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Higher Education, Society, and Government: Changing Dynamics

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Abstract

Reform strategies for Africa's universities are adjusting to three macro-trends: market pressures, demographic forces, and changing donor perspectives. Market-like definitions of accountability with their related performance indicators—focused less on what is known than on how fast and effectively knowledge is transformed into technologies, skills, and economic growth—are generating unprecedented institutional diversification in African higher education. This occurs as demographic forces threaten to deplete Africa of its most talented students who, if given the chance, will migrate for training and work. In the growing international competition for students, the balance of trade will not favor Africa. Those donors who remain committed to Africa are searching for models in which Africa's universities reposition themselves as indispensable bridges between the national economy and the international knowledge economy. Ensuring that universities—despite market and demographic pressures—continue to promote the "public good" in higher education and advanced research should be the strategy of choice.

Résumé

Les stratégies de réforme destinées aux universités africaines s'adaptent à trois tendances macro-économiques : les pressions du marché, les forces démographiques et les perspectives changeantes des bailleurs de fonds. Les définitions de la responsabilité liées à la notion de marché, et leurs indicateurs de performances (qui portent moins sur ce qui est connu que sur la manière rapide et efficace dont la connaissance est transformée en technologie, savoir-faire, et en croissance économique) provoquent actuellement une diversification institutionnelle sans précédent dans le milieu de l'enseignement supérieur.

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Ceci est en train de se produire à un moment où les courants démographiques menacent de vider l'Afrique de ses étudiants les plus talentueux, qui, s'ils en ont l'occasion, risquent de migrer pour des besoins de formation et de travail. Dans le cadre de la compétition internationale grandissante, la balance commerciale ne favorisera pas l'Afrique. Ces bailleurs de fonds qui restent engagés envers le continent sont à la recherche de modèles au sein desquels les universités africaines peuvent se repositionner, en tant que liens indispensables entre l'économie nationale et l'économie internationale de la connaissance. La meilleure stratégie consisterait à faire de sorte que les universités (malgré les pressions démographiques et celles du marché) continuent de promouvoir le « bien public » dans le domaine de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche approfondie.

The Threshold Question

Much has happened in the past 500 years: enormous population growth, from about one-half billion to 6 billion; phases of vast population movement, both rural to urban and old world to new; the rise of the nation-state system, now 200 or so independent (or striving to be independent) sovereign states; and the pervasiveness of secular, modern ideologies and deductive science with its endless stream of technologies that, many believe, is creating a new world economy.

Yet during this half-millennium, the basic model of higher education has changed hardly at all: direct, face-to-face exchange between the learned and the learners, heavy reliance on written texts that summarize previously established knowledge, and physical sites to which faculty and students come to reside. And, at least since Wilhelm von Humboldt, three core principles have been generally accepted: unity of research and teaching, protection of academic freedom including both the right of free inquiry by scholars and the right of students to choose their course of study, and the centrality of arts and sciences or liberal education.

This stability is a remarkable fact. There have been enormous changes in political, economic, and social life, in worldviews, and in the size and distribution of the human population; yet the institution that produces and disseminates knowledge looks much as it did centuries ago.

The threshold question, then, is whether higher education in general, and universities more particularly, will continue to be as resistant to change as in the past. Many commentators presume not: They argue that the "knowledge revolution" is going to cut more deeply than prior transformations. The argument is plausible because, after all, higher education is about knowledge. If we are entering a new phase of human history because knowledge itself is being

differently produced, disseminated, and used, it logically follows that the institution responsible for knowledge can hardly stand outside. Or so goes the new conventional wisdom. Higher education will change dramatically or be bypassed. See, for example, the carefully constructed argument that universities have to shift from the traditional model of knowledge production to a new model of knowledge configuration (Gibbons 1998). Or note that the widely circulated 14-page summary of the World Development Report, *Knowledge for Development,* does not mention universities until page 10 and then only in a passing reference to two virtual universities (World Bank 1999). Another World Bank document has as its opening sentences: "Imagine a university without buildings or classrooms or even a library. Imagine a university ten thousand miles away from its students." These sentences, and there are many more in this vein, presume that the old model is giving way "under the impact of globalization, knowledge-based economic growth, as well as the information and communication revolution" (Salmi 2002).

From that perspective, another report, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (Task Force 2000), is hopelessly naive in its many echoes of the Humboldtian vision. This report urges adaptation but not transformation. It particularly stresses that the responsibility of universities to continue a public-good tradition offers good reason for the change-resistant nature of universities that should not be casually or swiftly set aside.

The threshold question is best approached by distinguishing universities from the much larger and rapidly expanding sphere of tertiary education, as most of our familiar assumptions about the change-resistant nature of universities are drawn from historical periods when the term "universities" was interchangeable with the term "higher education." The term "tertiary education" points to a much more inclusive enterprise, one that includes universities but which extends to the full array of postsecondary training and educational institutions. The initial point, of course, is that universities have a steadily shrinking share of the educational market. This is because many institutions that make up the tertiary system are, in fact, a product of the knowledge economy and adapt quickly to its demands, e.g., corporate universities, distance learning, for-profit providers, and profession-specific institutions.

