

The development of a strategic plan for higher education in Uganda 2001-5: the interplay of internal and external forces in higher education policy formation in a southern country.

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1.0 Introduction

Any national policy reform development of a major service delivery system operates in, and is influenced by, the social forces present in the subject society. The factors that influence major political, economic and organisational behaviour of a given society influence the process of policy formation including that of higher education policy. The drafting of a strategic plan for higher education from 2000 to 2015 in Uganda was influenced by the same political and social forces that influence the daily lives and fortunes of Ugandans. This paper will focus on the impact of the interplay of internal and external forces (mainly the donor community) on the process of developing a strategic plan for higher education in Uganda. The attitude and experience of internal policy makers as well as the policies of the donor community influenced the development of the plan whose final draft is about to appear in the country's Parliament. Due to the forces mentioned above, the document that is going to Parliament will have lost a number of its major and crucial recommendations. Unfortunately, some of these recommendations are considered key to providing the country with policies that would address a number of major global forces impacting on higher education today. Yet many parents, policy makers, the labour market and students would like the higher education system to deliver quality higher education that is relevant to the national and global needs. Such a situation can only happen when policy makers are ready to take bold decisions. Finally, the paper will suggest operational behaviour that can maximise benefits from the interaction of local (southern) and external (northern) actors.

2.0 The process of reform in underdeveloped countries is influenced by internal and external forces

The lives of people in countries with weak social, political, economic and civil society structures are influenced not only by internal but also by external forces. Due to the weaknesses of internal forces, external forces in the form of economic, technical and,

often political, assistance become vital for the stabilization of the majority of undeveloped countries. Although internal actors may have good ideas of how to develop the state, these ideas need external inputs to become real. Thus in many of these countries, policy development is a joint enterprise of both the local and external forces. Policy packages that are eventually implemented are the result of interactions between internal and external forces. Ideally, the stamp of the internal forces, who are the consumers of developed policies, should be more prominent than those of external players. But this is rarely the case due to the weaknesses of underdeveloped states structures.

2.1 Internal forces of change

The government of Uganda, educators and parents have been the major internal forces of change desiring to reform higher education to make it relevant to the needs of society. In 1989, the government selected an eminent educator, Professor Senteza Kajubi, to head a team of commissioners to review Uganda's education. The report of the said Education Policy Review Commission "Education for National Integration and Development, 1989" noted that: "The current courses and programmes should be reviewed, revised or updated where necessary to make them more relevant" (Kajubi Report, 83, 1989). The report also recommended the establishment of a National Council for Higher Education to coordinate the development and management of higher education (Kajubi Report, 1989:74). In 1992, a government white paper which endorsed the recommendations of the report was produced (Government White Paper, 1992:90 – 112). But it was not until ten years later that the National Council for Higher Education was operationalized. However, the White Paper did not fully tackle the problem of curriculum reform to make higher education more relevant to social needs. Further, in a number of other government planning initiatives including the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Vision 2025, the Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture and others, the role of relevant higher education is emphasized. However, neither of these plans defines "relevant higher education" and how it will be used as an engine of development. What is unnerving about policy initiatives and developments in Uganda is that there was no strong civil society to

reinforce government initiatives and effort. Most of the discussions and sensitization workshops were organised either by the government or by the donor community. Indeed most of the participants demanded, and still demand, payment for attending policy development workshops!

In recent years, the major internal force of change has been the ever increasing demand for higher education. This demand has put politicians, policy makers, bureaucrats and parents in a situation of constantly trying to find solutions of placing the ever increasing number of students in tertiary institutions. The fear of a mismatch between students and educational facilities that could lead to the lowering of the quality of education has been a major factor in pushing for change. Since the 1970's, higher education enrolments have been growing at an annual average of 10-20%. In the last few years, the growth has been phenomenal as Table 1 indicates.

