the success of this initiative.

In contrast, Venezuela is suffering a massive case of brain drain. SciDev.Net reported that the Universidad Central de Venezuela had lost approximately 700 professors between 2011 and 2012, and the Universidad del Zulia has not been able to fill 1,577 vacant teaching positions. Working and living conditions in Venezuela are deteriorating, and most of those who went abroad to complete advanced training programs have decided not to come back to the country. Researchers, teachers, and highly skilled workers have migrated to different countries in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania.

Homesickness May Not Be Enough

Many countries are focusing their efforts and resources on attracting home expatriate academics who left the country to study abroad and decided to stay. At the end of 2013, *Colciencias*, the Colombian government's agency for research and innovation, launched "Es Tiempo de Volver" (It is Time to Come Back), a program aimed at attracting approximately 200 researchers from the diaspora. In addition to a relatively good salary—although not competitive with the remuneration typical of the countries where most of the expatriate researchers were based—the program offered tax exemptions, a relocation allowance, and a research grant. In April 2014, there were over 10,000 applications, 900 of them from holders of doctoral degrees.

Argentina, through its program *Raices*, has repatriated over 1,000 scientists since its creation in 2003. In addition to the repatriation component, the program also includes a networking strategy, by which Argentinian researchers who are not willing to come back to the country can keep in touch through short research stays or by directing research projects—such as theses and dissertations—from abroad.

The success of these initiatives varies from country to country but, in general, they all have the same weakness: they address only their own conationals, overlooking potential candidates from other countries who might be willing to migrate in search of better economic and academic opportunities.

Conclusion

Salaries are by no means the only variable that professors take into consideration when deciding to move to a different country, but they are an important factor. The existence of a solid academic community, infrastructure for research and teaching, and other elements also carry weight in any decision to relocate. The overproduction of doctoral-degree holders in many industrialized countries, together with the poor job availability for young professors entering academia in those places, may play to the advantage of nations with less-established academic communities, which are willing to attract members of the diaspora as well as international talent. Confining recruitment efforts to their own nationals can be a mistake for countries with low numbers of PhDs, as there is a growing stock of highly skilled researchers and professors willing to cross borders in the quest for a reasonably good working opportunity. ∎

The Struggle to Rebuild and Transform Higher Education in Afghanistan

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The higher education system in Afghanistan was one of the casualties of more than 30 years of war, with more than one million people killed, over 6 million who fled, most of its higher education institutions damaged, many of its institutions closed, women excluded from education and more than half its faculty members and staff lost. Its academic programs are a shell of its once proud history as a higher education leader in the region. The Ministry of Higher Education faced an enormous task to repair and rehabilitate the system once the Talibans were removed.

Confronting the Challenges

Among the most difficult challenges were the human cost of the war, including a high incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental health issues affecting more than half of the student population. Replacing the half of the faculty members who were lost to the war was another challenge. The personnel processes lacked transparency. Ideology, ethnicity, and region had become the most important factors in these decisions. The entrance examination (the Kankor) had also been compromised and people had lost faith in it. Higher education had broken down in other ways. No research was underway, and the universities had little to offer the government in solu-

tions to critical problems. Teaching also suffered with the remaining staff being badly out of touch with the current state of their fields.

By 2009 enough progress had been made in repairing the worst institutional damage, and it was possible to think about systematic plans for rehabilitation and change. Under the leadership of the Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs, a steering committee developed the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan: 2010-2014* (NHESP). Its two primary goals were to increase access and improve quality focusing on the curriculum, governance, faculty development, and facilities. That led to new policies to make major quality improvement in the system. The foundation for accreditation was finalized in July 2011. By 2013, 12 universities had completed institutional self-assessment, 50 peer reviewers were trained, and in September the first 6 universities achieve candidacy for accreditation, the first step in the three stage process. Another goal of the NHESP was met when enroll-

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ments doubled from their 2008 level of 54,683 to 130,195 in 2013, one year ahead of the target. Private higher education, which had been illegal until 2006, was flourishing—though of mixed quality—with 90 institutions and more than 130,000 students by 2014. The Kankor process had been streamlined and the corruption eliminated. A major review and upgrading of the curriculum was underway. By 2014, more than half the curricula of public higher education institutions had been reviewed, rewritten, and upgraded for the first time in history

A Higher Education Gender Strategy was released during 2013, reflecting close cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry for Women's Affairs. The number of women students went from zero in 2001 to 30,997, almost 19 percent of the students. The effort to recruit women faculty members was not as successful, partly because of the small number of women graduate students, reaching only 15 percent of total faculty members. The Ministry of Higher Education worked to overcome one of the major barriers to the increase of the number of women students the lack of adequate, safe housing, with three women's dorms under construction, two funded through the US State Department, and one using funds from the US Army. They will provide accommodations for almost 1,600 women students.