A useful working hypothesis is that universities, though not the tertiary system more generally, will remain change resistant. Universities are and will continue to adapt, as they have in the past, but not in a manner that discards proven practices that stretch back across the centuries. To anticipate the argument, there are public goods to be secured, such as nonproprietary research, training programs (e.g., for public school teachers) that serve the public interest, and offering educational opportunity for those who cannot pay market rates.

The tertiary educational system as a whole underproduces these public goods. Universities are the segment of the larger educational system that continues to produce public goods; this position gives universities their staying power.

Africa's Threshold Questions

What is true generally is seldom true for Africa, which takes us to Africa-specific questions. The most pressing, of course is: Can Africa catch up? The litany of statistics is depressingly familiar. Pick any economic or educational datum and learn that Africa is behind—and often way behind—the advanced economies. The United States has just under 5% of the world's population but more than a quarter of its Internet connections. Sub-Saharan Africa has twice the proportion of the world's population, but only 0.1% of the Internet connections. Tertiary enrollment in the world's high-income countries is approximately 60%; in sub-Saharan Africa, it is one twentieth that level, and so forth.

African countries have struggled to catch up by adopting two difficult-to-manage (and finance) features of education: massification of the universities and institutional diversification in the tertiary system more generally. Despite, or perhaps because of, these changes, Africa's advanced education system remains weak when compared to other world regions and small in relation to population needs.

This pattern leads some commentators to suggest that Africa might be less resistant to the demands of the new knowledge economy and more open, if only from a position of weakness, to institutional designs compatible with the tasks of the 21st century. This is the hope that a leap-frog strategy is available. This counterintuitive argument is that Africa can catch up because the distance between its educational achievement and infrastructure and that of most of the rest of the world is truly substantial.

The remainder of this essay considers three broad macro-trends—market pressures, demographic constraints, and donor perspectives—that influence whether and in what manner Africa's universities can be competitive when measured against world standards.

Market Pressures

We start with the simple but familiar schematic that distinguishes the three broad domains of human organization: the state or public sphere, the market or economic sphere, and the society or private sphere. The defining characteristic of the state is coercion. The state's power to regulate behavior and to extract resources is, of course, presumed to be linked to its responsibility for such public goods as security, infrastructure, and welfare. The defining characteris-

tic of the market is profit-seeking on the basis of which it produces private goods and benefits.

The third sphere, civil society, has recourse neither to coercion or profit-making. It organizes human behavior and mobilizes resources by serving the public good through individual and communal action that is voluntary (not coerced) and charitable (not profitable). Of course this raises the basic question always asked of the civil sector: If the state is already responsible for the public good, why bother with a voluntary, nonprofit sector trying to duplicate this task? The standard answer is that, the more the state provides public goods by taxing citizens and regulating markets, the more it coerces. And because freedom from state coercion is independently desirable, throughout history significant public goods have been produced and distributed outside the state and outside the market.

Historically, higher education was a public good largely provided in this manner. Monasteries in Catholicism, *waqfs* in Islam, and Brahmins in Buddhism come to mind. And not just the religious institutions. Private benefactors have established institutions of higher learning since antiquity. Plato's bequest of land endowed his famed Academy. Epicurus did likewise in endowing a school that survived for 600 years. The renowned library of Alexandria was funded and sustained by the Ptolemies. The first teaching hospital, Hotel Dieu in Burgundy, was established in 1443, the gift of a highly valued vineyard that produces vintage burgundies to this day. This tradition continues into the modern period: Yale, Brown, Stanford, and hundreds of other American universities were founded and funded by the private sector.

The private-public balance shifted in the modern era. The public university as a responsibility of the national or provincial government has come to the fore, almost exclusively in some countries (Germany) and alongside private universities in others (the United States and Great Britain). The new nations of Africa that emerged with the break-up of the European empires were quick to establish public, national universities.

Why recount this familiar story? To remind us that the boundaries separating state, market, and society are porous, contested, and ever changing. Much of public policy and law is about policing what occurs at the borders separating the three sectors and about determining what functions will be performed in which sphere.

Policy toward higher education in the 20th century facilitated a steady movement of universities from their earlier home in the civil (largely religious) sphere to an alternate location within the public, governmental sector. This movement did not challenge the fundamental premise that education is a public good. As we enter the 21st century, policy is opening higher education to the market,

that is, to commercialization and private profit-making criteria.[1] It is unclear whether the recent rapid growth of for-profit higher education services indicates a sea-change, or just an adjustment at the edges. If the former, the age-old responsibility of universities for the public good is under challenge.

What explains the increased role of the market in tertiary education? What might be the special consequences for African universities?

