

# International dimensions of higher education systems in developing countries

The perspective of Southern policy makers and managers

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## 1 Introduction

In the conference, the views of eight different stakeholder groups were sought, among them Southern policymakers and managers of higher education institutes. The group consisted of representatives from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Yemen and Zambia.

All together thirteen papers were submitted by participants from the South: six focused on policymaking at national level and seven on strategy development at the level of individual institutes. The authors had been asked to pay specific attention to the role of donors and donor programmes on policy development and policy implementation. Most briefly explained the national context before dealing with the influence exerted by international factors and trends. This overview paper does the same: the section entitled *National trends* outlines the challenges facing policymakers and managers of higher education institutes as well as the action they are taking.

Against this background, section 2.2 focuses on the international dimensions, clustered under four trends. The driving forces behind each trend are briefly described to achieve a better understanding of what they are. Next their impact on higher education in the South is assessed. Lastly recommendations are formulated that stem mostly from discussions at the conference (recommendations from papers can be read in the papers).

The last section contains a number of conclusions: what is the influence of international trends on the higher education sector in the South and how could support programmes be improved to better assist Southern partners in dealing with them?

This overview paper is based on the papers submitted and the outcomes of the conference. Summarizing thirteen papers and the discussions at the conference while highlighting the main contradictions and paradoxes is a difficult task. The risk of overgeneralization is obvious. The author therefore first assessed how much the papers have in common. This proved to be a considerable amount: the constraints that Southern policymakers and managers of higher education institutes are facing are very similar across the board, allowing for a general treatment of the subject in this overview.

## 2 National trends in the South

### 2.1 *National policy level: challenges and policies*

The 1990s were a difficult period for the higher education sector in the South, mainly because of a lack of funds to accommodate the increasing number of students. Data from the University of Dar es Salaam provide a dramatic example: between 1985 and 1995 the annual budget per student dropped from over USD 6,000 to less than USD 2,000 (Luhanga and Mashalla: 3 and 15).

In many other countries the same process, known as 'massification', is taking place. Several papers report a quadrupling of tertiary enrolments in the last decade. With their budgets under strain and experiencing increasing international pressure to liberalize their economies, governments viewed privatization of higher education as a logical step. Kasozi summarises this process and its consequences in Uganda:

*“The expansion of enrolment has triggered an unprecedented emergence of new institutes of higher learning. From one university in 1987, the country now has 28 private and public universities, some of which are less than glorified high schools. The number of non-university tertiary institutes has risen from 2 in 1970 to 127 in 2004.”(p.3)*

Many other factors play a role. Brito et al. (pp. 4-5) provide the following summary of challenges facing the national higher education system in Mozambique, which are common in other countries too:

- rapid changes in technology: curricula have to be updated on a constant basis;
- increasing demand for higher education (massification);
- the demand is skewed in favour of degrees in law, economics and business administration;
- adoption of new training models and life-long learning models;
- changing labour markets: university graduates are often too academic;
- integration in the national innovation system: universities need to be connected to society; and
- the creation of system regulatory mechanisms.

National governments respond to these challenges by designing new policies and strategic action plans, in consultation with a large number of stakeholders. All the papers explain how the latest policies were developed in the various countries. For example, in Mozambique a draft policy was first debated in all provinces and at all institutes of higher education. The contributions from these debates and the draft proposal were presented at a national seminar with 300 participants, including members of parliament, ministers, provincial delegates and representatives of higher education institutes. The outputs of the seminar were used to formulate a definitive policy.

Reflecting on the process of policy formulation, the following lessons were drawn by Brito et al. (p. 7):

- It is important to recognize the need for change and to use that momentum to involve all stakeholders in debates and consultations leading to a common vision and strategy for change.
- It is important to assume a holistic approach, in which higher education is seen as part of the national education and innovation systems.
- It is necessary to develop a long-term, national vision on higher education.
- It is important that government and society use all their knowledge and skills. National experts should provide leadership in baseline studies even if expatriate assistance is needed. This strengthens national ownership and gives the country-team a deep understanding of the situation and a full picture of alternative actions and their implications for the future.
- It is fundamental that the highest quality is achieved, in order to build trust and commitment.
- The sense of ownership in the design phase is a fundamental step for a smooth implementation and monitoring of the programme.
- It is important to include from the beginning a capacity building component for the stakeholders, allowing them to attain the required quality standards and to understand the process.

All the papers produced by policymakers provide an overview of current policies in their respective countries. For example, Botero Alvarez' paper outlines the Colombian Education Development Action Plan, which defines three main educational policies summarised as follows:

- Extend *access to higher education*, focusing on:
  - o granting credit to students with low resources for access to quality programmes;
  - o use of new (ICT) technologies and methodologies;
  - o creating Community Centres of Higher Education to serve underprivileged areas;
  - o promoting technical and technological training.
- Improve the *quality of education*, focusing on:

- verification of minimum quality conditions in all higher education programmes;
  - voluntary accreditation of quality standards of programmes and institutes;
  - creation of a body to monitor the labour market;
  - internationalization of higher education: to provide adequate conditions for academic mobility and to support the export of higher education services.
- Improve the *efficiency of the education sector*, in particular by:
- strengthening the National Higher Education Information System;
  - providing technical assistance to departmental, district and municipal Secretariats of Education in order to deepen decentralization processes.

The main policy objectives reported in nearly all the papers produced by Southern policymakers are related to equity (gender and regional), quality and efficiency, as well as to improved embedding of the sector in society ('connecting to the world of work') and greater relevance to national development strategies.

During the conference the stakeholder group of Southern policymakers was asked to select the policy priorities they wanted to discuss during the conference. The three basic issues of equitable access, of quality assurance and relevance, and of capacity building in institutes and at system level headed their list. Additional topics were the commoditization of higher education and the use of ICT in higher education. As we will see below, all of these (except equitable access) have important international dimensions.

