

or introducing them to new cheating techniques. Learning about the dissemination of corruption might augment its acceptance.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

While it is almost impossible to eliminate corruption in endemically corrupt environments, corruption can be mitigated. Anticorruption policies should, however, be smart enough not to make things worse. Anticorruption policies stipulating zero tolerance of corruption, targeting the needs of specific groups, and showing the negative results of academic dishonesty over a long-term perspective—such as the direct and indirect damage to human lives—are likely to have more success. ■

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The Vicious Circle of Quality in Ethiopian Higher Education

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CONTEXT

The Ethiopian higher education sector has been undergoing rapid expansion in the last 15 years. Over this period, the number of public universities has grown from just two to 35 (among which two are universities of science and technology), compared to three private ones, and the number of undergraduate students has surged from a little over thirty thousand to 729,028 (in the 2014–2015 academic year), putting the gross enrollment ratio at 10.2 percent. The government of Ethiopia is now building 11 new public universities during the second phase of the country's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II). This is a massive undertaking with many implications, in particular an urgent need for qualified teaching staff.

In order to have sufficient numbers of qualified teaching staff for the planned universities, the ministry of education invited students graduating from bachelor's programs to sit for a qualifying examination at the end of the 2014–2015 academic year. Those successfully passing the examination—which was tailored to each major—could be hired as university teachers at the rank of graduate assistants in

their respective fields.

While this procedure is an improvement over the practice in previous years of hiring graduate assistants solely based on grades and English language proficiency, the results were less than ideal: a sweeping majority of the candidates failed the test. These results indicate the seriousness of the challenge Ethiopia faces in the coming period: to simultaneously expand access to higher education and improve the quality of the education delivered.

WHAT NUMBERS TELL US

A quick look at some of the data from this exercise yields some striking results and worrying observations. Close to 10,000 students graduating from 32 universities across the country took the centrally prepared examination, which was offered in 14 fields of study. Eligibility was based on expressed interest and minimum requirements of a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.75 for men and 2.5 for women. Ultimately, 716 candidates were selected and offered a job, among which 30 percent were women—conceivably in line with the objective of increasing the share of female academic staff to 25 percent by the end of the Fifth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP V), in 2020.

While the maximum possible score was 100, only one person scored more than 80 (81, to be exact), followed by 28 candidates who scored between 70 and 79. The overall average score was 57.8, with no significant gender difference (59.3 for men and 54.3 for women).

A score of 57.8 in one's major must be viewed at best as a mediocre result. Disturbingly, 127 of the selected candidates (or close to one-fifth) scored a failing result (less than 50 percent score means failure according to the education policy of the country). Here, there is a considerable gender gap: 12.9 percent for men as opposed to 29.7 percent for women. Of course, it is also important to note that this is a result from a small sample of the highest scorers in the respective fields, representing just about 7 percent of those who took the examination. One can imagine the results of the remaining 93 percent of those who sat for the examination, or even worse, for those who reach the cutoff point to qualify for the examination in the first place.

These are deeply distressing numbers. Not only is the average result of the new generation of university teachers unquestionably mediocre, but a sizable proportion actually failed the qualifying examination in their own major subject. This has grave implications for their skills as teachers and their standing as role models for their students.

THE QUALITY CRISIS

Low caliber university teachers are one major input in the vicious circle of feeble quality in Ethiopian higher educa-

tion. Simultaneously, because of the low quality of primary and secondary education in Ethiopia, students are unprepared for university-level education. The country's Fifth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP V) reported that "many students joined higher education institutions with results below the 50 percent threshold in the higher education entrance examinations." ESDP V further notes that the combination of low-quality instruction and unprepared students could be the cause for low graduation rates among undergraduate students. For the government, on the one hand, to make such an assessment, and, on the other hand, to hire university teachers with such poor levels of academic performance appears to be utterly self-defeating.

The problem is even more serious in certain fields. For example, the average score for test takers in the fields of mathematics and physics were 48.3 and 50.5, respectively. Such low scores in these fields are particularly worrisome, since these subjects are considered fundamental to the country's priority academic areas of engineering, science, and technology.

There are also implications for research capacity. Since 2011–2012, research has accounted for only 1 percent of the total budget of all universities, and much of the research is conducted predominantly by graduate students. Given the quality of graduates, and of those admitted into graduate programs, the research capacity of Ethiopian universities is in serious jeopardy.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The overall poor quality of Ethiopian university education, its graduates, and its research infrastructure represents a real danger to the national economy and the country's development agenda. Immediate responses are needed to address these concerns.

As a quick fix, there is a need to create arrangements for competent professionals from industry to take part in teaching, perhaps partnering with freshly graduated assistant recruits; establishing a mentorship program where senior staff could train and empower their novice colleagues; creating better pay and benefits packages that attract more qualified professionals to the teaching profession; better utilizing Ethiopian professionals in the diaspora; and, in spite of all its drawbacks, using expatriates in certain important fields.

The long-term solution is, however, to slow down expansion and focus on strengthening existing institutions, with particular emphasis on creating differentiation across the system. Specifically, by reducing the rate at which new universities are established, selected senior institutions must be elevated to research universities and resourced accordingly. These institutions can engage in high level academic and research work, which provides two key benefits.

First, they will serve as hubs for knowledge generation and transfer, and for scientific and technological advancement. This provides the critically needed knowledge supply for the development of key sectors, such as agriculture and industry. Second, as epicenters of academic advancement, they will have the capacity to strategically produce highly trained and qualified academic staff for the new universities to be established, and strengthen the existing ones.

It is high time to take the issue of quality in Ethiopian higher education more seriously and come up with practical solutions to avert the looming crisis. Otherwise, Ethiopia's grand plan to expand access to higher education will result in universities of poorer quality than those already in business. ■

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Unusual in Growth and Composition: Ethiopian Private Higher Education

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CONTEXT

With more than 110,000 students (2016), Ethiopia's private higher education (PHE) is the largest or second largest in sub-Saharan Africa. This large private presence exists despite Ethiopia being rather late to start PHE and despite some stiffly restrictive regulation.

It is common for expert and public opinion in a given country, partly for lack of knowledge of other countries, to hold an exaggerated view of how atypical their systems are. But a reasonable conclusion from scrutinizing Ethiopian PHE is that in fundamental ways it is indeed significantly atypical for sub-Saharan Africa. After acknowledging several not insignificant commonalities, we will hone in on the more striking differences.

Though large in absolute private enrollment, Ethiopia's 14–17 percent private *share* is typical of sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the types of Ethiopian PHE are those found throughout the region. By far the largest chunk is nonelite,