The standard justification for moving what were public responsibilities into the market is that the market can do it better. "It" refers to nearly any human activity or purpose imaginable, while "better" means higher economic returns for whatever effort is involved. The market is assumed to have a better bottom line, that is, a better mechanism for measuring performance and enforcing accountability. Profit and market share on the upside; poverty and bankruptcy on the downside. You know where you stand in the market. Success is swiftly rewarded: Customers flock to your products, investors push your stock values up, and workers seek employment in your firm. Failure is swiftly punished, measurably so. Obviously it does not always work this way, but the theory is robust and the performance indicators have a face validity hard to deny. Certainly market-like definitions of accountability and related performance indicators are rapidly spreading across the tertiary education system. Here is how one commentator puts it:

> While it is true that universities still retain their role as the "conscience of society," the critical function of universities has been displaced in favor of a more pragmatic role in terms of the provision of qualified manpower and the production of knowledge. The author continues: "The new paradigm is bringing in its train a new culture of accountability as is evidenced by the spread of managerialism and an ethos of value for money throughout higher education systems internationally." (Gibbons 1998: 1)

This viewpoint is pervasive in the literature on tertiary education. The relevance of education is to be measured primarily as the contribution made to national economic performance. The old idea of the "development university" has returned in a new and much more potent guise. For the individual graduate, what matters is lifetime earning power. This is the preferred return-on-investment indicator. Knowledge is a product that is monetized in the market place. "The assumption . . . is that the new economically-oriented paradigm is not going to be replaced and that the trend towards increasing accountability will not be reversed" (Gibbons 1998: 1). The resulting culture of accountability is less about what is known than about how quickly and effectively knowledge is converted into technologies, employee skills, and economic growth. Rather

than measure educational performance in terms of years completed, there is a shift to outcome-based standards, that is, marketable skills.

It is taken for granted that tertiary education will adapt. Indicators include the partnerships linking research universities with for-profit firms, the steady shift of educational costs from the public to the private sector, the rapid growth in specialized and largely vocational training programs, the budget rules that put every program "on its own bottom," the growth of proprietary research arrangements, and the emergence of for-profit educational services, including a company that buys and sells universities.

The steady introduction of market-like accountability mechanisms influences what is taught, to whom, over what time frame, in what manner, and how instruction is assessed. It penetrates the research culture, affecting what research is funded, how priorities are set, who controls the new knowledge, and how knowledge is disseminated. Internal institutional structures and cultures adapt—for example, in a shift from decentralized faculty governance to centralized management, in the expansion of a part-time labor pool of adjunct professors, and in the shrinking of the core liberal arts curriculum and the expansion of professional and vocational training.

The most significant adaptation is what is happening to the sector as a whole. There has been expansion in the number of different kinds of institutions that now comprise tertiary education: corporate universities, distance learning, virtual universities, vocational schools, and continuing education programs, among others. This diversification is not limited to teaching and credentialing but characterizes research as well: government laboratories, think-tanks, corporate research and development (R&D), networked firms, scientific institutes, and international programs. Tertiary education now includes a large number of institutional forms that barely, if at all, resemble the traditional university. There is every reason to expect yet more institutional forms, as mergers and combinations not yet designed seek out a market niche.

With this diversification comes a proliferation of stakeholders. A large and growing number of groups have a stake, often an economic stake, in how well tertiary education is functioning. In matters both of curriculum and research, there are simply many more interests with which to negotiate the terms of education and the measures of its success. These multiple links to the market with its varied stakeholder groups are a large part of the momentum behind the culture of accountability.

The diversification of the educational sector occurs in the context of massive changes in knowledge production. The for-profit sector, primarily but not only in the OECD countries, is home to a multibillion dollar knowledge industry, one that is much more closely tied to labor market needs and to technologi-

cal innovation and application than are education institutions. It is widely assumed that the market for information and knowledge intensive products will continue to grow and that this growth will create yet more organizational forms that will compete with the traditional institutions of higher education.

Ironically, just as knowledge acquires greater value, the near-monopoly that universities have enjoyed in knowledge production and education is eroding. Under these circumstances, the challenge to tertiary education in Africa is particularly acute. There is no aspect of African tertiary education that is immune, but we limit discussion here to four issues that specifically challenge African universities.

Accountability

The greater accountability required by the new conditions does not necessarily mean less autonomy for universities, though faculties are fond of asserting that there is a direct tradeoff between the two. Accountability, properly managed, can increase autonomy. To report clearly to supporters, to account for the spending of funds, to justify priorities; and to insist on quality controls can build the public trust that leads to more not less autonomy. At a time when universities are in competition with other providers of educational services and other sources of knowledge generation, more attention to accountability is strategically wise.

In this regard, the university in Africa is disadvantaged. There is the difficulty of overcoming an image of aloofness, elitism, and selfishness, whether merited or not. There is the task of actually defining performance and then producing measures that can be publicly reviewed. These university-specific tasks are made more difficult by Africa's generally poor track record of establishing accountability in any sector: government, military, industry, professional services, and even the nonprofit arena. In the absence of a widespread understanding of public accountability, universities have much to overcome.