## *2.2 Institutional level: constraints and strategies*

Individual institutes have responded to the challenges of the 1990s by elaborating strategic plans, involving critical self-reflection and consultation of a wide range of stakeholders. The University of Dar es Salaam was one of the first to do so in 1994. It formulated six areas of reform that focused on effective and efficient management of available resources via enhanced internal autonomy, more market orientation (in content and in PR), increased flexibility and an outward orientation.

More recently, the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) developed a strategic plan in consultation with a range of stakeholders. Lwakabamba explains in detail how this was done, on the basis of the philosophy that because everyone has been involved at different points, everyone is involved in the final product.

How the results of a strategic plan can work out in practice can be illustrated by a large proportion of the innovations implemented by the University of Dar es Salaam (Luhanga and Mashalla: 4-14):

- cost cutting and income generation by:
  - outsourcing non-core activities like canteens;
  - creating a pool of common resources (like transport);
  - establishing a business oriented bureau to manage student accommodation;
  - transforming the University Press and the University Computing Centre into limited companies.
- use the costs per student as a unit for budgeting;
- introduce evening programmes for fee paying students as well as slots for privately sponsored students in the academic programmes;
- all research units were compelled to develop research agendas that were relevant and in line with institutional and national policies. Academic audits generated very valuable observations and recommendations for ongoing reforms and improvements;
- adopt a university wide ICT policy. In 10 years a University Computing Centre has been created and its professional staff up-graded. 400 PCs are available to the student;

- gender balancing and mainstreaming via:
  - o affirmative action;
  - o allow admission of females at a slightly lower cut-off point;
  - o a pre-entry programme;
  - o strong advocacy for third party sponsorship.

As a result the percentage of female students increased from 20% in 1994 to 33% in 2004.

- expansion of student enrolment (doubling between 1994 and 2000) via:
  - o attracting more privately sponsored students;
  - o simplifying admission, by creating zonal and regional admission centres;
  - o improved PR;
  - o a wider search for graduate scholarships.
- a university-wide alumni tracer study for academic improvement.

These and similar innovations are common features in most of the strategic plans described by Afeti, Gordon, Kiamba, Luhanga and Mashalla, Lwakabamba and Mora-Escalante. The title of Kiamba's paper on the University of Nairobi perfectly captures the underlying rationale: 'Entrepreneurialism and adaptability in Kenyan universities in the face of declining donor and government support'.

Making institutes more entrepreneurial and commercial met with resistance as well. Afeti (pp.4-5), writing on the changes at the Ho Polytechnic in Ghana, explains:

*"The barriers to change include the absence of a shared vision, the fear of creating disaffection, the weight of tradition, and lack of exposure of the participants in the change management process [...]. Parochial self-interest and misunderstanding and lack of trust are some other reasons why people may resist change."*

The same author pinpoints external sources of resistance to change as well, for example when the institutes in Ghana were not able to raise their fees to full cost-recovery levels because of organized student resistance and the lack of political will. Obviously there is a generally felt concern that higher fees will reduce access to higher education for children from poorer families. King observes in his paper (p. 8) that this fear has been remarkably absent from the policy discourse, but that it has nevertheless had an effect:

*"The downside of innovations with private access is that there is evidence of very small numbers of students from poor families reaching higher education (Palmer 2005)."*

During the conference the managers of Southern higher education institutes identified five priorities for discussions. They formulated them in terms of concerns: they were concerned about the lack of South-South cooperation, about the quality of education and research, about the funding of public universities and research, about the costs of ICT applications and about the challenge of retaining staff.

Although the wording is different, the overlap with the policy priorities of the Southern policymakers is obvious. And once again most of these concerns are linked to international dimensions, as we will see in the following section.

### **3 International dimensions**

With the national settings in mind, we turn to our key question: what are the international dimensions of the higher education sector in the South? Which factors and trends influence the development and implementation of higher education policies there? And what recommendations have been formulated on how Southern policymakers and managers of higher education institutes could turn international trends to their advantage (or how they can avoid experiencing overly negative effects). To answer

these questions we have to understand the driving forces behind these international factors and trends. And, obviously, we have to describe what their actual impact is.

Several international trends have an impact on higher education in developing countries. The major ones that were mentioned in nearly all the papers and discussed during the conference can be summarized as:

- commoditization of (cross-border) higher education;
- increased international mobility of qualified staff;
- new ICT developments;
- trends in donor policies and funding modalities.

### *3.1 Commoditization of (cross-border) higher education*

#### Driving forces

Higher education is increasingly becoming an international commodity. The three basic trends that are the driving forces behind this fact are strongly interconnected: the massification of higher education, the increasing influence of the neo-liberal political agenda and the internationalization of higher education.

Probably the most crucial trend is the massification of higher education. This began in the 1980s in the North. For example in the UK, the enrolment rate for tertiary education increased from 19% in 1980 to 50% in 1996. Such an increase could not be financed from public sources, so private funding was sought and found. In some English-speaking countries, over two-thirds of funding for higher education currently stems from private sources.

In the same period a neo-liberal political agenda started to dominate the general policy debate in the major market economies, especially in English-speaking countries. Governments started to consider themselves as the guardians, rather than the main suppliers, of the public good. In the 1990s this thinking reached the higher education sector and privatization became a main theme. The first step was cost sharing: students paid higher fees for institutes that were still public (not-for-profit). A second step was the creation by large companies of for-profit institutes that started to offer higher education at commercial rates. This process led to an increase in 'pseudo-universities' that are scarcely involved in knowledge generation and focus entirely on turning out large numbers of students with often narrowly defined qualifications (Altbach: 8).