One of the key problems for quality improvement was that only 5 percent of the faculty members had PhDs and 32 percent master's degrees. The Ministry of Higher Education sent more than 1,000 faculty members without advanced degrees to study for master's and PhD—750 abroad. The first of these faculty members are returning, bringing new energy and enthusiasm to teaching, and an eagerness to carry out research. For the first time in decades, research funding became available to faculty members in 2012, through the World Bank.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

A major continuing problem for the improvement of higher education is the lack of funding. While the government has higher education on its priority list, this is not reflected in funding for higher education, where allocations have declined on a per capita basis in recent years to only US$443 from US$522 in 2010. Part of the financial problem is the lack of donor interest with only the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank as major donors. Most donors are focused on primary education as part of the worldwide effort to bring about universal primary education by 2015 through *education for all*. While we laud that success, the long-term effects are an increase in graduates from secondary school bringing greater demands for admission to higher education.

Continuing war, corruption, and mismanagement has led to a loss of trust and hope for many students who wonder if there is a future for them. The enthusiasm and optimism we saw in 2003 has turned to an almost universal distrust of the government. Another challenge is the high level of centralization of higher education. The Ministry of Higher Education is committed to increase decentralization. In November 2013 the Ministry of Higher Education's measures to allow financial decentralization were approved. That will give universities much more autonomy, flexibility, and allow them to keep funds from entrepreneurial activities.

As we look back on the changes over the past five years, we see many fundamental changes in the system that have transformed it in significant ways. Major changes still must be made to recreate a culture of research, provide better student-focused teaching, challenge students to be creative and innovative, foster gender equity, and to expand decentralization.

The Ministry of Higher Education has focused on critical areas for quality improvement: the establishment of accreditation, faculty development, curriculum upgrading, and a commitment to merit recruitment and promotions. Challenges remain, in particular limited financial resources, corruption, and political interference. Nonetheless, there is a cadre of committed, hardworking academics and

administrators who are dedicated to the transformation of the system. While successes are fragile, they just might succeed in sustaining, expanding, and institutionalizing these changes. That is the challenge for 2014–2015. We think the chances of continued success are good. ∎

The Challenges of Developing an Autonomous Higher Education System in Afghanistan

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It is well documented that until 2001 higher education in Afghanistan had been severely impacted by the effects of a nearly three-decade long period of violent conflict. However, since 2001 there have been ongoing efforts to reestablish high quality tertiary education capable of meeting the rapidly growing demands of the country's emerging democracy, with a developing economy and a bourgeoning cadre of young men and women thirsty for higher education. Demand for higher education has increased dramatically in Afghanistan over the past decade, with the number of students growing from approximately 6,000 in 2001 to almost 100,000 in 2012, and over 300,000 projected by 2020 in the public higher education system alone, with an additional 100,000 students expected to be enrolled in private institutions as of 2015. Public universities continue to be the dominant higher education institutions in Afghanistan and remain the first choice for all qualified students—given that access is free to all students who qualify and that the public institutions are viewed as the legitimately prestigious academic institutions in the Afghan society. Private institutions enjoy significant autonomy, but most of these institutions are quite small, not highly regarded, and fail to meet minimal standards for academic quality. Thus, a more autonomous public system and greater regulation of private institutions are essential conditions for the further development of a high-quality higher education system in Afghanistan.

Institutional Autonomy

The public higher education system in Afghanistan is one of the most highly centralized systems in the world, and until two years ago the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) controlled virtually every aspect of decisionmaking for individual campuses. With support from the international donor community, the MoHE made significant strides towards improving the scope and quality of higher education in Afghanistan, driven by this highly centralized approach. But in order to further support campus growth and development, in 2009 the MoHE initiated a National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) that called for, among other priorities, increased autonomy for public postsecondary institutions.

Until recently, there has been no clear strategy for how to move forward with increased autonomy on individual public campuses. A great deal of effort has been invested in the improvement of policy frameworks that provide a system-wide framework for increased autonomy, which is an important foundation for then moving to the development and implementation of (a) procedures and infrastructure for implementing policy and (b) enhanced human capacity in the ministry and the constituent university campuses. Recent efforts have been implemented to improve the capacity of Afghan universities to be more autonomous in three strategic areas: academic, administrative, and financial.

Academic autonomy focuses on increasing the role of

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faculty and administrative leaders in an improving quality assurance system, based on twelve national standards that are evaluated through self-studies and peer reviews within the campuses. This shift increasingly moves the role of the MoHE from rigid academic control to coordination.

Administrative autonomy is focused on capacity development activities in six critical areas required for the Public Financial Management Risk Assessment (PFMRA). These areas include organizational leadership, internal auditing,