Table 1. Growth of Tertiary Enrolment in Uganda in recent years

Year	Population estimates in millions	Enrolment	Growth	Percentage	Enrolment Per 100,000 of population
1969	9.5	5,341	NA	NA	56
1980	12.6	10,352	5,011	48.41	80
1990	16.5	17,000	6,648	39.11	104
1995	19.2	30,268	13,268	43.84	157
2000	22.3	59,716	29,448	49.31	268
2001	22.8	68,408	8,692	12.71	300
2002	23.3	78,367	9,959	12.71	336
2003	23.9	89,775	11,408	12.71	375
2004	25.0	108,295	18,520	17.10	440

The expansion of enrolment has triggered a number of challenges. First, there has been an unprecedented emergence of many new institutions of higher learning including university and non university ones. From one university institution in 1987, the country now has twenty eight private and public universities, some of which are less than glorified high schools. The number of non-university tertiary institutions has risen from two (2) in 1970 to one hundred and twenty seven (127) in 2004. Secondly, a number of

suppliers of higher education have joined government as deliverers of higher education. Many social groups with an interest in higher education policy including profit motivated ones, politically motivated ones and a number of philanthropic ones have begun to participate in the delivery of higher education. This is welcome but 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. However, few of these emerging social groups participated in the process of the production of a strategic plan for higher education. Lastly, there is a developing mismatch between increasing numbers and education facilities. A survey of institutions of higher learning by the National Council for Higher Education has revealed that education facilities have not been expanding fast enough to match increases in student numbers (NCHE Survey: 2004). This ugly development will inevitably lead to the delivery of inferior higher education.

2.2 External forces of change

The major external forces of change that have influenced higher education policy formation have been the donor community. For the education sector in Uganda, these are organized in an umbrella organisation called the Education Funding Agencies Group (EFAG). This is a group that consists of mainly northern donor institutions and countries (Appendix 1). They have been, and still are, very vital for the development of education formation and implementation in Uganda. They provide:

- Needed budgetary support for education,
- Relevant expertise where it is needed,
- Specific project development in education and
- Monitor the implementation of education policies and initiatives.

Without the help of EFAG, Uganda's education sector would never have achieved what it has. This is especially so in the area of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. The EFAG members have massively contributed to the funding of UPE.

However, the views of the external groups as to which level of education should receive the lion's share of public funding do not seem to have changed since the publication of the World Bank report on higher education in developing countries in 2000 (World Bank, 2000). In the past, international funding agencies and the ruling African elite have correctly emphasized the primacy of primary education. While every one is agreed that this has been a correct position to take, an attitude has developed which regards other levels of education as footnotes or appendages to basic education. The donor groups need to come out strongly to the support of other levels of education, particularly higher education, **which is immediately key to economic development**. The allocation of funds to the tertiary sub sector has stagnated at 9-12% of the Ministry of Education budget (Table 2). There is also strong local support for this type of financial behaviour since many of the delegates who attend the Education Sector Reviews come from local regions, where the political issue is basic and not higher education.

Table 2: Recurrent budget allocation in billions of Uganda shillings, 2001/2-2005/6

	2001/2 Estim.	2002/3 Planned	2003/04 Planned	2004/05 Planned	2005/06 Planned
Total Education Sector Recurrent (in Ush billion)	350.53	403.07	65%	66%	66%
Primary Education	66%	63%	65%	66%	66%
Secondary Education (including NTCs)	16%	18%	18%	18%	17%
BTVET	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Tertiary (without tertiary BTVET/NTC)	12%	12%	11%	11%	11%
Others	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: World Bank, 2004:28

Higher education should be moved up on the priority list. There are compelling reasons to either increase allocations to higher education to 20% of the Ministry budget or to get special allocation to implement the major recommendations of the strategic plan. These reasons are:

- UPE graduates and the current demand for higher education will overstretch tertiary education facilities. With increased student numbers in the tertiary sub-sector, funding levels must change to reflect changed circumstances.
- It is now clear that massive global forces are impacting on higher education and national tertiary systems must have the capacity to address and cope with the impact of these changes (World Bank, 2000).
- With the commoditization of higher education, poor countries are becoming exposed to unregulated international higher education markets because these countries lack capacity to regulate incoming education commodities.
- Higher education is increasingly becoming the key to economic development as knowledge based economies are replacing traditional modes of production. “Today, global wealth is concentrated less and less in factories, land, tools and machinery. The knowledge, skills, and resourcefulness of people are increasingly critical to the world economy. Human capital in the United States is now estimated to be at least three times more important than physical capital “ (World Bank, 2000:15). Without more and better higher education, Uganda cannot develop and implement its macro and micro economic development plans.