With ongoing globalization and integration of markets, the next step was international competition between higher education institutes. In Europe, the Bologna process aims at regulating the European higher education market (basically by creating a common system of quality standards) in order to make it more attractive on the world market. Through the GATS negotiations<sup>1</sup> the trend towards privatization and commercialization was exported from the North to the South. The aim is to create a worldwide, free market for education that encourages international competition between institutes.

#### Impact

In the South the commoditization of trans-national higher education has led to a sharp increase in branch campuses and twinning relations (including joint degrees) in the past decade. Unfortunately the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Bologna process 45 European countries are trying to harmonize their education system. GATS stands for General Agreement on Trade in Services, being negotiated under the auspices of the World Trade Organization. The overall aim is to create free markets for education around the globe.

business-like approach that underpins these relations has not yet resulted in the equal partnerships usually assumed to be inherent to business arrangements. Altbach (p. 11) observes:

*“In this context Northern institutes are in firm control of the curriculum, faculties and degrees. Most initiatives stem from lower prestige institutes in the North.”*

In the South this trend coincided with the massification of higher education which started in most countries in the second half of the 1990s. Yizengaw reports that in Ethiopia the total population at all higher education institutes increased six-fold between 1997 and 2004. The necessary investments are huge and the author concludes that these can only be secured with the active involvement of the private and non-governmental sector in higher education provision. Indeed in 2004 some 23% of Ethiopian students were in private institutes while in 1997 this was still zero.

Most country papers report at the very least a quadrupling of enrolment rates in the past decade and all agree that private (and international) sources are needed to cover increasing expenditure. At the same time opening up national and international education markets is seen as problematic. Several papers express concern that cross-border education will increase the dependence of the South in intellectual and cultural terms; in this sense new cross-border arrangements are a continuation of historical patterns (interestingly two Northern academics, Altbach and Samoff, analyse this problem most explicitly).

In addition to this, the strong growth in national private education suppliers poses a huge challenge to national regulatory systems. In her paper on the national university of Costa Rica, Mora-Escalante summarises this as follows (p.1):

*“Latin America is experiencing the proliferation of institutes – mostly private institutes –without these countries having simultaneously developed an effective quality-control system to ensure that criteria for academic excellence are satisfied.”*

During the conference it was stated that ‘junk institutes’ have entered the market in the South. The fear of such institutes is echoed in the papers of national-level policymakers as well. Special concern is expressed with regard to internet-based joint degrees; Mollel, for example, concludes (p. 12):

*“The current tendency of unaccredited universities from the North, delivering on-line courses to unsuspecting candidates from developing countries who use their meagre earnings to pay for non-existent or unrecognized qualifications, calls for enhanced cooperation between the North and South in order to curb this fast growing trend.”*

Still, the quality problem is more general; national higher education institutes also need to be regulated and accredited. Kasozi (p.4) writes:

*“The country’s regulatory body, the National Council for Higher Education, has been in place for only two years and is just beginning to develop capacity to regulate higher education. There is a fear that Ugandans could receive low quality higher education.”*

Regulatory systems are clearly called for. Nkanza elaborates on how the Zambian government created an independent regulatory body with support of the donor community. It combines regulatory tasks with technical support to governments and training providers. It forms part of more general reforms whereby the role of private initiatives is encouraged as well as regulated. The paper illustrates the resistance to change that can be expected when setting up an independent regulatory body. One observation is that training providers accepted the role of the new institute more readily than ministries. This means that a strong autonomous institute (in legal terms and in board composition) is needed to prevent reforms being reversed. A second observation is that reforms must be consistent. For example, if the government encourages institutes to be self-financing, it should not try to control the fees for training at the same time. A third point is that greater involvement by private actors has proved beneficial to the system. Private training institutes adapted more rapidly to the new situation, entered

niche markets and training funds (a levy on the payrolls of formal industries) minimized bureaucracy and proved an effective way of involving employers and employees, resulting in satisfactory training outcomes. Lastly, referring to the relevance of education, Nkanza observes that simple, decentralized labour market surveys are better than complex central systems.

In line with these last observations, several papers mention the positive impacts of privatization and cross-border education as well. In addition to providing more educational opportunities for a growing number of students, they can help change the mindset of institutes that are sometimes too self-confident and internally oriented. Referring to Tanzania, Mollel concludes (p.11):

*“To remain competitive, higher education institutes will need to be very alert and in general have to become more business-oriented with new mindsets.”*

Colombia is trying to capitalize on new opportunities by developing a policy to stimulate cross-border education originating in Colombia. Along the same lines, Brito et al. (pp. 4-5) believe that national systems should be encouraged to adapt and to look for opportunities, rather than wallowing in self-pity and inferiority:

*“National tertiary education systems have to adapt themselves in such a way that they can respond adequately to this challenge. They will have to engage in strategic alliances (in the South and the North), which will guarantee them access to the knowledge and excellence they need to improve their performance. These partnerships could assume the form of networks around centres of excellence.”*

#### Recommendations formulated at the conference

The papers submitted themselves formulate a large number of recommendations aimed at improving higher education in the South. These will not be repeated here. Instead, we will focus on the recommendations as formulated and discussed during the conference. The topic that received most attention from the two stakeholder groups from the South was ‘quality’. For the policymakers this meant they discussed quality assurance and enhancement systems at great length. For managers of higher education institutes the key to better quality lies in improved access to the international body of knowledge and research. This can be achieved either via partnerships with Northern institutes, via Centres of Excellence, via international networks or via South-South cooperation. The discussions and recommendations on these two topics are presented below.

#### • **Quality assurance and quality enhancement**

During the conference policymakers from the South saw the creation or improvement of proper regulatory bodies as their highest priority. The bottom line was that that all institutes should fulfil certain minimum requirements in order to be accredited. Yet this is not enough. According to the participants, this should not only be a question of quality assurance but also of quality enhancement. This starts at the level of teaching and all institutes should have quality systems in place. Quality assurance must be seen in terms of local relevance and international applicability/excellence. However it should be understood that the different levels may conflict with one another.