The natural inclination will be to gravitate to performance as measured in the marketplace, by emphasizing short-term economic benefit. But being quick to cooperate with market-derived measures will erode the public-good tradition in higher education, which (see below) is not in the long-term interest of African universities.

Partnerships

The market environment in which universities often function puts a premium on linkages between universities and government laboratories, industrial R&D, think-tanks, independent scientific institutes, and the like. We have moved from "publish or perish" to "partner or perish." These multiple external networking patterns obviously require a robust research presence in settings outside the

university, in both government and industrial laboratories. These are present in developing countries and are widely credited with some of the spectacular advances in new knowledge in recent decades, especially in bio-medicine, communication, materials, and transportation. These nonuniversity research sites also provide for expanded educational opportunities, through internships, new forms of postdoctoral training, and, of course, continuing technical education. From this dynamic mix are emerging new, powerful models of research and advanced education.

These models require not only strong universities but also a system external to education that is engaged in the core activities of universities, that is, in research and training in fields such as agriculture and health. Such is not widespread or particularly strong in Africa. The danger is that Africa will remain wedded to traditional assumptions about university education less because it is resistant to change than because the conditions allow for little else.

Continuing Education

One of the remarkable features about tertiary education in the developed countries is its agreeableness toward continuing (adult) education. The old model of adult education was civic in its purpose. It was to allow those who had missed out on the benefits of a liberal education to have this experience in combination with their work life. Thus, the evening class or "night school," as it came to be known, was invented. Over time this civic model was expanded as the middle class sought out continuing education opportunities in book discussion groups, museum courses, or university-arranged travel. These programs linger in wealthier countries, but the new energy behind continuing education is skill based rather than civic minded. Continuing education is described as the friend of technological change, as the process though which the labor force upgrades its skills in line with new technologies of production and marketing. In this model, what works best is a continuing education—whether located in the local college, a for-profit provider, or the firm itself—that is closely aligned with job-based skill requirements.

Africa, not being locked into an earlier civic model of continuing education, is well positioned to adapt to the newer model; but as with the point just made about partnerships, this requires an economy that itself is geared to technological innovation. Where that is weakly present, there is no venue for a more skill-based or vocationally oriented system of continuing education to emerge.

Funding

Everywhere, of course, the costs of education are being shifted from the public to the private sphere. Mostly this is fee-based, whether in the traditional public subsidized university or in the newer providers of educational services. Subsidized education is also available in the corporate sector, in church-based institutions, and from an array of other nonprofit actors. The rationale for this shift has been developed in many World Bank documents. It is often closely related to rate-of-return analyses that stresses the individual rather than social benefits of advanced education.

But a resource-limited public sector often means a resource-limited private sector. Shifting the cost of education to the private sector and linking it more directly to the market, does not solve the resource problem; it only relocates it. Just as the public sector has to decide what priority to assign to education vis-à-vis alternative claimants, so now will families, corporations, charities, churches, and foundations. Again, the challenge in Africa is compounded. In Africa, the state has been a dominant presence, and the market and civil society have been comparatively weak. Shifting the cost of university education to those sectors places enormous demands on their resources and priority-setting mechanisms.

To draw the general point, embedding tertiary education in the market has consequences for university reform. There is no way to reform, improve, or otherwise transform universities solely from the inside out. The challenge—not an easy one—is designing educational policies that take into account forces beyond the educational sector.

Shifting from economics to demography makes this point even more clearly.

Demographic Constraints

Replacement migration[2] is a term not yet widely known; it will become so. First, the term draws attention to below-replacement birth rates in virtually all of the OECD countries. The United Nations projects negative population growth for 31 European nations. For example, under current (median) U.N. projections, in the next half-century Italy's population will drop from 57 million to 41 million and that of the Russian federation will decline from 147 million to 121 million. Accompanying these population declines is population aging. A third of the population in Italy will be over 65 by midcentury. Because of aging, the declines tend to be even more dramatic for the working-age cohort. Similar patterns hold for large sections of East Asia as well, especially Japan and South Korea. It is these fertility patterns that lead to discussion of replacement migration (Population Division, 2000).

As defined in the U.N. report: "Replacement migration refers to the international migration that would be needed to offset declines in the size of the population, the declines in the population of working age, as well as to offset the overall ageing of a population" (Population Division 2000: p. 1). These numbers get very high. To keep constant the size of the working-age population in Italy, for example, approximately 370,000 new migrants a year would be required. Germany would require just short of a half-million migrants. For countries such as Germany and Japan with comparatively low percentages of women in the workforce, increased participation of women could sharply reduce the number of new migrants required.

