Makerere University and the Private Students Scheme

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The introduction of the private students scheme at Uganda's premier public university, Makerere, has turned the institution around and restored its academic viability. The story of how the transformation, referred to as the "quiet revolution," came about is as instructive as the actual changes themselves. Makerere University, however, will need to assert its independence under the new Universities and Tertiary Education Act and adopt a corporate management approach to maintain the momentum of reform.

The Crisis of Underfunding

Until the year 1991, Makerere University, which relied 100 percent on public funding for both tuition and living expenses for all its students, was the most underfunded university in the Eastern and Southern African Region. Its gross unit cost in 1984 stood at U.S.$345 when the average unit cost in the region was U.S.$2,000. A university professor earned U.S.$30 per month, and many lecturers had to make ends meet by moonlighting with jobs such as driving taxis, running shops or kiosks, or teaching in secondary school. Many other academics left the country in search of greener pastures. The financial squeeze manifested itself further in deteriorating buildings, constant power failures, and breakdowns in the water supply system. Journal subscriptions declined to zero as had the purchase of chemicals, textbooks, and science laboratory equipment. Research publishing dried up.

The government was not ready to provide the funds needed by the university, nor was it ready to let the university introduce cost sharing, for fear of student protest actions. Students at Makerere University insisted on free tuition, free food, and free accommodation—and even pocket money popularly known as "boom." Every time student benefits were tampered with, they would put on their academic gowns and march to the State House or to Parliament to exact their demands. In 1990, the government abolished the students' transport allowance and introduced a "book bank" in place of a book allowance; students went on strike, resulting in a confrontation with police during which two students died. The academic staff soon realized that they were absorbing the brunt of the financial squeeze by being underpaid. They started to organize themselves into strike action.

In the meantime, the demand for university places far outstripped supply. For example, in 1990 and 1991 of approximately 6,000 candidates who met the minimum entry requirements, Makerere University and two other new universities could not absorb more than 2,500 students. This created cutthroat competition for university places and escalated the cut-off points for admission to Makerere University. Wealthy parents resorted to sending their children abroad as the next best alternative.

Evolution of a Private Scheme

It is said that need is the mother of invention, and indeed this seems to have been the driving force behind the evolution of the private scheme at Makerere. After failing to introduce cost sharing to supplement government funds, the university decided to venture into admitting a few fee-paying students in existing programs. First, in order to get the government's blessing and ensure student noninterference, the scheme would not apply to any students already at Makerere. Second, the scheme started in 1991–1992 with a tiny number of students—just 300 out of a total of 2,418. Third, the scheme targeted relatively well-to-do parents who were sending their children outside Uganda at exorbitant cost. A consensus developed that once the university had admitted 2,000 government-funded students, it could admit private students to generate income.

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However, the number of private students that could be absorbed into existing programs, already running at full capacity, was limited. Departments were then encouraged to initiate additional private programs and introduce evening and distance education programs. Initially, faculties were not enthusiastic about generating income. They wanted to stick to their traditional roles of teaching and research, leaving administrators to grapple with funding. To persuade faculties to venture into income generating, it was decided to give them a lot of say in how the income generated would be spent. The central administration took less than 40 percent of the income and left the rest to the schools and under the control of the deans, directors, and heads of department and faculties. The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education inaugurated a self-sponsored external degree program in 1992 in the disciplines of commerce and education. In 1993, the School of Law and the School of Commerce seized the opportunity and launched private evening programs. In 1995, the university council sanctioned evening courses for all departments that were ready to mount them.

Makerere University formulated its first strategic plan (1996–2000) to promote this new entrepreneurial approach and adjust its administrative design to enhance the innovative process. The admission of private students, which started in a tentative way, was followed by initiatives such as the introduction of the semester system and an updated curriculum to make courses more marketable. Other changes included the decentralization of authority—including the area of finance. Finally, the legal foundations of the university have also been revised.

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Funding Problems

These momentous innovations notwithstanding, Makerere University still faces considerable obstacles. The science disciplines, which involve laboratory and fieldwork as well as research, were unable to take part in the privatization drive and still remain in the underfunding trap. This means that faculties in the medical school, agriculture, technology, veterinary medicine, and the natural sciences get lower take-home pay than their counterparts in the humanities and in commerce.

The tuition fees that were fixed at U.S.$1,500 in 1991/92 when the scheme was initiated now stand at U.S.$800. The official salary for a professor (excluding earnings from teaching in private programs) which was adjusted to USh 1,060,000 (U.S.$1,100) in 1996 is now equivalent to U.S.$600, although the amount in shillings has not changed. Thus, the income that the university generates is not adequate to meet its basic needs, and its financial stresses and strains are mounting. It is also likely that some faculties have not realized the decline in the real value of the fees they generate from students and are bent on increasing student enrollments in the belief that having more students means more income.