The question was raised of the extent to which quality assurance (QA) is a national or a regional concern. In her paper, Mollel identified the need for closer cooperation between governments and regulatory bodies in the North and South in order to come to joint accreditations of joint degrees. From the perspective of Northern institutes, Molenaar’s paper confirms this as he concludes that at present joint accreditation is indeed very complicated, if not outright impossible, due to the conflicting requirements of national systems. In fact the members of the Bologna process have not yet managed to arrive at a common accreditation system for Europe. Yet, when participants were asked during the

conference to describe the ideal situation in higher education in the South in 2015, one of the statements was that joint degrees would by then have almost become standard practice.

The general feeling was that quality assurance and maintenance is an issue at institutional, regional, national and international levels and QA systems are the joint responsibility of governments, institutes and agencies. It was noted that important achievements have been realized in this domain. In most countries a regulatory framework and agencies for quality improvement are in place. These deal with monitoring of QA, and curriculum review and reform. In addition, the use of external examiners and academic audits is becoming more widespread. At the same time there are important gaps that need to be addressed. In practice a lack of funds often leads to shortcomings in quality control. What is more, quality frameworks often operate at institutional level and not on a national scale. This leads to a narrow focus on QA with not enough focus on inter-institutional comparison. Many participants felt that ranking of institutes is an essential by-product of quality assurance.

Participants stressed that regulatory authorities should have the capacity to make independent decisions but that at the same time, they should not impinge on, or reduce, the institutional autonomy of higher education institutes.

#### • **International connectivity and cooperation**

Science and higher education are international by their very nature. The formation of international partnerships is therefore seen as critical by all; being it in the forms of North-South partnerships, Centres of Excellence, international networks or South-South cooperation. Here the focus is on the Southern perspective on this topics; how Northern actors look at these issues can be found in the overview paper on the Northern perspective.

#### *Partnerships*

Participants expressed the hope that in the future North-South relations will be less about development 'assistance' and more about international cooperation - among groups of institutes working on similar topics and addressing shared problems. The collaboration will be more between 'equals' - on the assumption that currently perhaps weaker Southern institutes will be much more capable to contribute to or lead such international collaborations. In this scenario, the purpose of the cooperation is not 'aid' but 'science'.

#### *Centres of Excellence*

The concept of Centres of Excellence was only mentioned in two of the papers submitted by Southern participants, yet it received much attention at the conference, partly as it is a key-concept for the Commission for Africa. The participants identified the following key-characterises of a centre of excellence:

- Excellence in connectivity with local community and business.
- Preferable integration in higher education institutes because they are degree-giving.
- Networking within institute & between institutes.
- Proper management infrastructure and high quality leadership.
- Attracting staff from diaspora and best researchers through financial incentives.
- Formalizing consultancy as a means of staff retention.
- Political will to allow for such incentive schemes.
- Increased autonomy for universities to make strategic decisions.

The centres should create a proper working environment where researcher can carry out high quality research and they should be part and parcel of a strong (national) university in order to ensure that newly generated knowledge is passed on immediately to national innovations systems as well as to students. Participants agreed that relevant performance indicators for Centres of Excellence are needed. The critical step to better quality research is a proper peer reviewing and publication system. Africa does not have such a set up, and African scientists are encouraged to publish in restricted-access western journals. Most African journals are not acknowledged. Support should be provided to assist them to improve quality assurance through peer review and publications.

Other participants, notably the stakeholders group of donors, responded more critical. They focus their efforts on the Millennium Development Goals and are not convinced that centres of excellence are an efficient way of reaching these. Another problem for donors seems to be how to explain to their taxpayers the need to invest in long terms projects that might be perceived as white elephants or as driven by prestige considerations. The academics agreed that “in order to make centres of excellence work costs must be incurred for some time without benefits– over an extended period”.

#### *International networks and South-South cooperation*

The Southern managers named one of their presentations at the conference ‘From Northern and Southern institutes to an international network of equal partners’. They observed that there is fragmented and limited South-South cooperation and limited joint research between Southern institutes. They advocated two modalities: networks (of Centers of Excellence) and structured cooperation programmes. The positive effects can be found at different levels: strengthened institutes, improved quality of graduates and more relevant research outputs.

As possible actions that could turn this ideal into reality they mentioned: establish databases to map complementary strengths; establish effective communication lines; develop human capacities and provide incentive for networking (rather than for publishing); enhance the capacity in science and technology and influence policy making.

Yet, this might be more complicated than it sounds and participants concluded that there is a need for a broad understanding in what is involved in making networks effective. The managers of Southern institutes asked themselves the question why networks did not manage to change the landscape in the past. ANSTI was given as an example of a very promising South-South initiative that was little heard of these days. Southern managers concluded that it takes well over a decade, or even more than one generation, to make networks work. This means long-term policy level funding is needed rather than single project level funding. Next to this, they mentioned that well trained human recourse are needed as well as a proper ICT infrastructure and services and a shared research agenda.

### *3.2 International mobility of staff and students*

#### Driving forces

Communication between people of different nations has increased tremendously in the last few decades. The ICT revolution is a major factor, as well as improvements in language skills, increased tourism and large-scale labour migration. Opportunities for contact across borders and cultures have increased, while at the same time the international media and higher levels of education have made people more interested in other cultures.

Alongside these general trends, the internationalization of education has led to a harmonization of educational systems (basically by the universal adoption of the Bachelors/Masters system) enabling students to pursue part of their studies in another country. Nowadays, many countries encourage young people to become world citizens and stimulate cross-border initiatives. Countries in the North

also invite students from the South to study at their institutes. In this way, they not only make up for falling student numbers at home, they also recruit high-quality staff for the future and, as a society, attract a new generation of knowledge workers to help secure the future economic growth that will be necessary to maintain the welfare state (with an aging and shrinking population).