However, the process of the formation of the tertiary strategic plan showed that funding of the plan that was beyond (a) the Medium Term Budget Framework(MTBF) and (b) above the traditional 9-13% of Ministry budgetary allocations to the tertiary sub-sector would not be entertained. As a result, the core of the plan, which the 1989 Education Policy Review Commission and the White Paper emphasized, mainly the massive overhaul of the curriculum, is not part of the draft that formed part of the cabinet paper that will come to Parliament soon. The important ICT recommendations that would link Uganda’s tertiary sub-sector to the international academy and knowledge are not properly addressed in the said paper. Only those areas that do not need extra funding outside the MTBF seem to be entertained. How then can a new initiative take off if not lubricated by extra funding?

3.0 Higher education policy formation in Uganda has been a process of the interplay of internal and external forces.

For the last two decades, higher education policy development has been a process of co-operation between external forces – the donor community and internal forces – the education bureaucrats and stakeholders. Since 2000, there have been three major policy developments pertaining to higher education. These were (a) the loan scheme, (b) the open university project and (c) the strategic plan for higher education. This paper will focus on the development of the strategic plan for higher education to highlight the interplay of internal and external forces in the formation of higher education policy in an underdeveloped southern nation. The author will suggest lessons to be learned from Uganda’s experience in the hope that lessons learned will improve future practice.

3.1 Preliminary to the drafting of strategic plan for higher education.

The drafting of the plan was preceded by an Issues Paper that informed the process of writing. The Issues Paper was to be preceded by a number of studies to understand the state of higher education. The Ministry of Education appealed to donors to fund four studies. The studies were meant to analyze the current state of Uganda higher education and suggest ways of improving it to cope with local and global forces. The following were the studies.

- A Macro study to position the Ugandan higher education system in a comparative global context and in the context of an economic development strategy. The consultant produced a paper entitled “Redesigning Uganda Higher Education Policy in a Global Context” in June 2001.
- A Finance study to evaluate the current schemes of tertiary education financing and the impact of expansion on the budget and on future access and equity. A report entitled “Management and Financing of Higher Education in Uganda,” was produced June 2001.

- A Micro study to describe current coverage, equity and efficiency. A first draft of this study was finished in September 30, 2001.
- To fill in the gaps of the Macro study that were noted due to the failure of the consultant of the first study to stick to the Terms of Reference, another paper a “Macro Study Supplement Notes: Positioning Uganda Tertiary Education in an International Context”, was produced later on

When the studies were over, a local consultant was retained to produce the Issues Paper using the above studies. However, the local consultant found that the four studies were:

- Good at analyzing international models of higher education and giving various options for adoption.
- Very thin on the actual state of Ugandan higher education; its history, current problems and needs.

The local consultant realized later that at least two of the external consultants had visited Uganda for brief periods, had not done comprehensive studies of the Uganda higher education sub-sector and had not interviewed seasoned higher education academics and policy makers. There were no labour market surveys, nor those of commerce, industry or agriculture which the tertiary sector feeds. The writer of the Issues Paper had no alternative but to start on a data collection exercise to increase the stock of available knowledge on Uganda’s tertiary sub-sectors. The external experts might have improved their products if they had stayed longer in Uganda, discussed with local people who have the intellectual capacity to comprehend theoretical and practical models and tested their assumptions locally before flying back to the north. The input of external experts into the Issues Paper were therefore not materially substantial.

Eventually, a comprehensive Issues Paper was produced and was hailed as good by both internal and external critics. By 2001, time was ripe to start on the drafting of the strategic plan.