The United States has been an early practitioner of replacement migration. Its native stock stopped reproducing at replacement level three decades ago, but the adjustment in immigration policy was swift. The last three decades witnessed increases in the U.S. foreign-born population not seen since early in the century. Immigration plus higher than replacement fertility among the foreign-born added nearly 33 million residents between the 1990 and the 2000 decennial censuses, with especially high levels of growth among the working-age cohort. How likely is it that replacement migration will occur across the OECD countries? If it does, how likely is it that Africa will supply a large number of the new migrants? And, if this were to happen, what are the implications for African universities? These are complex questions that take us well into speculation, but they are important enough to merit informed guesses. The demographic trends themselves are reasonably clear.

A version of replacement migration took place in the half-century just prior to World War I, with population movement from Europe and Asia to the industrial economies and frontier agricultural opportunities in the New World, especially Australia and North America. It holds lessons for what might happen between now and 2050. The demographic transition is defined as the change from high fertility and high mortality in the preindustrial period to low fertility and low mortality in the postindustrial period. At the beginning of the transition, changes in fertility rates lag behind changes in mortality, and there is a surge in the size of the youth cohort. For Europe this phase occurred just as the new world needed labor, and there was mass movement of a working-age population to Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Of course, large migratory flows are not caused only by changes in population composition associated with the demographic transition. Excess labor supply in sending countries coupled with excess labor demand in receiving countries generally implies major differences in living standards. These factors added to migratory pressures in the 19th century.

To return to the 21st century and replacement migration, Jeffrey Williamson (2001:1) observes: "Demographically-young nations tend to send emigrants, while demographically-old nations tend to receive them." Although policies matter, he continues:

> If liberal immigration policy allows this process to play itself out, mass migrations from emerging nations in the middle of their demographic transitions will always flood the advanced nations who have completed their demographic transitions. If restrictive immigration policy tries to choke off this process, then illegal immigration will try to circumvent it.

That is, demographic and economic realities indicate that Europe will, strong opposition political movements notwithstanding, hesitantly move toward replacement migration. The pressures to do so are heightened by the fact that the United States economy appears quite prepared to be flexible with respect to immigration, already having fashioned policies that satisfy low-end markets for service workers and high-end markets for engineers and skilled technicians in the information and health sectors. It is not likely that Europe can continue to cede this advantage to the United States. Competition for foreign students is a factor as well. The region that attracts the best students from around the world, and then keeps them, has an economic advantage.

If Europe follows North America in adopting replacement migration strategies, how likely is it that Africa will supply a large number of the new migrants? Williamson (2001:8) provides an informed prediction:

> The same fundamentals that drove European emigration a century ago are even more powerful in Africa today. After all, Africa has undergone a more dramatic demographic transition than did Europe a century ago. Thus, population growth rates in Africa are expected to remain above 2% for the next two decades, rates that are almost double those of the poor parts of Europe sending out migrants before World War I. The contrast is even more striking when rates of increase of young adults are compared, and these, of course, are the ones most likely to move. Furthermore, the wage gaps favoring Europe over Africa today are more than double the gaps that favored the New World over poor Europe in the 19th century. If Africans are as responsive to migration fundamentals as Europeans were a century ago, then large outflows should be taking place now and larger ones should be expected in the future.

Williamson is quick to note that restrictions on immigration in the high-wage OECD nations can prevent this flow from happening at the pace and in the amount that the migration fundamentals would suggest. But faced with serious

economic dislocations, it is likely that Europe will adjust its immigration policy. On the assumption that policy will catch up with demographic realities, we can explore what this might mean for postsecondary education.

Historically, emigration has been age and ambition selective. It is the young with drive, energy, imagination, and determination who are more likely to strike out for new places and new possibilities. If this pattern repeats itself in the 21st century and operates on migratory flows from Africa to Europe, the next quarter to half century will witness a steadily increasing proportion of Africa's best and brightest arriving in Europe or North America for their postsecondary education. There will certainly be spaces in the OECD education systems. Adjustments in the United States have already led to levels of educational attainment for Asian Americans that outpace native whites. If Africans do arrive in large numbers and find their way into tertiary education programs, they are not likely to take newly acquired skills back to low-wage countries.[3]

In the United States, there is already sharp competition in some labor sectors (including higher education itself) for the best foreign student graduates. The employment market in the OECD countries will, under the demographic scenarios noted above, have ample space for a young educated workforce and will turn to their own tertiary education institutions for that workforce. The time frame for these demographic changes is a half-century or so but could easily leave universities in Africa to compete for and educate only those who stay behind, a less impressive lot.

Of course, even without migration, Africans can begin to prepare themselves for employment opportunities in the OECD countries, at least in those fields served by the distance education market. If, for example, meeting the standards of a multinational accounting firm is more likely to be achieved in a distance education course provided by that firm than by going to the local university, the choice is easy for the job aspirant.

