top up') for all staff, from messengers to secretaries to vice-chancellor. What does the student receive in return?

A consideration of dropouts, dead years and retakes shows bigger numbers in the privately sponsored cohort. In particular the evening students were more likely to have retakes than those in the day programme. The semester system and the evening programme have seen evening students operating a permanent crash programme. The evening programme begins at 5 p.m. when the rest of the university (including lavatories) is closing and continues up to 10 p.m.

**Figure 2:** Number of Retakes in the Faculty of Social Sciences for Selected Years



**Table 7: Student Retakes in the Faculty of Social Sciences over a Selected Period**

Sex	2000/2001						2001/2002						2002/2003					
	Study Programme			Study Programme			Study Programme			Study Programme			Study Programme			Study Programme		
	Day	%	Eve	Day	%	Eve	Day	%	Eve	Day	%	Eve	Day	%	Eve	Day	%	Eve
<i>Semester One</i>	24	2	73	7	7	46	20	2	4	4	46	3	0.3	9	0.9	3	0.3	9
<i>Female</i>	20	2	69	7	7	30	10	0.9	3	3	30	3	0.3	4	0.4	3	0.3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Semester Two</i>	14	2	28	3	3	24	21	2	2	2	24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Female</i>	4	0.5	28	3	3	28	10	1	3	3	28	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

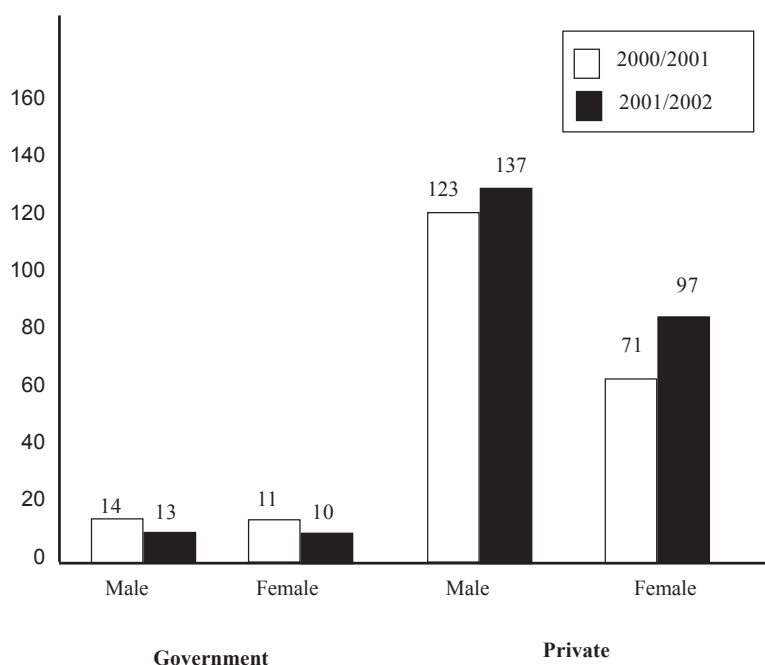
**Source:** Makerere University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Records.

Compensation for the limited time is Saturdays where from 8 a.m. students are hopping from one lecture to another until the 6 p.m. The lecturer who comes for the 6 p.m. lecture hour talks to a virtually 'lifeless' group of people.<sup>16</sup>

The statistics in Figure 2 and Table 7 trace a specific cohort of students beginning their first year in 2000–2001 and completing in 2002–2003 in the Faculty of Social Sciences. What is demonstrated is that retakes were very high in the first semester of the first year. The explanation was that students are often excited to be at the campus and, by the time they settle in, the semester is coming to an end. But this also talks specifically to the manner in which the university is unprepared to receive the large numbers and enable them to settle in to begin the semester on time and be ready for a final exam after seventeen weeks. The other and perhaps more significant aspect is the consistently higher numbers of retakes in the evening than in the day programme.

The drop-out rates closely follow the pattern of retakes. Figures available in the Faculty of Social Sciences show that in the 2000–2001 academic year a total of 25 government-sponsored students (14 males and 11 females) dropped out, while the total for private students was 194 (123 males and 71 females). In

**Figure 3:** Dropouts in the Faculty of Social Sciences by Sponsorship





2001–2002, 21 (11 males and 10 females) dropouts were government-sponsored and 246 (137 males, 97 females) were private students (see Figure 3). The problem of dropouts may not be significant in terms of percentages, but it indicates a specific trend stemming directly from the nature of the reforms that Makerere University has undergone.