3.2 The aims of the initial draft of the strategic plan for higher education.

The drafting of the strategic plan was contracted to three local consultants. The writer of the Issues Paper was selected to be the lead consultant. The funds for writing the plan were paid by the European Union and Ireland Aid.

The initial plan was an ambitious document meant to overhaul the country's colonial style higher education curriculum that is theoretical, compartmented into unbridgeable disciplines and trains students to move on the next levels instead of life skills. It was structured around the themes: enhancing quality and relevance, increasing equity, and relevance, access, efficiency and effective higher education based on reformed financing for higher education, improving governance in higher education and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The draft plan is summarised in its item 3.1 which described the type of graduate Uganda needed to produce as follows:

“The plan proposes a tertiary education sector that produces students who are useful to themselves and the nation. The desired type of graduate determines the structures and nature of the higher education system to put in place. From the plan's view, Uganda needs a versatile, retrainable and well informed graduate who can operate in both the local and global market. The emerging Uganda economy needs skilled, practical and patriotic workers. The graduate must have a specialised work skill built on a bedrock of a broad knowledge of his physiological, philosophical and sociological self through knowledge of the functioning of life and its environment and the social dynamics of the society in which he/she lives. Such a graduate must not only be versatile, able to retain, acquire new ideas and skills but must also have the ability to continue learning as long as s/he lives. To get such a graduate, the study of both sciences and arts/humanities at tertiary level is essential. On top of these basics, each of our institutions must add a moral touch to the education or a student derived from the mission of each institution. The curriculum reform and other supporting structures proposed in this plan have been designed in such a way that the desired graduate as described above will be produced by the emerging flexible, integrated and diversified tertiary education sub-sector. The proposed curriculum reform whether of structure or content is therefore student focussed.”

The focus of the reform was on curriculum. The draft proposed a liberal curriculum where all tertiary students would do general studies in the first year and specialise or major in their last two to four years of study. Further, computer literacy was to be mandatory to all students because these studies are considered key to participation in the emerging national and global markets. It was realised that the plan was expensive to implement, so a number of implementation options

were given (appendix 2). Further, most of the cost was planned to be paid for by the private sector. A critic of the plan, Fred M.Hayward has commented as follows on the draft strategic plan:

“This is a very impressive strategic plan, well conceived, well organised, and well documented. Not only are the goals spelt out clearly, but they are broken down into sub-categories that both give a clear idea of what is intended and make costing a much easier process than is often the case. The vision, mission, and goals are important and well done. The breadth and depth of some of the goals are breath taking. The only worry is that failure to reach some of the targets may be taken as a failure of the plan as a whole (Hayward 2004:30).”

3.3 Consultations and discussions on the draft strategic plan.

The draft plan was discussed by many stakeholders. The Forum of Vice Chancellors and Academic Registrars discussed the draft at a meeting at the Uganda Christian University on 15th September 2003 and selected option four for implementation (Appendix 2). Further, academic registrars sitting separately at Makerere University discussed the draft and made some minor adjustments. A national workshop consisting of educators, business, commerce, industry, agriculture and non-government organisations met at Hotel Africana on 22nd -23rd October 2003 to discuss the plan. They too, endorsed the major recommendations of the plan. Top Ministry of Education Officers also reviewed the plan before it was discussed in the sector review.

It was at the Education Sector Review of November 2003 that the draft plan lost its major areas of innovation. The Ministry of Education organizes very useful sector reviews twice a year to account for what it has done. These reviews are very informative and officials of the Ministry benefit by the constructive criticisms of participants. External and internal forces meet at these reviews. Donors, educators, politicians, business people and members of the civil society are invited to the reviews. However, most of the participants, particularly those from the regions, have more interest in basic than higher education faced the following hurdles:

- Most of the participants were attached to the “primacy of primary” education and showed little interest in discussing the plan as was done by the Vice Chancellors and Academic Registrars when discussing the same

document. This lack of interest was discernable even among the donor community.