Altogether, two million international students represent a market worth billions. Generally it is students from the South who travel to study in the North. They constitute a major source of income for the academic institute and they make up for falling student numbers – especially in the natural sciences – in the country concerned. Many continue to work in the country where they studied.

### Impact

Today students and staff move freely around the globe, be it as part of an exchange programme, a fellowship (scholarship) programme or as a private initiative. Several papers submitted to the conference focus on scholarship programmes in Northern countries. The target group is usually mid-career staff. The impact on policy development in the South is believed to be fairly high, although often indirect. Scholarship programmes are highly thought of by many authors. Positive features include:

- a. the fact that these students are future policymakers;
- b. taking students out of their normal working situation enables them to learn more quickly and efficiently;
- c. international students see and experience how things are done in another culture; today's students are tomorrow's world citizens.

There are of course negative aspects too:

- d. there is no guarantee that the subjects studied are of value to the student's country of origin;
- e. there is a risk of brain drain, as students may remain in the country where they study.

In general the papers are positive about increased mobility. Brito et al. (p. 14) conclude:

*“Mobility of lecturers and students will contribute largely to the dream of creating a common vision for development, by building bridges of friendship and knowledge between our youths and our cultures, by building a common understanding of the challenges we are facing, and by building a common language and approach to respond to those challenges.”*

Yet there is also criticism of the model, as Brito et al. (pp. 14 and 15) go on to say:

*“Today, we assist North-North and North-South mobility but very little South-South and South-North. The exchange rarely is a true sharing of knowledge and part of a common research programme. Instead, frequently it serves primarily the interests of the party with the resources; normally the Northern institute. One reason for this is the interest of Northern institutes which face declining domestic markets as a result of demographic changes and the necessity to maintain their scientific and technological superiority. The second factor is the interests of the elites of low-income countries, who prefer training their children in European or US institutes rather than at home or in other developing nations.”*

The brain drain is a direct negative effect of international mobility. Although it can have positive side-effects as well (remittances, increased knowledge and skills upon returning) the loss of human resources for the country and region is huge. According to the Commission for Africa, the African Capacity Building Foundation estimates that Africa loses 20,000 trained personnel annually to developed countries (the same report also quotes a World Bank study that put the figure at 70,000 per year, so apparently the data are scanty and/or open to interpretation). This excludes people studying abroad.

The ultimate result of scholarships should be enhanced capacity, not only in individuals but also in institutes. While sending students abroad is a risk, as some might not return, sending staff creates the additional problem that while they are abroad, somebody else has to take over their duties. In the case of long-term scholarships this can present a problem for the institute and careful planning is needed, especially when a scholarship programme is combined with institutional support and international technical assistance that also depends on the availability of the same staff. KIST in Rwanda has to balance all these aspects and Lwakabamba concludes (pp. 14-15):

*“In the case of capacity building, institutes need to take the time to work with the government and donors to make sure that skill deficits are addressed in the short-term, but that capacity building is constantly addressed by both the short-term and the long-term approaches. The government and donors can support real capacity building by including staff training in the terms of reference for expatriate consultants and by investing in sandwich programmes.”*

#### Recommendations formulated at the conference

Several recommendations have been formulated in the papers and some are already included in the quotes given above. The main one is that scholarship programmes are a very valuable tool for capacity building. Sandwich programmes, in which periods of field research in the home country are alternated with periods of study in the country of the host institute, are seen as the most suitable by many authors, including the PhD students who attended the conference. In addition to easing the burden on the students' family lives, it enables them to do more practical or relevant research and it creates stronger ties between the two educational institutes as they share supervision.

The value of scholarship programmes can be further increased by combining them with an institutional support programme. The workshop sparked off more detailed discussions on how to do this and the results are summarized in Chapter 5.

The issue of the brain drain is more complex. Some think the Centres of Excellence could be a way of attracting Africans to return from the diaspora. Some advocate the use of donor money to enhance the salaries of African civil servants. This would allow governments to offer higher salaries in a consistent manner. King quotes the Commission for Africa, which refers to the example of Mozambique where a reallocation of less than one-third of the expenditure on technical assistance would be sufficient to double the salaries of all civil servants and to create an incentive system. As King (and others during the conference) said in his paper, many doubt the sustainability of such an approach. The paper of Nkanza on Zambia adds fuel to this as it shows that the government is not able or willing to sustain its initial commitment to better salaries for staff of the regulatory authority in the educational sector. Others are afraid that governments might not give any priority to higher education when it comes to better salaries (e.g. the paper on Uganda). No consensus was reached on this issue and no concrete recommendation was formulated.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.3 New ICT developments

A series of papers were submitted to the conference on ICT-related issues (Ballantyne, Mbwette, Molenaar and Beerens, Molendijk and Scholten, and Robinson). They are dealt with in more detail in the overview of Northern higher education institutes. A summary focusing on the views of Southern

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<sup>2</sup> It will be very difficult to convince Northern (neo-liberal) politicians to work on salary enhancement. Quite apart from the fear of inflation, a recent IMF publication (Rajan and Subramania, 2005: *What Undermines Aid's Impact on Growth?*) suggests that higher salaries paid by aid projects for well educated local staff makes it more difficult for local companies to employ them and this again leads to a loss of export opportunities. Paying more to civil servants can be expected to have the same effect.

policymakers and managers on the subject will suffice here. In general they are less enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by ICT than the authors who concentrated on ICT issues.

### Driving forces

One could argue that new ICT developments have been the driving force behind many changes, both locally and globally, for the last two decades. The introduction of personal computers, e-mail and the Internet are the most visible. Applications like Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and the use of chips in a range of instruments and equipment are less visible to the general public but probably as important.