The new Makerere University Strategic Plan for 2000/01–2004/05 has identified funding and the need to maintain academic standards as the most critical issues facing the university and has therefore recommended that a special study on the university's funding situation be carried out as a matter of urgency within the first year of the plan period.

Systemic Weaknesses

The inability to generate income at a time when university places were in very high demand was the result of poor governance rooted in the university's legal foundation. The legal framework based on the 1970 act and the 1975 decree created a feeble management structure. Appointments to top and middle management were within the patronage of the president and the minister of education, who had the power to give directives to the university. On the ground, authority was held by the university secretary, who was more powerful than the vice chancellor and the deputy to whom he reported. The vice chancellor lacked the power to hire or fire, nor could she or he reward or punish. The institution was steered by an executive without teeth.

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The private students scheme grew within an old governance system with systemic weaknesses, which could explain the university's gradual drift into declining income levels that was discussed earlier. Despite the level of privatization attained, Makerere University lacked the autonomy it needed to assert itself. Both tuition fees and the government's contribution were fixed more than five years ago and have been quietly eroded by inflation. The university has been unable to avert the downward trend, which has had a negative impact on staff remuneration.

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A new Universities and Tertiary Education Act (2001), in which the minister of education's powers have been diminished and the university's autonomy enhanced, has recently been enacted, and the university is now undergoing a transitional period. However, serious doubts remain concerning the vice chancellor as chief executive of the institution.

A restructuring study of the university, funded by the World Bank, has proposed a corporate management model—with the vice chancellor as the chief accounting officer. The university secretary's position is transformed into that of company secretary. The proposed restructuring, however, requires another amendment to the new act, and its probability of getting adopted in the near future is not assured.

Conclusion
The private students scheme has regenerated Makerere University in record time—about 10 years. In order for this process to continue, the university should move quickly to implement the new Universities and Tertiary Education Act, which enhances its autonomy and puts it in control of its own affairs. Furthermore, the university as a whole and the schools, institutes, and colleges need to become more cost-conscious and adopt a business planning approach in course design and determining fees. Finally, the restructuring study and others have emphasized the ongoing need to review and evaluate the university's delivery system and organization and determine whether further amendments to the act are required.

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Education Reform in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

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The human resources of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are these countries' most valuable assets. As small countries with comparatively limited natural resources, the Baltic states' future will depend on the knowledge and skills of their people. Education reform has therefore been a priority of each country since regaining independence.

Differences among the Countries
The Baltic states are often grouped together, but the significant differences among them are reflected in education policy. Each country has a unique history and relations with other nations and cultures that have ongoing influence on national perspectives and policy. Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian, for example, are three highly distinct languages.

Phases of Reform
Education reform in the Baltic states is best understood in terms of phases, beginning in the late 1980s. Each country's reforms can be traced to initiatives in 1988 (if not earlier) undertaken in the spirit of the new awakening, *perestroika*, and the deterioration of Soviet institutions, during which each country experienced unprecedented grassroots engagement of educators in exploring new possibilities.

In the 1990–1992 period all three countries reestablished independence and established constitutions (based largely on earlier constitutions) and the initial legal framework for education. Enacted in the rapidly developing circumstances of 1991, these initial laws would require refinement in later years.

In the 1992–1994 period, each of the Baltic states faced extraordinary challenges in gaining economic stability and establishing new legal frameworks and institutional structures. Nevertheless, each country continued to make progress on basic elements of education reform: eliminating ideologically oriented elements within universities; developing new curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials; and developing new links with Western donors and partners.

The 1995–1996 period brought a temporary pause in the positive developments since reestablishing independence, as banking crises and economic instability drew attention and energy away from education reform. Each country attempted to shape new state policies to provide a degree of order to the previously largely decentralized and often fragmented reforms.

In the 1996–1998 period, all three countries experienced their strongest periods of economic revitalization and growth since 1991. Each country broadened the conceptual foundation for education reform and developed the second generation of legal frameworks. The laws on education first enacted in 1991–1992 were either replaced or amended significantly to reflect an increased maturity in each country's education reforms.

In late 1998, the Russian economic crisis, beginning with the devaluation of the rouble on August 17th, 1998 slowed economic growth as well as the pace of education reform of the previous two years in all three countries. Yet the commitment to reform remained strong.

Common Themes
All three Baltic states have made great strides in restructuring their higher education systems since the major changes began in 1988. Democratic principles and processes were instilled throughout the universities. A new legal framework providing for university autonomy was established, as well as a new research infrastructure, the framework for quality assurance, and a differentiated higher education system.

Previous restrictions in content and pedagogy were eliminated, especially in the social sciences and humanities, as was military training as a compulsory part of the curriculum. Dramatic shifts in academic programs were carried out, in response to changing student demands and the need to generate additional revenue from fee-paying students to offset limitations in state funding.

The narrow Soviet degree structure gave way to an award structure that is not only more flexible but also consistent with Western models and rising expectations (e.g., the Bologna Joint Declaration) for common structures across Europe and the world. The academies of science were abolished as research organizations and re-