Dropouts in higher education should, in an ideal world, be at the very minimum, resulting mainly from such incidents as death and sickness. But for privately sponsored dropping out seems to be fast becoming the norm. The university administration presumed the students to have “absconded”. There was also an indication of a higher dropout rate among male students. Apart from the fact that males are the majority, there is also an increasing phenomenon that males are often assumed to have more capacity to make money. In such cases parents and guardians put more emphasis on females. The overall picture is the relative degree of false access on the part of students. Students and parents may manage to pay the first semester or the first year and then find that they cannot continue. The student drops out, and the university proceeds with business as usual. The lost income on the part of the parents and students is never a consideration.

### **Conclusion**

By way of closing reflections on the issue of access at Makerere University, we make a number of observations. We have argued that the reform process and the opening up accompanying it have greatly expanded access. However this access may be concealing far-reaching contradictions. As staff and students struggle to keep pace with the reform model even outrageous things have become normalised. It leaves one with no doubt that both staff and students are cheated by the system.

The privatisation process within a public university calls for a critical rethinking. Evidently the state can no longer shoulder the financing the entire university sector. In any case the open access within public universities and the establishment of various private universities mean that the sector has expanded tremendously. However the issue is that student fees cannot finance the university. Alternative sources of funding are inevitable. For a public university such as Makerere the government must, as a matter of necessity, realign its priorities to have a much higher stake in higher education if the sector is to serve its purpose.

Government’s stake in education should therefore not stop at dividing and re-dividing the meagre slots for sponsorship. As already argued, affirmative action and quotas, as a response to diversity, have only meant a reallocation of the fixed slots that government already funds. The outcome has been a repro-

duction of elite privilege in several categories, whether we talk of women's affirmative action or quotas such as for science and districts. Beyond these short-term and top-down interventions there is need for structural transformation in the education system that addresses disadvantage at the root as opposed to the apex. This means that, for example, regional and gender disparities would be addressed at all levels of education. With reference to the science shift in 2005 and how it inevitably knocked out areas with no science subjects, the executive director of the National Council for Higher Education recommended that government needed to empower schools in rural areas. One would need to 'unpack' that empowerment and what it entails in real terms to achieve equity in higher education.

Government sponsorship for students is a key access issue that needs to be revisited in view of the changes that have taken place. General debates have indicated that it is no longer justifiable to select a few students for the comfortable life inside the campus while the majority pine away as private students. Moreover those who actually get to that sponsorship are already the privileged, largely urban and from predominantly good schools. These are complex questions which call for equally far-reaching, long-term solutions. Quotas can only serve as temporary measures.

The issue of student loans has been mooted as a way of increasing access to higher education in an equitable manner. In addition student loans are said to increase the commitment of students to their studies while at the same time providing a fair means of expanding the university sector without being a parasite on parents and students (particularly the poor). In Kenya, where the policy of giving loans to students has a much longer history, there was initially the problem of mechanisms for recovery once the students graduated. A Higher Education Loans Board was established in 1995, charged with the disbursement of loans, scholarships and bursaries to needy Kenyan students as well as the recovery of the loans. It is important to examine whether or not such an option is possible in the Ugandan context.

### Notes

1. This fact has become common place in the media. It forms one of the constant pleas by the Vice-Chancellors at graduation ceremonies. Sometimes it is a cause of strikes by students, especially when the meagre funds paid in lieu of residence and special faculty allowances are delayed.
2. These include Islamic University in Uganda (1988), East African Christina University, Ndejje (1992), Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi (1993), Nkumba University (1999), Namasagali University (1999), Kampala University (2000), Bugema University (1994), Uganda Christian University, Mukono (1999),

Kigezi International University (2000), Aga Khan University (2001), and Kabale University (2005). Several other universities are in operation, though not licensed yet. For others such as Namasagali, the National Council for Higher Education has withdrawn the licence on account of failure to meet required standards.

