

FEAR OF LOSING THE “ONLY SON” STATUS

Critics of the envisaged policy fear that funding, academic standards, state sponsorship of students, and the international character of academic staff may be adversely affected when the University of Botswana loses its status as the “only son” in the higher education landscape. Greater reduction of government support may have a negative impact on its ability to retain senior-level expatriate staff and maintain academic standards. Over the years, the University of Botswana has played a critical role in the training of the required manpower for the country’s rapid development. The university has attracted expatriate scholars, who constitute 35 percent of its academic staff. It is feared that further reductions in government funding may affect the ability of the university to maintain its competitive edge in Africa. Such a loss of status might challenge the University of Botswana’s vision of serving as “a leading academic center of excellence in Africa and the world.”

A concomitant issue concerns alternative and sustainable sources of funding. In line with globalization trends elsewhere, the adoption of a cost-sharing policy by the university is a likely option. However, this approach may be more controversial than in other developing countries, for citizens are long used to what a recent report by a government-appointed council (the Business Economic Advisory Council) called “a culture of entitlements” and of living in a “comfort zone.” The council’s characterization of Botswana as “a relatively low-income country with a high-income lifestyle” does not raise any hope that a cost-sharing policy would be easy to implement. ■

Violence in Pursuit of Knowledge: African Victims of Xenophobia

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On February 4, 2006, CNN featured horrific pictures of the brutal beating, maiming, and killing of African students by a fringe neo-Nazi group in Russia. While this was one of the major international media to broadcast such a story, in Russia and former Eastern European bloc countries, numerous other attacks on foreign students and scholars, typically Africans and other dark-skinned people, have been reported.

According to an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*

(September 30, 2005), Russia’s minister of education and science conceded that the government could not protect foreign students from racist attacks and called on colleges to work more closely with the police in dealing with the widespread problem. In Ukraine, the former president, Leonid Kuchma, once ordered the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the city administration in Odessa to investigate attacks and killings of foreign students. In the

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former East Germany, students and scholars from Congo, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan have been beaten, stabbed, killed—and even castrated.

THE EDUCATION MARKET

Today, around 2.2 million students in the world study outside their borders, and this trend is expected to rise significantly in the next decade. Many of these students study in institutions in the Western hemisphere. While geopolitical developments following September 11th have had some chilling effect on the mobility of students and scholars, this scenario has had a short and temporary impact across the major centers of education.

The former Eastern bloc, led by the former Soviet Union, played an important role in training a considerable number of African students during the Cold War era as part of the broader campaign to build global solidarity and influence. Many African countries sent thousands of students to these countries with full scholarships. With the decline in geopolitical influence, shift in ideology, and consequent lack of interest and capacity to train the African intelligentsia, the number of African students studying in eastern Europe has dropped dramatically.

However, many African students still pursue their studies in this part of the world. For instance, 15,000 students were reported as studying at St. Petersburg, Russia in 2005; as many as 20,000 students now study in Ukraine. Students in eastern Europe are attracted by low tuition and cost of living and relatively lax visa regulations, among other factors. Earning a medical degree in the former Soviet republics costs only a fraction of expenses in the West, and especially the United States. While it has become increasingly onerous to acquire visas for countries in the North, post-September 11th, with proper documents visas could be obtained in as short a time as 24 hours in these countries.

BEYOND LIP SERVICE

Most African governments have ignored these growing brutal attacks on their citizens. Only a few governments have expressed their concern and lodged formal complaints through

diplomatic avenues. The deafening silence toward such xenophobic atrocities committed against knowledge-seeking citizens is obvious.

In many former Eastern bloc countries, institutions have launched programs in English largely prompted by the language's growing popularity and benefits. Along with the low cost of studying in eastern Europe, the provision of English-language medium of instruction will attract even more students from poor countries, necessitating the need to create more awareness about the xenophobia.

DESTINATION COUNTRIES

It is imperative that African students and scholars who are going to study abroad, especially eastern European countries, become fully informed about the social, cultural, and political realities in their countries of study. Guidance on appropriate precautions and informed decisions to avoid such attacks are imperative. Embassies of host countries can play an active role in providing students and scholars updated and candid information on what they should expect in the countries and regions. Moreover, such a responsibility should be fully assumed by host universities not only by providing ample guidance on "survival tools" regularly but also raising awareness on the academic, social, and financial significance of foreigners on campus. It is important that institutions make it clear that they are fully committed to the safety and security of their foreign students.

SOURCE COUNTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Sending countries and institutions need to engage in the wel-

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fare of their intellectual communities abroad at various levels. The first necessity is to ensure that students not leave home without proper guidance and information to destination countries.

Foreign service staff could actively raise the awareness of their citizens to the concerns in destination countries. Embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions, especially in eastern Europe, could become more actively engaged. In cases where their citizens have been attacked, African diplomatic missions should lodge formal complaints and pursue investigations. African citizens could also play a role by organizing peaceful protest marches targeting respective embassies. Associations such as the Association of African Universities, the Southern African Regional Universities Association, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the African

Union could play an active role in addressing these issues.

STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS

African students and scholars must be conscious about xenophobia and its serious consequences. It is imperative that they pay special attention to social, political, and cultural nuances in the countries of their study. The ultimate burden for taking care of their welfare rests on them.

Foreign students and scholars need to be advised to use a variety of communication sources as well as survival tools. Electronic communication sites are ideal means. These sites may feature, among other topics, institutions where attack is rampant, places and times where crimes are common, and the nature of attacks.

CONCLUSION

The deafening silence of African governments on attacks against their citizens searching for knowledge overseas is simply deplorable. National governments, regional and international organizations, universities in respective countries, diplomatic missions abroad (and locally), and nongovernmental organizations need to do more to curb this growing problem. Moreover, host countries must take serious measures to address this rising mobility threat. The responsibilities of source countries should also not be underestimated. ■

The Minnow and the Whale: Singapore-China Relations in Higher Education

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Most internationalization literature still focuses on advanced Western states or student and staff flows from South to North. Regional internationalization retains a narrower focus, although the rise in regional trading and political blocs—sometimes supported by student mobility schemes such as ERASMUS—can mean that student mobility becomes largely regional. One little-known regional case involves the tiny island nation of Singapore and its giant and sometimes troubling cousin, China. The changing context includes China-ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) trade relations, which is substantial and growing swiftly, and China's accession to the WTO and worldwide rise in service-sector