

Once these were centralized in the university, the emphasis shifted to undergraduate teaching. But research today opens into a much larger space than the academic graduate world. There are nongovernmental agencies that are leaders in new areas of research, where the Jesuits would be challenged to revive their lost tradition.

A "Study of Jesuit Colleges in India" by Fr. John Macia in 1982, concludes with "the conflict between two organizational goals: (a) the pursuit of academic excellence, (b) the promotion of greater social justice." In the present context of the affiliating university in this country, our mission today indicates an obvious choice in favor of the second. The new economic policies being adopted in the country, which are likely to hasten growth and certainly sharpen inequalities, only make this choice all the more urgent. The real creative challenge is not in the resolution of this played-out goal-conflict, but rather in the dialectic tension between a critical intellectual quest and an effective commitment to education for justice. This, we believe, must be the real creative challenge for Jesuit higher education in India on the threshold of the 21st century.

Currency and Crisis Higher Education in Francophone Africa

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African higher education has been in crisis since the 1980s—in contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, which were periods of lavish spending and expansion. This crisis was exacerbated in the 1990s by worsening economic conditions and the constraints of structural adjustment programs (SAP). Most features of the crisis are common to francophone and anglophone African countries. However, some aspects are unique to francophone Africa and are due to factors internal and external to higher education. This article gives an overview of the situation in Africa, in general, and focuses on the francophone part of the continent.

Increasing enrollments, unsustainable expenditure patterns, declining quality, and irrelevance to national needs have been mentioned as problems common to universities in sub-Saharan Africa. This accounts for the fact that among the three main outputs of higher education (i.e., high level manpower, knowledge and innovation, and development advisory services), the region has produced relatively too much of the first and not enough of the second and the third. The overproduction of graduates and the deterioration of quality are major characteristics of the current crisis in higher education in Africa. The consequence of the overproduction of graduates is the considerable unemployment and underemployment among graduates of African universities. Some features of the deterioration of standards are: 1) the low quality of teaching, and 2) the low internal efficiency resulting from high drop-out rates, which increases the cost per graduate, and the unnecessarily high costs of higher education borne by the education budget of African countries.

Common Problems

Although most aspects of the crisis of higher education are common to the entire sub-Saharan region, certain processes particular to the francophone higher education systems as well as the devaluation of the currency of these countries (the CFA Franc) in January 1994 have exacerbated the crisis of quality in the francophone area of Africa. The tradition of free university education inherited from France has led to a dramatic increase of student numbers. Until now,

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[HTTP://WWW.BC.EDU/BC_ORG/AVP/SOE/CIHE/CENTER.HTML](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/center.html)

It is recommended to use Netscape 1.1 or a similar graphical browser to access the above location, which offers a wide variety of online resources, including: full text versions of the Center's newsletter, *International Higher Education*, library and data information resources, scholarly exchange and research funding resources, online journals in the field of higher education, and international news resources. The Center has already received recognition from Point Communications, a well-known leader in information technology, that the Web site is in the top 5% of all Internet resources in terms of quality, and has been incorporated by Yahoo, Lycos, the Internet Yellow Pages, and other popular Internet directory services.

all students who pass the secondary school leaving exam (*baccalauréat*) can enroll in universities without paying tuition fees. Consequently, universities in francophone Africa are overcrowded because they enroll more than two to three times their capacity. This situation has dealt a damaging blow to quality of life and training in universities. There are tremendously more students than student residences, libraries, classrooms, labs and other equipment can accommodate. The limited teaching staff cannot monitor such large numbers. Quality has deteriorated increasingly due to lack of the minimum academic environment necessary for adequate work.

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The current crisis of francophone African higher education systems can be partly ascribed to the fact that they have not adapted to changing realities. In fact, inherited ideas and practices now regarded as anachronistic and obsolete in Europe have not been replaced by more appropriate and relevant policies. The current francophone university is still organized and operated like the French universities before 1968.² The authoritarian administrative model which exists in these universities is rigid and hierarchical. It is not flexible enough to adapt to changing needs and does not promote the involvement of students. The lack of integration of students' concerns has been one cause of unrest and riots on campuses in francophone Africa for the last five years. The result of these widespread student protests has been the loss of at least one academic year on every campus during this period due to the government's decision to close universities.