- As a result of the above, it was not possible to accept allocating more funds to higher education beyond the traditional 9-13% of Ministry allocation.
- There was a misguided view that to reform higher education, it is mandatory to start with the lower levels. The truth is that in East Africa, it is university and other tertiary entry requirements that condition and set the curriculum of the lower sectors of education. Lower levels of education train for, and set their programmes, for admission to higher levels. If university entry requirements change, all secondary and primary school curricula would adjust to accommodate the change.

Both external and internal forces within the sector review shared the following assumptions:

- The plan was proposing massive curriculum change that could affect the entire education system.
- The changes were too expensive to be funded within the Ministry budget, in the Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF). How could one reform such an archaic higher education system as the Uganda one without setting aside more money for doing so? What was being said is that the plan was a dead draft. In effect, the status quo in the tertiary sub-sector was to remain unchanged.
- There was a quiet but unwritten consensus that only those areas that did not need funding outside the MTBF would be implemented.

Thus although the people who administer higher education institutions had recommended option four, the Education sector review recommended option two as the most realistic.

4.0 The Final recommendations

The recommendations that were eventually adopted were:

- The introduction of a credit system

- Rising of the number of students taking science and technology from 15% (in 2004) to 30% (by 2015).
- Increased access
 - To the poor through a loan scheme
 - To regions by establishing a university in the East
 - Rehabilitation of existing infrastructure
 - Encouragement of the private sector participation
- Financing
 - Government to fund tuition and not welfare
 - Government to sponsor 75% science students and 25% arts and humanities.
 - Government to establish a Universities Grants Committee in the long term.
 - Government to fund only students who are studying subjects that are key to economic development
- Governance
 - To empower the National Council for Higher Education by more funding and appropriate legislation.
- Control and Prevention of HIV/AIDS
 - All institutions to be required to have programmes for HIV/AIDS prevention.

If implemented, these reforms would make the higher education sub-sector good-just good but not wonderful. The sub-sector will not be able to address all the global forces impacting on higher education or deal with the surging numbers of students. To benefit from higher education, the country must find the money to overhaul the curriculum and to integrate ICT in the delivery of higher education.

5.0 Conclusions

- (i) The process of higher education formation is both a political and social process. In countries with low political and economic

development, internal and external forces operate in the process of policy formation. Ideally, external forces should supplement internal initiative in both ideas and funding. But due to the weak political, economic and social bases of southern countries, the reverse is often the case. 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.

- (ii) The best way to start on reforming a higher education system is to have thorough studies of the state of higher education involving visiting and collection of data from each of the institutions of learning. 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 institutions and the system.
- (iii) 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.
- (iv) There is a perverse fear of change especially higher education change amongst bureaucrats. Micro changes at reforming institutions might be the alternative method of higher education innovation in the south. Changes in one institution could trigger developments elsewhere. Already Makerere University and Uganda Martyrs University's innovative examples are influencing other institutions.
- (v) Few African countries can afford to restructure their higher education systems to address global changes that are impacting on tertiary education. They need external assistance. It is clear that

Uganda cannot afford the ideal option in the strategic plan. The only way is to get a grant to do so.

- (vi) In Uganda, external partners groups in EFAG have been a positive factor in the development of education, particularly the lower levels of education. As higher education becomes increasingly key to economic development and as UPE graduates move on to the tertiary sub-sector, the eyes of internal and external actors must refocus to higher education. Unless higher education is urgently reformed to address internal and global forces, the reforms of the primary and secondary levels will not have the best social impact. Students who are well trained at lower levels need good tertiary institutions in a good tertiary sector to go to.
- (vii) If Uganda wants to develop fast, it must fund the tertiary sector and allocate at least 25% of Ministry budget to higher education. As one writer put it in the New Vision, Feb.22/05 (Mayanja):
 - “Obviously the Government cannot reverse the UPE policy and the political commitment to it, but if it wants to transform the Ugandan economy, it must know that our manpower bottleneck is not at the provision of UPE graduates but that of degree holders at the highest level as well as A-level and O-level leavers.”
- (viii) A recent study of the tertiary sub-sector by the National Council for Higher Education has revealed very depressing information regarding availability of education facilities, quality of academic staff, infrastructure and linkage to current sources of knowledge. The country needs to attend to this sub-sector as urgently as possible.