As in many other sectors, new ICT systems were initially used by educational institutes to speed up and automate their traditional working processes, both in teaching and administration. Over time however, new programs and applications were developed that affected the learning process itself. Having an enormous amount of information readily available on the Internet changed the role of the teacher dramatically, from a supplier of information to a guide in finding information, from an instructor who tells students what to do, to a coach who assists them in assessing the usefulness of information and in applying the knowledge they have collected.

The development of new ICT applications is market-driven. The largest markets can be found in the North and therefore many ICT applications are geared to Northern needs. Yet large ICT companies also have a great stake in securing future markets and emerging economies are considered an essential part of this. As Levey's paper shows, if African institutes combine their demands for ICT services, they can negotiate better deals with suppliers. So even if the African market is very small, market forces are at work and the more organizations in the South cooperate, the more these forces can be made to work in their interests. Another way to benefit from market forces is to join Northern higher education institutes in an ICT-based network and profit from economies of scale.

### Impact

At global level a double digital gap is developing rapidly. Many higher education institutes in the South are still struggling to provide their students with a minimal access to computers and the Internet (the traditional gap) and they have a long way to go before they can actively use ICT and multimedia technologies in new ways of learning (the second gap). This creates an opportunity for Northern institutes to offer their courses to students in the South via the Internet. We have already seen that Southern policymakers are concerned about the quality and appropriateness of the courses offered in this way. There is no need to go into this again here.

The papers submitted by Southern participants mostly failed to analyse how Southern institutes could capitalize on new opportunities offered by ICT and closer cooperation with higher education institutes in the North. Some papers stated that it could offer greater choice for students in South, but few seem to be really excited about ICT. KIST stands out for its focus on ICT and it is one of the few that emphasize the opportunities presented by ICT-based learning, rather than the threats. Lwakabamba writes (pp. 11-12):

*"Internet has facilitated new forms of education delivery such as on-line distance learning and electronic libraries. KIST works in collaboration with two Australian institutes to offer high quality distance learning via Internet. Through this program, KIST facilitates access to the same world-class education offered by the African Virtual University in over 34 learning centres in Africa. AVU's teaching methods include a blend of online and in-class learning and flexible delivery systems, combining e-learning, discussions with onsite facilitators, web-seminars and video broadcast."*

Mbwette's paper explores the need for an ICT infrastructure in distance education, as offered by the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). At present some 8,000 students are estimated to be active learners, representing 20% of total enrolment in tertiary education. With nearly a quarter of the students enrolled in the faculty of education, OUT is a key supplier of qualified teachers in the country. Yet only its headquarters and an outreach centre in Dar es Salaam are connected to OUT's Wide Area Network. Under this institute's ICT policy, this needs to be expanded by at least 10 PCs in each of the 23 regional educational centres.

In his paper on KIST, Lwakabamba summarises the main obstacles to Southern institutes making better use of ICT as follows (p.12):

*“While these new forms of education delivery hold great promise for Southern institutes, they also require huge investment in infrastructure. Setting up a computer laboratory is not enough. One must also consider the strength of the server, the reliability of the Internet connection, the reliability of the power source, not to mention the capacity of the teacher and the librarian – the human infrastructure.”*

#### Recommendations formulated at the conference

During the conference relatively little time was spent on ICT issues as such. And what was said was the same as is written in the papers. Since ICT offers such opportunities, yet is so costly, the main recommendation for donors is to invest more in ICT infrastructure. Mbwette's conclusions are very much in line with this:

*“In the first place there need to be sufficient ICT facilities and services in all higher education institutes. These must be linked to sustainable international bandwidth access. To close the digital gap, development partners and institutes have to give a much higher priority to projects that attempt to provide for such facilities at national level. Policies on both licensing of communication services to higher education institutes have to be favourable as well as regarding costing of bandwidth and taxation of ICT – related goods.”*

Yet, it is not only a matter of finance and hardware, but also of skills and attitude, as Mbwette points out (p. 9):

*“Institutes have to ensure that academic staff is aware and enabled to facilitate the paradigm shift whereby students become the centre of attention in teaching and learning process.”*

### 3.4 Donor influence

Since the aim of the conference was to arrive at better support systems for higher education development in the South, this topic will be dealt with in greater detail. However, we will limit ourselves to general donor influences, leaving the specific issues of effectiveness and efficiency of different higher education programmes to the overview paper that focuses on donors and administrators of aid programmes.

#### Driving forces

International aid is driven by a complex set of forces as it is an expression of international solidarity and of enlightened self-interest in the North.

An essential factor in the North is the willingness of the general public to pay higher taxes for development cooperation. Ongoing exposure in the media of the struggle for survival among the poor motivates people to contribute generously, as was once again confirmed after the tsunami disaster which struck Asia in December 2004. On the other hand, there is an increasing demand for the

development sector to show clear results and to ensure that resources are used effectively. The formulation of the MDGs is an attempt to explain in clear terms to the general public what value they can expect for their money, while at the same time they function as a mechanism enforcing donor coordination. The higher education sector is one of the sectors that has experienced the disadvantages of this process: an over-simplification of reality (both of problems and solutions) and an overly narrow focus on a few visible and measurable results.

Historically, development aid has been a battlefield between ideologies and although the cold war is over, ideological elements are still part of the game. Samoff explains in his paper how the World Bank is promoting a neo-liberal agenda and how this can undermine ownership of policies by governments. While in the past World Bank involvement in policy development was justified by the fact that it had to be sure that loans could be repaid, it is increasingly being justified on the grounds that it advances the cause of disadvantaged groups (women, poor regions, ethnic minorities). The involvement of World Bank staff and World Bank hired consultants in conceptualising and writing international studies and national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) plays a key role in exerting influence. Other elements are more visible, such as conditions set on loans and the World Bank's role as certifier of policies and policy reforms for a range of multilateral and bilateral donors.

