

EduWorld International in its Internet advertisement of a PhD program offered by one of its clients (Trinity College), promised its completion in six months (with an escaping phrase “or more years”)—and to be executed “via 100% Online Distance Learning.” These fraudulent cases in Nigeria corroborate some of the findings elsewhere already reported internationally. There are also offshore master's programs operated by some other foreign universities. An MBA program of the Lincoln University, in California, is offered through the SKB Executive Marketing Nigeria Ltd. and a master's program is presented by the Netherlands Business School (Universiteit Nyenrode). Both of these programs come from low-end educational institutions, and their programs do not have the official approval of the NUC.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

In spite of these reported illegal cases, there are also legally sanctioned activities of international providers in Nigeria's fast-growing private higher education industry, which are reflective of some positive aspects of globalization. Some providers operate in partnership with locally licensed private universities in a manner that probably meets the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Cross-border Higher Education or some of the expectations of the Association of African Universities in the Accra Declaration (2004) on GATS and the Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa. One of these providers is the American University of Nigeria, Yola, which has a partnership with the American University in Washington, DC, modeled after the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

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THE NIGERIAN REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria currently has both tight (strict or restrictive) and loose regulatory frameworks. At the higher education level, the regulatory framework is restrictive even when it has some limitations in its capacity to monitor cases of illegal Internet-based cross-border actions. But at the lower level of diploma and IT-related programs, Nigeria appears unable to check the activities of unrecognized and rogue cross-border providers.

A COMPREHENSIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Although there is no detailed NUC policy to check the activities of illegally operating cross-border providers at the lower levels of the higher education system, in contrast to the legally operating ones at the higher level, the current government thinking is against the rogue cross-border providers. However, since 2005 NUC has been working on a comprehensive regu-

latory framework. However, this process has been somewhat slow, and thus we recommend that actions be swiftly taken as some reputable foreign providers would have a positive role to play in the broader higher education landscape in Nigeria. ■

Higher Education Trends in Eritrea

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Eritrea got its independence in 1991 after a 30-year freedom struggle. It is a small country located in the Horn of Africa with an estimated population of about 4 million. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with the per capita income estimated at around US\$200 and a 66.5 percent poverty rate.

COLLEGES IN ERITREA

In order to develop education in general and higher education in particular, the government has exerted efforts to develop its human resources after independence. In line with this, the University of Asmara, the only university in the country, has supplied a workforce of about 12,000 graduates from 1992 to 2007 (including 1,505 graduated in September 2007), of whom more than half are graduates at the bachelor's level and employed in different government and private sectors. Further, in 2004, the university began master's programs in six different fields. These programs are being run through funds obtained from the government and bilateral cooperation agreements. The university has also expanded its undergraduate programs. Currently, the university has 260 faculty members with about 120 PhD holders, over 50 of whom are Eritreans teaching in 43 departments. The University of Asmara has been temporarily closed, and thus all these staff have been transferred to the Eritrea Institute of Technology and other colleges. Since the local manpower is insufficient in the higher learning institutions, the government has hired (on a contract basis) about 300 expatriates from India and 10 from Pakistan. The expatriate teaching staff constitutes about 60 percent of the total teaching staff in the colleges. All the staff, both locals and expatriates, are full-time employees. In 2004, nakfa 35.89 million (US\$2.39 million) has been spent on Asmara University.

In 2004, eight other new colleges were established at the tertiary level in different parts of Eritrea. These colleges are

offering various English-medium degree and diploma programs. It is estimated that about 15,000 students are attending these colleges, of which about 25 percent complete their graduation and the remaining earn certificates and diplomas. These new colleges are established under the \$200 million World Bank loan project.

In July 2004, the University of Asmara established the School of Graduate Studies to administer the graduate programs within various colleges. In 1995, 12 years ago, it was estimated that Eritrea needed to produce up to 1,000 persons trained at the master's level. This requirement has increased as Eritrea has been facing a crisis in manpower development.

In September 2004, 35 students were enrolled in six fields of study: agronomy, horticulture, applied soil science, sustainable livestock production, development economics, and organic chemistry. Of these, 27 graduated in 2006. In 2005 35 students were enrolled in the existing fields, and 29 graduated with a master's degree in 2007. However, no students were enrolled in 2006. Graduate and undergraduate programs are taught in English. As stated earlier, the University of Asmara has remained closed since September 2006, with a conviction that it will restart as a full-fledged university with only master's and other research programs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MASTER'S PROGRAMS

The university has faced many challenges while seeking to supply productive manpower and relevant knowledge through graduate research. The master's program has been launched with a number of objectives.

Eritrea has problems related to food security; exploration and management of natural resources; economic, social, and cultural development; and health, gender, and other issues. The research-based, graduate programs have to be designed to enable graduate students to undertake research in areas of national priority. It is believed that the graduate research may help meet the major developmental challenges and constraints afflicting the country. It may also improve the quality and relevance of education at all levels in the university and the newly established institutes of higher learning.

Building graduate programs will help save the foreign currency now spent on graduate-level training at foreign universities. Until 2005, over US\$17 million has been spent on training more than 1,100 Eritreans at foreign universities. Most of these funds are donated by the development partners and non-governmental organizations. A homegrown graduate program that will eventually create opportunities for research at the doctoral level will allow the use of funds for building research and educational infrastructure in Eritrea.

Curbing brain drain will save the qualified manpower of the nation as well as the huge sum of foreign currency spent. Of the total 1,100 persons sent abroad with government funding for higher-level education, 35 to 40 percent decided to remain in the developed nations after completing their studies. This has had a negative impact on the development plans of the

sponsoring institutions. Domestic graduate programs will not only save a substantial amount of foreign currency but will also help retain the trained workforce in the country.

Eventually, the University of Asmara may transform itself from a teaching university into one devoted to both teaching and research because the graduate degrees involve research as well as teaching. According to the policy of the university, to

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start a graduate program a department must have at least a core staff of three nationals with a PhD. Thus the College of Science, Faculty of Arts, College of Social Sciences, College of Agriculture, and College of Business and Economics have started their programs with limited intake.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

The principle of relevance concerns the issues and goals that interest Eritrea and its development programs. These programs should be meant not only to pursue knowledge but also to solve socioeconomic and scientific problems in the country. Thus, local stakeholders are involved in workshops organized by each college to evaluate their draft curricula. This may enable departments to tune their curricula and research agenda to the needs of the country. The local stakeholders may also contribute to the programs by making their facilities available to graduate students.

The principle of quality has to be addressed by involving external linkage partners in the whole process of planning and drafting of the curricula. As far as possible, graduate training has to be envisaged as joint programs between the University of Asmara and partner institutions of higher learning in the North and South (Dutch, Swedish, Indian, and South African universities). The quality of the program can be pegged to the standards of these institutions. Each department can be encouraged to invite at least one professor from partner universities to offer courses and to cosupervise graduate students and their research.

While education is free at all levels in Eritrea, the principle of sustainability can be addressed through the introduction of student fees. The annual tuition fees for every student in the laboratory-based and non-laboratory-based disciplines are, respectively, US\$5,000 and US\$3,500. Since the students cannot afford to pay the fees, the government may make necessary agreements with the partners to resolve this problem. Furthermore, together with the research centers, the program aims at generating 20 percent of their budget through consultancy and research contracts. However, until the graduate programs reach a level of maturity, they will require budgetary support from the government, and that task is not easy. ■