Academic programs have also failed to adapt to the needs of students and to changing realities. For example, in June 1995 in Côte d'Ivoire, students were protesting against the system of promotion in some faculties at the universities. There were different grievances depending on the discipline. In the Faculty of Letters students expressed concern about the policy according to which dismissal from the Faculty could occur even in the third year (in a four-year degree program) if one did not pass the final exams. In the Faculty of Medicine students opposed the fact that one could be dismissed from the faculty even in the fifth year (in a seven-year program) if one failed a subject re-

lated to computer training. In Benin, the situation is similar in the Faculty of Medicine³ and the Faculty of Agronomy, where one must continuously pass exams every year or be dismissed mid-way without any "intermediate" certificate.

These examples illustrate the excessive internal selection process that offers few opportunities to students and does not take into consideration their overall performance. A student can be dismissed after three years in a four-year program if he or she fails to pass one or two subjects. The adoption of the "semester" approach in lieu of the academic year and of the "credit" system could help the francophone African universities address some of the issues raised by students.

Currency Issues

The devaluation of the currency common to francophone Africa (the CFA franc) had a dramatic effect on the economies of the concerned nations. It created an environment of uncertainty and crisis for all sectors, including education. Debates and controversies are continuing on the positive or negative effects of the devaluation of the CFA franc? Let us just mention that, with the devaluation, the fixed exchange rate of the CFA franc in relation to the French Franc (FF) has moved from 1 FF = 50 CFAF to 1 FF = 100 CFAF. In simple terms, the purchasing power of the CFAF in regard to the FF has been divided by two. African countries have to spend twice as much to buy the same value of goods abroad. The devaluation has had a negative impact on education systems in Africa. It has put serious strains on the budget of the nation by increasing the CFAF needs for foreign purchases. This has reduced the prospect for the development of education budgets, which face stagnation or even reduction. In such a situation higher education, which has been criticized for its cost-ineffectiveness, has little hope of financial improvement.

The devaluation of the CFAF has contributed to the deterioration of existing difficult working conditions in universities and has negatively affected quality. Universities that lacked equipment and materials cannot purchase as much as they used to. Libraries cannot buy as many books and subscribe to as many foreign journals. Less students and faculty exchanges with foreign universities are possible.

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The rapid development of the nonacademic external career among faculty members is another negative consequence of the devaluation of the CFAF. The devaluation has accelerated the deterioration of the living conditions of the faculty who feel the need to seek outside employment to make both ends meet. The insignificant salary increases have not improved their situation. Some are able to take a second job in the private sector although they are full-time government employees. But the majority of those engaged in external activities join branches of the government as ministers, deputy-ministers, directors or advisers to the president of the Republic or to ministers. All these activities are carried out at the expense of their academic work, because such faculty members are no longer able to perform their teaching and research duties regularly and adequately. Although universities suffer considerably from this "defection" of faculty members, they can take no action because these individuals are officially appointed to these political or technical positions by the government, their employer. This defection, in addition to the freeze on recruitment, creates an acute shortage of faculty in universities, which is one major cause of the quality crisis.

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The economic difficulties faced by the sub-Saharan countries in the mid-1980s have considerably affected governments' approaches to educational development and their established priorities among subsectors. In fact, economic difficulties have forced them into SAP, with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The SAP implies adjustment of all sectors, including education. With the assumption that existing educational financing promoted ineffective uses of resources and inequity among subsectors in favor of higher education, education sector adjustment programs developed within the context of the SAPs recommended a shift in financing in favor of basic

education, based on the perceived benefits to the majority of the population. This approach to the development of the education sector is a source of controversy among higher education stakeholders (government, donors, faculty, and students). Universities have become the lowest priority of the education sector and within the context of the devaluation of the CFAF, they cannot expect an increase in their share of the scarce resources allocated to education.

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As a whole, the current crisis of higher education systems in francophone Africa is related to internal and external factors. The systems are suffering from the strong influence of the French system, some aspects of which are found to be anachronistic in France and are being reformed. African Universities have not devoted sufficient energy or are reluctant to adapt their internal processes to the changing realities. The devaluation of the CFAF has added to the marginalization of higher education, resulting from shifting priorities in the education sector due to structural adjustment. This devaluation has had pervasive, long-standing and devastating effects on all aspects of higher education. These are hard realities that need to be addressed for the survival of higher education in francophone Africa.

Notes

¹ The World Bank, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1988).

² N.T. Assié-Lumumba, *Higher Education in Francophone Africa*, AFTR note no. 5, (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1993).

³ In the francophone African system, the students are admitted to the Faculty of Medicine after obtaining the secondary school leaving certificate (*baccalauréat*) and passing a special test. It takes in general seven years to become a medical doctor.

⁴ Natalie Camara, *Afrique-Education* no. 11 (April-May 1995).