Individual nations in the North may have strategic interests in the South. Both geo-political considerations and market factors (exports or securing raw materials) play a role. We have seen above that in the higher education sector this is explicitly the case when Northern institutes try to attract well qualified staff from the South.

### Impact

That donor support is vital for higher education systems in developing countries is accepted as a fact in all the papers submitted by Southern policymakers. The papers on Uganda and Mozambique are very explicit about the positive contributions of the international donor community. At the same time all are well aware of the fundamental limitations of external support. As Brito et al. put it (p. 13):

*“External resources should be an aid to achieve a national goal and not a substitute for national commitment.”*

As explained above, Samoff points out that too much donor influence (in his case the World Bank) can lead to less ownership on the recipient side and that can translate into reduced national commitment.

The traditional aid modality is project support and this is not without its problems, as Gordon explains in his paper (p. 7) on the University of Ghana:

*“Donor agencies often play a dominant and determinant role by providing much needed funds to continue with basic programmes. Unfortunately, very often donor grants are earmarked for specific projects, have strict conditions for disbursement, reporting and financial statements, and very seldom are these conditions coordinated with institutional policies. Through grants, funding agencies can obtain increased influence over the institutes. Donors or external university ‘partners’ now determine activities, reporting cycles and procedures, negotiate and control directly projects or individual units, and in general interfere and limit the autonomy of the institute and their capacity to establish priorities.”*

Gordon also points out that this is not in line with the seven principles of effective aid as laid down in the Rome Declaration on Aid Harmonization, where the focus was on aligning financing with partner country priorities, improving aid predictability, relying on country systems and strengthening systemic capacity.

One of the widely used solutions to curb some of these problems is the sector-wide approach (SWAp) where donors coordinate their efforts and provide basket funding to governmental agencies. Kasozi

explores in great detail how donors influenced the policy development process in Uganda, where SWAp is the dominant approach (p. 4):

*“A group of 12 donors formed the Education Funding Agencies Group that provides budgetary support, relevant expertise, develops specific projects and monitors the implementation of education policies and initiatives. It provided massive funding for primary education; without it primary education in Uganda would never have achieved what it has.”*

Yet he goes on to explain that it has been very difficult to convince the government and donors that the main problem in the education system has moved from the primary to the secondary and tertiary level. So the same SWAp that was a useful tool for primary education can become a powerful stumbling block to higher education development. One of his conclusions is as follows (p. 13):

*“External forces influence the process of higher education formation as well as the final product for implementation. What remains of a number of internally originated plans and initiatives is what is agreeable to external sources, even if these forces do not force their points of view. The internal actors must fulfil all their commitments or help will not be forthcoming.”*

This seems similar to the World Bank approach in working with PRSPs as explained by Samoff: donors can enforce their points of view, without doing it overtly. However regrettable this might be, it is plain reality, as was revealed at the conference as well. Donors cannot be compelled to finance initiatives that they do not believe to be effective. And as the stakeholder group of donors stressed during the conference, they need to balance the interests of Southern partners with the interests of their own citizens, both tax-payers and pressure groups like higher education institutes. And sometimes general public opinion in the North becomes a force in its own right. For example, if public opinion is mobilized to ensure sufficient funds for a campaign like Education for All, the same campaign can make it much more difficult to mobilize support for higher education. This is why the stakeholder group of donors asked the higher education sector to provide them with arguments explaining how support for higher education is linked to achieving the MDGs; without such arguments they will not be able to justify that support to the general public or to parliament.

Nkanza provides some interesting conclusions on Zambia's experience with setting up a Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) as part of the sector-wide approach. This PCU was created to ensure optimal use of the pooled resources of different donors; in practice it has led to the following difficulties (Nkanza p. 9):

- The PCU was not sufficiently integrated into the line structures of the programme and tended to operate as a 'parallel' organization.
- The PCU began to operate on behalf of implementing agencies by assuming and centralising operational functions (e.g. procurement, financial management, monitoring and reporting).
- The centralization of operations caused considerable delays in programme implementation.
- Insufficient clarity on the responsibilities of implementing agencies and conflict between them.
- Insufficient focus on particular problems, resulting in spreading of limited resources across many issues, with limited success on particular ones.
- Due to its highly centralized nature, planning and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems were slow and the M&E objectives were difficult to attain.

Nkanza (pp. 9-10) concludes that direct support from cooperating partner to implementing agencies worked better, relatively speaking, because:

- Implementing agencies were able to develop their own work plans and budgets and had direct control over their activities.

- It was easier to identify weaknesses within implementing agencies and to design interventions to strengthen these institutes through, for example, training of staff.
- Resources to the training delivery system flowed more efficiently.
- The targeting of resources at particular institutes, and particular problems, resulted in clearer and better outcomes in those institutes.
- Implementing agencies developed a sense of ownership of the reform process, and assumed responsibility for their actions.

Donors could contribute to fighting the brain drain through better salaries for civil servants. Many donors presently work with topping up of salaries in one way or another. The case of Zambia illustrates the limitations of this approach. Nkanza explains that a donor agreed to meet the operational costs (including contributions to salaries) of the newly established Regulatory Authority on the basis that this support would decline over time and that the government would increase its support to offset the decline in external support. In practice, the government has not been able to increase its contribution, which in fact represents a decreasing proportion of the budget. Nor has it been enthusiastic about paying local experts salaries that are above those paid to the civil service. At the same time it is not always appreciated by governments that in the absence of local experts, donors may have no other option than to use international experts.