3. In addition, many of the newer universities still lack qualified staff and frequently rely on Makerere staff for their teaching, on a part-time basis.
4. Many of the rural-based secondary schools were established in the spirit of 'taking services to the people' but such schools, at least in each sub-county then, were not well resourced. Known as 'Tata' Lorry or Third World schools, many have remained at that level. While it is clear that such schools have made some difference in widening educational access, such access has largely been of secondary status. Many lack science laboratories and good libraries. Although the government could attempt to redress the situation of these schools by providing science laboratories and libraries, the issue of rural schools goes beyond mere laboratories and libraries. There are more complex factors such as the living conditions. Positive change will probably be felt in the distant future.
5. This phenomenon could be explained in terms of its location, bordering with Kenya as well as the colonial heritage where a number of educational institutions were established there, perhaps due to the favourable terrain. Despite this fact however, the Eastern region over time tumbled on the HE landscape due to insurgency and related factors.
6. Due to space limitations, the whole question of gender mainstreaming in Makerere University, as a much broader access issue beyond the consideration of student needs and experience, is not included here. The gender perspective and the shape it has taken within Makerere University during the same period as the liberalisation reforms is a critical issue for consideration. Further, the significance of the Women and Gender Studies department as an academic unit together with the Gender Mainstreaming Programme as part of the strategic direction of the university are equally critical for analysis.
7. This leaves out two halls of residence. One is Complex which was mixed at the time but with much fewer females than males. The other is Africa Hall for females where data could not be obtained. A former student resident in Africa Hall indicated that the hall is very small compared to all the other halls of residence.
8. According to a former student beneficiary, the chairperson of MUNSA claimed to have visited the State House to see the President and returned on the same day with a donation of 10 million Shillings 'extracted' from the President.
9. In 2004, the Students' Guild Government officially submitted requests for employment of needy students to the various university units (General Circular letters by the Employment Minister, Students Guild dated 10 January 2004). It would appear that district administration would also embrace the idea, since

- some of the districts often sponsor students directly (e.g. Lira, Arua, Kibaale and Gulu sponsor a few students).
10. Thirteen scholarships were withdrawn in November 2004 as a result of the home validation exercise. The Senate Committee on Gender Mainstreaming further recommended cancellation of 23 more scholarships.
  11. Such commissions include De la Warr Commission (1937), De Bunsen Commission (1958), Castle Commission (1963), and Kajubi Commission (1989).
  12. A practice also emerged where in mixed schools (primary and secondary), if the head teacher is male the deputy must be female and vice versa. There is a central government scholarship for secondary school education awarded to one girl and one boy per sub-country annually. It is also government policy to build or re-enforce science laboratories and libraries for rural based girls' and/or mixed secondary schools.
  13. The district of origin column however shows some variations with a number of marginal districts such as Kanungu, Katakwi, Pader, Kiboga appearing occasionally which meant those students had studied in schools outside of their districts of origin.
  14. It was not possible to obtain concrete data (for example on performance) from all the units of the university. The available information from the FSS is used to illustrate the larger debate.
  15. The university subsequently announced that the intake of private students for the academic year 2005/06 would be less by about 2000.
  16. Personal experience teaching Gender and Development, a double lecture from 6 to 8 p.m., on Saturdays.

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Appendix 1: Undated Notice in the Faculty of Social Sciences

Soc 2204  
EVENING  
Pick today's lecture notes from the photocopier  
[Lecturer]

Appendix 2: Notice Board at the Department of Women and Gender Studies

DISSERTATIONS, THESIS, RESEARCH

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Having a problem with data analysis and report writing?

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Appendix 3: SOC 1203 final examination question paper, June 2005

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS 2005

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SEMESTER II, 2005/2005

SOC. 1203: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVES, THEORIES AND METHODS

Date: Saturday 25th June 2005 Time: 9.00 a.m. – 12.00 Noon

Instructions:

1. Section A is compulsory and takes 50 Marks
2. Answer any TWO questions in Section B. Each Question takes 25 Marks.
3. Do not write anything on this question paper. The question paper **MUST** be handed in with the Answer sheet(s)

SECTION A (Compulsory)

1. Sociology is .....
  - a. The scientific study of human groups
  - b. The study of behaviour unique to particular situations
  - c. A form of philosophy
  - d. A science developed during the middle ages
2. Which of the following is an example of social interaction?
  - a. Playing solitaire computer game
  - b. Arguing with a friend
  - c. Reading a book
  - d. None of the above