

New Report on Higher Education in Developing Countries: Educated People Are No Luxury, They're Essential

Mamphela Ramphela and Henry Rosovsky

Mamphela Remphele was vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town and is currently managing director of the World Bank. Henry Rosovsky is professor emeritus at Harvard University and former dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. They were coauthors of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society. Address: Mamphela Ramphela, World Bank, 1818 H St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433, USA. Henry Rosovsky, Loeb House, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.

Recently, World Bank president James Wolfensohn marked a sea change in thinking about higher education in the developing world, endorsing the final report of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society, on which we were fortunate to serve as coauthors.

Mr. Wolfensohn committed the World Bank to redoubling its efforts to support higher education, sending an important signal to the rest of the development community. "It is impossible," he said, "to have a system that functions without an appropriate and deep commitment to higher education."

Education is vital to the prospects of developing countries. The poor, by definition, have very few resources. First-rate education and health care are vital investments in the assets they do control: their own labor, enterprise, and ingenuity. Educated, healthy people do not need to be rescued from poverty. They rescue themselves.

But the stakes are rising. The knowledge economy demands highly specialized skills. It also moves at a faster pace. People must now learn how to learn, or they will be left behind. Primary and secondary schools aim to provide students with a strong grounding in the 3 R's and other vital skills, but higher education offers the depth and flexibility people need to thrive in the modern workplace. It also promotes human development by enhancing the life of the mind and creates the freedom to pursue knowledge for its own sake.

The case for higher education in developing countries may seem straightforward, but it has traditionally been contentious. Development orthodoxy holds that investment in basic education yields higher returns than money spent further up the system. Higher education is thus a luxury, runs the argument, that developing countries cannot afford.

If this argument was ever true, it is no longer. The issue is not primary and secondary education versus higher education, but rather achieving the right mix among the three levels. As leaders, entrepreneurs, and administrators, highly educated people are enormously important to social and economic development. Investment in higher education is thus strongly in the public interest. Sustainable

poverty reduction will not be achieved without a renaissance in the higher education systems of developing countries.

We are not talking about systems that concentrate exclusively on professional training, either. We argue that some of the most promising students should receive a first-class general education. To overcome their serious problems, developing countries need to liberally apply a vital resource—brainpower—not money.

Ultimately, this concerns helping some of the world's fledgling democracies to thrive. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has pointed out, democracy matters most to the poorest. No famine has ever occurred (or been allowed to happen) in a society where leaders must listen to their citizens.

Education is vital to the prospects of developing countries.

The problems of the developing world are indeed serious. Demand is rising fast, but higher education systems are expanding chaotically. Low-quality institutions mushroom in the private sector, while public-sector provision suffers from underfunding, lack of vision, poor management, and low morale.

The solution demands a holistic approach and a strategic vision of what can be achieved. We advocate "planned diversity" as a third way between central planning and chaotic expansion. Both public and private sectors must be involved in a system that uses the market's energy but recognizes the areas where the market cannot deliver: most notably in the areas of basic science, the humanities, and access for the disadvantaged.

We see the state's most important role as a guarantor of standards. If talented but poor individuals are denied access by the system, then the state must intervene. It must also fight to improve the current lamentable standards of governance in many countries and to boost capacity in the vital areas of science and technology. When resources are limited, they must be spent well, not wasted by demoralized faculty, teaching out-of-date curricula to poorly motivated students.

Institutions should specialize. Research universities remain important in all but the smallest and poorest countries. But other institutions should not be treated as poor cousins. Centers of excellence can be developed through

out the system—not simply reserved for an educational elite. Distance learning provides the most exciting challenge to the status quo, especially as it becomes clear that many remote parts of the world will have Internet access long before they enjoy decent roads.

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society brought together 14 educational experts from 13 countries with the intention to start an ongoing debate, not to answer all the questions. We firmly believe that rapid progress can be made, but only with political will, new resources,

and people prepared to contemplate and develop imaginative solutions.

At the report's launch, Wolfensohn asked why we needed such a document when what is being said is absolutely straightforward. "We need it," he said, "because we've forgotten it, because we don't give higher education the weighting that is required." We wholeheartedly agree. ■

Authors' Note: This article is reprinted, with permission, from the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, London, UK.

Transformation of Hungarian Higher Education

Ildikó Hrubos

Ildikó Hrubos is professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Budapest University of Economic Sciences. E-mail: <ildiko.hrubos@soc.bke.hu>.

Higher education reform in Hungary shares some elements with similar transformations in Western countries and others that are unique to the country. Parallel to a period of economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, higher education in the developed countries experienced great expansion, signifying a democratization of educational opportunities. In the 1980s, questions concerning efficiency and competition were in the forefront of the debates over higher education. The decade of the 1990s was concerned with quality: namely, the challenge of maintaining academic values while providing education for the masses. In the case of Hungarian higher education, not only have all of these processes been condensed into one decade but they have also been initiated under deteriorating economic conditions. Another peculiarity of the Hungarian case is that reforms were introduced that simultaneously affected both the content of education and the system of administering it. This was necessary to address the changing needs of the labor market and society at large as well as to break down the ideological and political biases of the system that prevailed under the state socialist (communist) regime.

The Expansion of Higher Education

In the academic year 1990–1991, the ratio of those admitted to institutions of higher education was rather low compared to international figures—a mere 10 percent of the 18-to-22-year age group. A rapid increase in student numbers in the 1990s served to reduce this gap: by 1997–1998, enrollments climbed to 20 percent and are expected to reach 30 percent by 2005. As a result, university enrollments increased 2.3-fold between the academic years 1990–1991 and 1997–1998.

This expansion of student numbers was achieved partly

by increasing enrollments in existing universities and partly by establishing new institutions and programs. Nonstate opportunities for education were introduced, including private universities and denominational schools. The number of institutions of higher education in Hungary increased overall from 77 to 89 (28 of these were established by churches and enroll 5 percent of all students; 6 are private, enrolling another 3 percent).

The decade of the 1990s was concerned with quality.

The Network of Higher Education Institutions

One of the basic structural problems of the Hungarian higher education system is the fragmentation of the institutional network. Based on the Soviet model, in the late 1940s and early 1950s the faculties of traditional universities were separated from one another, and a number of specialized universities were established. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a network of colleges was created in a system similar to that of countries in Western Europe. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rationalization of the network of such disunited institutions was accomplished in other countries by merging institutions with narrow profiles. Hungarian higher education, however, has been bearing the burden of fragmentation ever since. Currently, there are 89 independent institutions of higher education in Hungary and 50 to 60 additional faculties. The most common problems caused by such fragmentation are inefficiency and limited scope of academic activity.

Transformation of the Hungarian network of institutions was initiated in the mid-1980s. Integration has been a priority supported by consecutive administrations in the 1990s and is expected to be accomplished by 1999–2000. According to the current plan, upon completion of integration state higher education will be comprised of 17 universities and 13 colleges. The new organizational order went into effect in January 2000.

Parallel to the transformation of the network of institu-