But not everything is negative or problematic when it comes to donor support. Despite criticism of the way the World Bank works, all the papers submitted by heads of African higher education institutes (Afeti, Luhanga and Mashalla, Gordon, Nkanza and Kiamba) are positive about the impact of World Bank education projects in the 1990s. Most focused on strategic planning at university level and as we have seen earlier on, this is generally seen as successful. Kiamba notes (p. 12):

*“It is important to acknowledge that the WB-supported projects in the early 1990s heralded a shift in policy to a largely market or neo-liberal basis and its usual conditionalities. This obviously made it much easier to subsequently introduce reforms through entrepreneurialism that the University of Nairobi instituted, e.g., initially, through cost sharing and, later, through full fee paying strategies.”*

Managers of higher education institutes are also positive about the impact of donor activities on the current activities of their institutes. Luhanga and Mashalla (p. 21) are explicit about this:

*“The donor support therefore, proved to be very useful and facilitated the University in developing infrastructure, expanding student enrolment, improving teaching and learning resources, building human resource capacity, and increasing the volume and quality of research as well as the quality of services to the community.”*

Obviously some critical views were aired as well. Gordon reports on a project at his institute (University of Ghana) that was totally controlled from the North, ignoring the Southern agenda and needs. The main problem was the exclusion of Ghanaian institutes from the formulation of the project. Mbwette (of the Open University of Tanzania) expresses in his paper some frustration concerning a donor procedure for the identification of projects that is in his view neither appropriate nor transparent.

Several authors expand on the use of technical assistance (TA) as one of the aid modalities. This is not always in line with the perceived needs of the receiving institutes, as Lwakabamba (p. 12) explains:

*“The negative result of this approach (TA) is that huge chunks of budget assistance actually go to such consultancies rather than directly to the intended institutes. In most cases, the choice of such consultants is not even up to our institutes.”*

Yizengaw writes very critically about *compulsory* employment of experts in institutes or departments by donors and sometimes even doubts the *willingness* of donors to understand and address local problems, opportunities and priorities.

Other papers are more positive about the contribution made by technical assistance. Brito et al. comment on the case of Mozambique (p. 8):

*“Donors turned into direct stakeholders, hardly different from the national members of the team. They brought their specific expertise, knowledge and international experience[...]. In many respects, their view coincided with those of the national team. Their contribution as part of the national process created a sense of ownership of the plan to all. The interaction between national and foreign (donor) experts brought about new ideas such as competitive funds for the improvement of educational quality and research at higher education institutes, and a fund to support students from provinces with low higher student enrolment rates.”*

### Recommendations formulated at the conference

Making aid for higher education development in the South more effective is not an easy task. The papers show that support for higher education faces similar dilemmas to those confronting all development programmes. The effectiveness of aid depends on finding the right balance. First, at intervention level: how can a balance be achieved between the need to coordinate efforts at higher levels and the need to be flexible and deliver practical results?

- IF too many small projects are undertaken, the receiving partners/systems are overburdened.
- IF all the money is put into one basket, the gatekeeper to the basket (be it the World Bank or representatives of a group of donors) might have too much power. Since this power is not legitimized it can easily lead to lack of accountability and/or one-sidedness.

Secondly one has to find a balance between providing hardware, knowledge, TA and topping up the salaries of local staff:

- IF too much hardware and equipment is provided, these cannot be maintained after support is phased out.
- IF only training, information, knowledge and skills are provided, these can often not be applied if the necessary equipment and infrastructure is lacking.
- IF too much technical assistance is used to cover skills deficits, this can lead to dependency and to insufficiently informed decisions.
- IF general salaries are enhanced, this can probably not be maintained by governments and too great a difference between salary levels is not politically acceptable.

To find the proper balance in all these dimensions requires involvement and commitment on the one hand and critical distance on the other.

On the use of technical assistance to make up for the skills deficit, Kasozi formulates (p. 13) recommendations on making optimum use of both:

*“Northern experts, where they are used, should not be funded for mere tourist visits of a few weeks. They should be funded to do thorough field surveys of institutes and the system. Where local knowledge experts are unavailable, the Northern expert should team with local middle personnel to undertake studies that precede and inform the process of drafting important policy documents.”*

Brito et al. underline (p. 12) that the usefulness of international experts also depends on the strength of the national team:

*'The involvement of technical assistance by donor agencies in the reform process has been quite successful, primarily because they became part of a broader, national team instead of running their own independent show.'*

## **4 Conclusions**

The higher education sector in the South is recovering from severe underfunding but it is still under pressure. This pressure is not only caused by budgetary constraints but also by international trends that threaten the autonomy of higher education in the South. The ever-increasing pressure created by privatization and cross-border education requires a strong response from governments in order to guarantee a minimum quality standard for institutes and curricula. Strengthening national quality systems is indeed the single most important priority for higher education policymakers in the South. Donors could make their support more effective by providing sufficient support for quality assurance in the coming decade. They should also reconsider the coherence of their own education policies, as Northern countries increasingly try to attract well educated people from the South to strengthen their own economy.

Another way of improving the quality of research and education is the strengthening of international partnerships and networks. At present the Northern higher education institutes are still dominant in these partnerships and networks, and more needs to be done to shift ownership to the South. Centres of Excellence could contribute to this, although not all stakeholders are currently convinced that this is an efficient way to do it. What everyone does agree on is that support programmes should be adjusted in such a way that they can cater for more South-South cooperation.

Some international trends are favourable to the higher education sector in the South: new ICT approaches enable higher education institutes to deliver education to a larger group than before. An increasingly liberalized world market for education makes it possible for an increasing number of students to obtain (joint) degrees from reputable universities. Fellowship programmes are an essential tool in this respect and these are increasingly tailor-made through approaches such as the widely used sandwich model. Donors can further enhance the impact of the programmes by integrating them into institutional development programmes.

Coming back to the main question of how to make support for the higher education sector in the South more effective, the overall conclusion is that comprehensive and flexible programmes are needed with a range of tools to be adapted to specific local circumstances. How this could be organized will be discussed in the overview paper on donors and administrators. Here we can however note that in the view of the Southern participants, more attention should be focused on system elements like quality assurance and quality enhancement.