Alternatively, an increasingly integrated global economy may allow for workers to remain in their current home country, while producing goods and services under the auspices of multinational firms. This scenario, too, would have large consequences for tertiary education. It would hasten the standardization of curriculum, degrees, and certification that has already begun. Here the new technologies of distance education play a role. They are well suited to accelerating cross-national standardization in postsecondary education as students everywhere can be taught similar materials and tested against common criteria.

Migration and distance learning stimulate a world trade in educational services. Overseas training is not new, but there has been an order-of-magnitude shift, with many new actors on the scene. The importing countries are no longer

limited to Britain, France, the United States, or Russia. Australia aggressively recruits Asian students. It was hurt by the economic downturn across Asia in the late 1990s and is now looking to Western Europe, Latin America, and Russia for tuition-paying students. Australia now earns $2 billion a year from foreign students, equal to its earnings on the export of wheat. In Europe, Germany and the Netherlands now offer courses in English, not to attract American or British students but to attract students from Taiwan and South Korea. Indian universities actively recruit from Southeast Asia, where they increasingly find that the competition is Japanese rather than Euro-American. The United States continues to be the favored destination. U.S. universities enroll approximately 450,000 international students annually but has seen its market share decline from 39% in 1982 to 30% in 1995, the most recent figures available (*Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2001, p. A45).

Nearly every country exports some of its students for advanced training; but small countries and, irrespective of size, the poorer countries are especially dependent on overseas advanced training. Thus, 90% of all African Ph.D. candidates are getting their training off-continent. Asian candidates are scattered across 50 host countries.

What seems certain is that efforts to improve university education in Africa must take into account the growing international competition for students. The balance of trade will not favor Africa. Its small and weak university system will not be competitive. The most talented Africans will seek degrees elsewhere; and few, if any, Europeans or Asians will seek an African degree.

In linking demography to university practices, there are a number of uncertainties, making prediction a hazardous enterprise. But policies designed to improve higher education in Africa will have to track and adjust to the magnitude of emigration, especially of the postsecondary cohort.

Donor Perspectives

For any university system other than Africa's, we would not need to treat donor perspectives as a macro-trend.[7] But for universities in Africa, the role of external support has been critical. It is hard to find a document on university reform that did not include a section urging greater support from international donors, and a brief retrospective puts current issues in context.

National Elite Universities, Phase I

In the 1960s, universities of the newly independent African nations were a favored target of external aid. The contribution came in the form of personnel as well as funds. It was guided by a reasonably coherent idea of what was to be achieved. Universities, then public, were to become autonomous institutions

of high quality and free inquiry. Humboldtian in design, they would house training and research; and most of the nation's advanced research would be conducted in the university setting. If the first generation of government leaders had been trained abroad, the sooner the successor generation could be trained in the local university the better. The favored instrument of the aid community was the staff development fellowship.

The new university in the new nation would look and feel like the leading universities of the colonial powers, that is, of Britain, France, and Belgium. The early arrival of the United States as a major donor, particularly the private foundations, did not radically change the model. For example, the attempt by U.S. aid agencies to introduce traditions from the land-grant system did not get much traction.

Donors and the first wave of postindependence leaders took for granted that an autonomous, prestigious national university was itself an indicator of development. Like a seat at the U.N. or a national airline, the very presence of the university demonstrated that the new nation had arrived and that development was underway.

The Development University: Phase 2

Although the investment in universities carried into the 1970s, the model of the independent, high-prestige university did not. It was replaced by or blended into the notion of the "development university," which was to be self-consciously linked to the development goals of the society. Community service was integrated into the undergraduate curriculum. Advanced degrees (nearly always at the M.A. level) were no longer the monopoly of the discipline-based departments but now could be earned in the well-funded special institutes of development, demography, economic planning, or agricultural sciences. Research opportunities were linked with specific national needs: integrated rural development, agricultural extension service, public health programs, and five-year economic plans. The university would contribute less by basic research and training future leaders than by providing answers to short-term policy needs and by meeting the needs of five-year manpower plans. These new, instrumental purposes were external to the traditional university culture. Although the development university was initiated in active cooperation with enthusiastic donor agencies, enthusiasm soon gave way to donor disillusionment. If an investment is justified in terms of short-term payoff, doubts set in quickly when the payoff does not occur promptly.

Three other factors contributed to a changed relationship between external donors and the university sector.

First, donor investments became more selective and more project focused. These investments were designed to be an element in a food security program or a civil service reform or a public health strategy. Even though funds continued to flow to higher education, the university as university—its infrastructure, its liberal arts mission, its responsibility to train future leaders—fell out of favor in donor rationales.

Second, the university lost its privileged place in donor priorities. Led by the World Bank's aggressive introduction of rate-of-return considerations, higher education found itself being unfavorably compared to primary and secondary education. Funds were reallocated, often outside the education sector altogether, to NGOs and other service-delivery initiatives. To a limited but not insignificant extent, the disillusionment with the university as a direct instrument for development became generalized as skepticism about higher education itself.

