

ing of thoughtful practitioners in the field, working in tandem with researchers, policymakers, and institutional leaders who are sensitive to the practicalities that reside within the “big issues” dominating so many strategic discussions about internationalization today.

Around the world, there are research centers and programs devoted to the education and training of higher education professionals, many of which seem to be concerned about matters of internationalization. But, the scope of these research and training efforts is very unclear, as is the quality of the products they produce or the training they provide. Equally, there is a very uncertain connection between the needs for information and expertise by policymakers and practitioners, and what researchers and educators/trainers actually produce.

“Intelligent internationalization” demands the development of a thoughtful alliance between the research, practitioner, and policy communities. Those participating in the elaboration of internationalization activities and agendas have access to the information, ideas, and professional skill-building opportunities that will enhance their ability to navigate the complex and volatile higher education environment of the next 20 years. ■

To Be or Not to Be—A World-Class University?

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With the 2003 publication of the first international ranking by Shanghai Jiao Tong University and the subsequent emergence of competing global league tables (*Times Higher Education*, Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan, QS, and others), more systematic ways of identifying world-class universities have appeared. As a result, a major concern of governments has been to find the most effective method for inducing substantial progress in their country’s top universities. While a few nations—Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, for example—have opted for establishing new universities from scratch, most countries have adopted a strategy combining mergers and upgrading of existing institutions.

In order to accelerate the transformation process, several governments have launched so-called “excellence initiatives,” consisting of large injections of additional funding

to boost their university sector. The recent excellence initiatives have been launched mainly in East Asia and Europe. These programs usually have a limited number of beneficiary universities and focus on research upgrading.

Many of these excellence initiatives mark a significant philosophical shift in the funding policies of the participating countries. In France, Germany, and Spain—for instance, where all public universities have traditionally been considered equally good in terms of performance—the excellence initiative represents a move away from the principle of uniform budget entitlements toward a substantial element of competitive funding.

Measuring the effectiveness of excellence initiatives is not an easy task for at least two reasons. First, upgrading a university takes many years. Since many excellence initiatives are fairly recent, attempts at measuring success would be premature in most cases. The second challenge is related to attribution. Even if a correlation could be identified on the basis of a large sample of institutions, establishing elements of causality would require an in-depth analysis of case studies.

In the meantime, it is possible to identify a number of risks and challenges associated with the ongoing race to establish world-class universities. The overemphasis on research sends the wrong signal that the quality of teaching and learning is not important. International rankings clearly favor research-intensive universities at the cost of excluding excellent undergraduate teaching institutions. In the United States, for instance, liberal arts schools such as Wellesley, Carleton, Williams, and Pomona Colleges, and engineering schools such as Olin College are all recognized as outstanding colleges, but fail to be included in the rankings.

The focus on world-class universities is likely to further promote elitism. In the search for academic excellence, top universities are very selective, which bears the risk of keeping away talented students from families with low-cultural capital. With a 1:100 success ratio, the Indian Institutes of Technology are the most selective institutions in the world. Similarly, the Ivy League universities are the most selective universities in the United States.

The search for academic excellence is in danger of being thwarted by restrictions on academic freedom in non-democratic countries. While it may be a lesser constraint in the hard sciences, it certainly hinders the ability of social scientists to conduct scientific inquiries on issues that are politically sensitive in China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, for example.

At the end of the day, instead of focusing exclusively on building world-class universities, governments should worry more about developing well-balanced tertiary education systems that encompass the whole range of institu-

tions necessary to address the variety of learning needs of a diverse student population. ■

Africa's Troika Conundrums: Expansion, Consolidation, and Un(der)employment?

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African higher education has recorded an impressive growth in the last decade. Currently, an estimated 14 million students study in higher learning institutions in the region with Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia enrolling the highest number of students. Over 500 public and 1,500 private universities operate in the region. Yet, still the enrollment rate, at around 6 percent, stands as the lowest in the world.

If expansion of access could be triumphantly described as African higher education success, the grim realities of its quality diminish this declaration. As enrollments in the system have grown exponentially, quality of teaching, learning, and research has suffered precipitously. Massive expansion has meant that class sizes ballooned, academics overloaded, resources declined, activities trimmed, and facilities deteriorated—creating a perfect storm for quality crisis.

The implications of massive growth are probably nowhere clearer than on the research landscape. Africa's figures on research productivity are depressingly low hovering at above 1 percent. Despite the impressive growth of the system, the region has little to show for its knowledge productivity—an agonizing reality in the knowledge era. Poor quality and knowledge productivity continue to depict the system—necessitating consolidating excellence, while pursuing expansion. Ameliorating the situation requires sustained commitment and meaningful resources to research and development.

As expansion is rapid and consolidation is staggering, a once reluctantly tolerated predicament of unemployment for university graduates has surfaced—with a vengeance. The continent is now awash with unemployed and underemployed graduates, in some cases prompting organized action. As Africa still counts its enrollment rates in

single digits—and still needs to catch up with the rest of the world—the massive unemployment of graduates has emerged as a serious national, regional, and international conundrum, following the Arab Spring allegedly sparked by unemployed graduates.

Higher education expansion is part of national development plans, though their implementations are increasingly tempered with narrow political whims. Thus, opening new public institutions are more influenced by political imperatives than relevance and appropriateness. Opening a university has become part of a political manifesto across the region, pursued both by incumbents as well as oppositions in the hope of scoring electoral votes. Such crass politics tend to undermine the possible differentiation of the system—putting more pressure on the delicate relationship between expansion and consolidation, quantity, and excellence. Egalitarian views of all public institutions in a country as equals are not only flawed, but also costly.

The triple conundrum of African higher education is as complex as it is forbidding—with no immediate relief in sight. Thus, meaningful system differentiation, expanding delivery modes, diversified financing, vigorous quality regimes, sound institutional autonomy, and “robust” curricula help address the confounding predicaments.

Sustained macroeconomic growth, attractive investment opportunities, declining internecine conflicts, more accountable and transparent governments and institutions—attributed to ever-growing African self-confidence and its global image—and most importantly the favorable higher education perceptions increase optimism in the outlook for higher education development in the continent. ■

Is the Decline of the Universities' Credibility Irreversible?

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As modern societies are moving toward knowledge societies, the hope is that universities will be the main benefactors of this trend. Some experts warned: universities will lose their monopolistic or oligopolistic role of knowledge production and utilization and keep only the single power of awarding degrees. In the mean time, even this power is