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6. Appendices

Appendix 1. Members of EFAG

1. The world Bank
2. European Union
3. Development Co-operation of Ireland (DCI)
4. The Netherlands
5. Japan (JICA)
6. Germany (GTZ)
7. World Food Programme
8. UNICEF
9. DFID
10. ADB
11. USID

Appendix 2. Options for implementation of the Strategic Plan

The costing option assumes that University education will have three years of which one year will be a compulsory science and humanities for all enrolled students. It also assumes that within the MTEF major expenditures changes will not be possible. However, expenditures are expected to transition to realistic unit costs by 2006/07, where the quality of education will be addressed.

Option I: Constant Enrolment composition

This assumes a status quo in enrolment composition at the University and Other Tertiary Institutions sector levels of 59% and 41% respectively. In addition the

option assumes a modest growth in students enrolled for science courses to 18,959 (30%) by 2015 from the current 4,456 (10%). Due to staff constraint in terms of training and ability to recruit, this assumes that the teacher student ratio will be 1:25.

Under this option the cumulative public expenditure will be Ushs 2,206bn within the plan period. This creates an expenditure deficit of Ushs 448bn based on the 16% higher education sector share of the gross education sector budget. The average private expenditure as a percentage of GDP at factor cost will be 63%.

Option II: Transformation within the constrained resource envelope

This option assumes a student enrolment distribution of 50% in the University and 50% in the Other Tertiary Institutions. It also assumes a growth to 30% of students in University enrolled for science related disciplines by 2015.

Within a constrained resource environment this is the preferred option. It assumes that total teaching staff will be 50056 by 2015. This is expected to increase at an average of 50PhDs per annum and 100 staff getting Masters degrees this will gradually increase to 100 staff PhDs per annum and 150 masters per annum within the whole higher education sector. The option however assumes that the total number of students sponsored by the public will remain constant and the changes will be in composition.

The cumulative public expenditure under this option is Ushs. 2,287 billion with a deficit of Ushs 529 bn. This option assumes that the new unit cost funding mechanism will be applied. And what welfare component in the medium and long term is taken up by the private sector.

Option III: Minimum resource utilisation

Option three assumes a status quo in enrolment distributions of 59% University and 41% Other Tertiary Institutions. It however assumes that students taking science in Universities will increase to 37,287 (50%) of total University enrolment by 2015. This option does not maximise resources utilization and has a cumulative public

expenditure of Ushs 2,519 billion and an average GDP a factor cost private percentage distribution of 63% for the private sector.

Option IV: Ideal

This is the ideal option where major transformations in higher education will be realised. The option addresses quality as well as input to structural transformations. Target enrolment will increase to 50% in both the Other Tertiary Institutions and Universities. In addition enrolment composition in the Universities will be 50% for the sciences and 50% for the humanities from the current 10% and 50% respectively.

Under the option the public will finance 10% of the development expenditures by 2015. The public will sponsor forty percent of students offering science and 40% of students in Other Tertiary Institutions. On the other hand 75% of students offering humanities will be sponsored by the private sector. The option assumes a staff student ration of 1:15. Total number of staff will be 8,426 by 2015.

The cumulative public expenditure will be Ushs 2,465. Billion with a deficit of Ushs 707 billion recorded over the plan period. Private expenditure is Ushs 6,089 billion giving a GDP at factor cost average percentage expenditure of 62%.

Option V: Status Quo

This is the baseline and status quo model. Under the option, enrolment composition is maintained at 59% and 41% in the university and Other Tertiary Institutions respectively. It however, assumes a growth to 30% of students enrolled in the science related disciplines in Universities by 2015. Under the option unit costs are maintained at the current average levels of Ushs 1.5m for the Other Tertiary Institutions and Ushs 3 million for the humanities and 5m for the sciences in Universities. Inflation of 3% over the plan period is factored into the unit costs to get an average Ushs. 1,688,000 unit cost in the other tertiary sector and 3,300,000 in the Universities by the year 2015.