Third, the belief that university education is, finally, an investment in quality selection of people and ideas—that is, in the rigorous application of elite criteria—was confounded by a new rhetoric of egalitarianism and the quasi-populist political movements that saw university elitism as a convenient target.

The development university model gave way to an altogether less coherent sense of why and how donors should invest in higher education. This is clear in how universities were affected by sequential decline of the two initial models:

- The development university notion invited a closer link to government priorities, with confusing consequences for the commitment to free inquiry promoted in the initial model.
- Project funding led to contract research and the faculty reference group was not peers but program officers in the external funding agencies, who were now authorized to deal directly with the individual researcher. This development led to a severe weakening of peer review research culture and thus of science itself.
- Project funding also tended to displace research from the university to nonuniversity settings—to nongovernmental organizations engaged with rural poverty or to policy units associated with government ministries.
- With the decline of donor aid, which had operated as an important subsidy to higher education, the university was vulnerable to an unexpected public scrutiny that focused on the true (high) costs of higher education. In the midst of a general economic decline, funds to sustain university education were hard to come by.
- The shifts in donor priorities occurred during a period of substantial demographic pressures that transformed many public universities from small and privileged places to large and crowded places, often leading

to student unrest. Universities were politicized in the process; quality criteria and faculty governance suffered.

Damage Control and University Reform, Phase 3

Accompanying the shifts in donor priorities following the disillusionment was a much greater degree of donor pluralism. That is, if the 1960s were marked by donor coordination in pursuit of a common vision and the 1970s were marked by a common commitment to a new model, the next phase was marked by much less coordination.

Inconsistencies were hard to avoid. One donor invests in staff development to build up a university department, and another donor funds regional centers of excellence that drain the best faculty from the university setting. One donor stresses south-to-south training and research networks, and others are determined to lure the best talent to training or research programs centered in the northern countries. Some external funds continue to emphasize the central importance of public higher education, while others busily set up competing institutions in the private sector.

The term that perhaps last describes this phase is damage control. Donors worked to correct internal inefficiencies, tried to interrupt both external and internal brain drain, and attempted to compensate for the research failure of the universities by creating research networks, improving learning habits, helping particular institutions catch up with the technological revolution, and shielding research from the excesses of political interference. All of these efforts fell under the umbrella view that African universities needed reforming.

But reform to what end? Against what vision? In pursuit of what purpose? With what model of university education in mind? It comes as no surprise that the donor community is without a common vision of what is right for African universities. In this, they are simply reflecting the times. Since the demise of the development university model, there has been a search for how best to situate the university in a tertiary education system that is transforming the landscape. International conferences, task force reports, and white papers have struggled to describe the role of the university in nations facing many demands with few resources, nations in which the public sector is weak and market mechanisms are not yet mature.

The task for Africa is not made easier by the much more generalized effort to define the mission of the university in the new world economy. The OECD countries have their own white papers and task force reports trying to sort out a mission that has become fuzzier, more diverse, harder to specify and more difficult to assert and defend. Even the enormously robust university system in the United States, with its 4,000 institutions, is scrambling to define itself in a

world where corporations have their own universities, where "click" institutions compete with "brick" institutions, and where the market is quick to see for-profit opportunities in a sector traditionally ceded to the state and nonprofit sponsorship.

Universities and the Public Good

There is, or should be, one constant in this search for a mission.[5] Universities—though not tertiary education more generally—will continue to anchor the public good historically represented in and through advanced education. The previous discussion suggests some of the pressures that have thinned out the public-good dimension of higher education in recent decades. A major contributor is the expansion of tertiary institutions that are defined and defended as sites for personal advance and private benefit.[6] While this aspect of advanced education is not new and not unwelcome, to present it as the primary if not sole justification for postsecondary education has the consequence, perhaps unintended, of neglecting an equally long tradition of public support for institutions that advance the public good.

For many countries, especially those of Africa, being competitive in the international global economy has replaced the traditional "nation-building" task as the criteria against which the contribution of the university is measured. We are familiar with the indicators, a number of which were suggested above: market-sensitive curricular reform, rewards to entrepreneurship, fee-based financing, subcontracting educational services to the private sector, managing universities according to private-sector standards, the expectation that universities can continuously increase the numbers being taught without any increase in teaching staff ("more with less"), and blurred boundaries between the university and the for-profit sector through new partnerships, etc. As summarized by one observer, these trends

> are bringing universities in line with other social arrangements designed to position national economies for greater global competitiveness. . . . [They are] functioning as a powerful and influential global paradigm, shaping higher education policies and practices in many developing country economies, despite huge social, economic and historical differences [from one country to the next]. (Singh n.d.: 1)

The independent Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries, whose report I cited earlier, was sufficiently alarmed that it devoted an entire chapter to "higher education and the public interest," pointing out the several ways in which universities continue to have a responsibility for the public good. This analysis started from the view that universities offer a mixture of private

and public benefits. In line with traditional World Bank analysis, it acknowledges that it is a waste of public funds to pay for those elements that offer private benefits, because prospective beneficiaries will provide the funds. But the same logic underscores that it is a serious mistake to presume that private investment will secure the public or social benefits of universities. Such a presumption defies economic theory. Public returns depend on public investment. Jamil Salmi notes that government support is justified because higher education generates "external benefits that are crucial for knowledge-driven economic development" and also because of "social benefits accruing from the construction of more cohesive societies" (Salmi, 2002: 8).

In the rush to adopt funding strategies that shift the cost-burden from the public sector to the individual beneficiary, the ancient justification of advanced learning as a public obligation recedes from view. This danger is magnified where it is assumed that market forces will supply whatever it is that society wants and needs. Markets, we are repeatedly instructed by economists (and by historical experience), underinvest in public goods.

The Task Force Report (2000) presents an illustrative list of public goods traditionally associated with universities. They can:

> unlock potential at all levels of society, helping talented people to gain advanced training whatever their background;
>
> create a pool of highly trained individuals that attains a critical size and becomes a key national resource; address topics whose long-term value to society is thought to exceed their current value to students and employees (for example, the humanities); and provide a space for the free and open discussion of ideas and values. (p. 28).

Lists such as these appear in more and more documents about higher education, a sign that these "taken for granted" purposes are, in fact, no longer taken for granted but need to be reasserted.

There is the hopeful possibility that the public-goods argument will find a fresh rationale as universities reposition themselves to advance international economic competitiveness, and that this rationale will be especially compelling for Africa. For the foreseeable future, the only way in which Africa can participate in the international knowledge revolution will be by protecting the public good aspect of knowledge production. (See Ndulu's similar conclusions, this issue.)

There is a worldwide system of basic knowledge production, widely available in both print and electronic media. It follows from the simple fact that the results of publicly funded basic research cannot be held for the benefit only of the nation that has invested in it. Science does not work that way, and efforts to

limit the science to its sponsoring nation turn out to weaken the science and harm the nation, as the closed economies have discovered.

Given internationally available knowledge, it greatly benefits each individual nation to create knowledge links to other countries of the world. These links help a country guard against isolationism and parochialism; they also open the society to broader economic, intellectual, technical, and social possibilities. A strong public case can be made for reducing any import or export constraints on the flow of new knowledge. Research universities are a country's best-equipped institution to facilitate this flow. They generate, import, and disseminate nonproprietary knowledge, making it available to all the institutions of society—government, commerce, media, military, and civil society organizations.

The international intellectual commons based on nonproprietary and nonexclusive research allows the world to address a number of widely recognized challenges, such as emergent diseases, invasive species, and climate fluctuations. It is not in the interest of any single nation to invest heavily in research that could address these problems, because then the other nations of the world would have a free ride. Knowledge about these global challenges is, then, an international public good. It is in the public interest of every nation that this knowledge be created, but it will not be created in the absence of public investment. A network of research universities and institutes is a mechanism to advance the required research agenda.

For a number of reasons, then, it is in the interest of each nation to enhance those features of its universities that are able to participate in globally significant R&D and international expert systems focused on global challenges. This plan works to the benefit of African universities in an environment in which they reposition themselves to advance national competitiveness in the international knowledge economy. Only by continuing to assert and reflect a public-good responsibility can they function as a link between their national economies and that part of the international system which continues to be nonproprietary.

To summarize: The trends earlier noted—neo-liberal economic doctrine and the prospect of substantial emigration driven by economic considerations—are and will continue to influence African tertiary education in a manner that pulls it closer to market-derived accountability. This pattern threatens to weaken the traditionally close association of university education to a set of public-good responsibilities.

The international donor community can provide a corrective. Being largely outside the market, it is well positioned to protect the public interest dimension. In particular, it can support Africa's connection to the global economy by

helping African universities to assert a new, internationally defined role constructed around the linked values of advanced education and nonproprietary research.

Notes

1 An estimate of 662 for-profit institutions awarding degrees appears in *Change* (2000). *The Chronicle of Higher Education* tracks the market performance of 11 publicly traded higher-education companies.

2 This section was prepared without having had the benefit of Ndulu's paper, presented at the same conference and also published in this issue, in which an extensive, well-documented analysis confirms and advances the views expressed here.

3 Ndulu (this issue) reports that Africa has already lost 30% of its highly skilled personnel to OECD countries.

4 The following discussion benefited in major ways from Coleman and Court (1993).

5 This section reflects and repeats arguments advanced by the Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries, co-chaired by Mamphela Ramphele and Henry Rosovsky and on which I served as vice-chair.

6 Compare, for example, the mission statement of Harvard University with that of the for-profit University of Phoenix. Harvard "encourages students to respect ideas and their free expression, and to rejoice in the discovery and in critical thought; to pursue excellence in a spirit of productive cooperation. . . "The University of Phoenix "provides general education and professional programs that prepare students to articulate and advance their personal and professional goals."

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