

Editorial

Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise was published in 2000 under the auspices of the World Bank and UNESCO. It was steered by 14 Task Force members; two study directors; 10 funders; and nearly 100 prominent individuals from around the world who “made substantive contributions.”

The Task Force was cochaired by Mamphela Ramphele (at the time vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town, who later became the managing director of the World Bank from 2000 to 2004) and Henry Rosovsky, who was also steering committee member. In this special issue, Rosovsky, professor emeritus at Harvard University, and David Bloom, currently at Harvard University, and one of the two authors of the draft of the Task Force report, are contributing a joint article together with Philip G. Altbach, who served as a special consultant to the steering committee, and “whose extensive comments and suggestions are reflected throughout this report.” Kenneth Prewitt, at the time director of the US Bureau of the Census, also formerly vice-president of the Rockefeller Foundation, and currently with Columbia University, served as vice-chair and steering committee member; he also contributed an article for this special issue.

The Task Force included other very prominent political personalities, current and sitting government ministers, members of parliament, university and higher education leaders, and university associations. This includes such prominent personalities as Manmohan Singh (India), member of parliament and former minister of finance at the time, who became prime minister from 2004 to 2014. It may be stated that the institutional representation as well as personal standing of the Task Force members are simply far-reaching.

The report notes that not all members of the Task Force attended every meeting or commented on every draft. Furthermore, it explicitly notes that “individual differences concerning specific points may remain,” but affirms that “the document represents the consensus of all Task Force members.”

It is palpable that the eminent members of this diverse Task Force had differences of opinions and perspectives, though we are unaware of their extent. It is however clear that the team presumably agreed on the

least common denominator acceptable to virtually all individuals, institutions, and governments represented in the Task Force, or consulted.

The 135-page report, which includes six chapters, an overview, an introduction, and a conclusion, is rich with extensive tables (nine), boxes (10), and figures (five). It is important to note that the headings of the chapters are telling in their rendering, intent, and focus, and include: Longstanding Problems and New Realities; Higher Education and the Public Interest; Systems of Higher Education; Governance; Science and Technology; and The Importance of General Education.

For a seminal document as *Peril and Promise* to be impactful—and garner the requisite attention it deserves against the entrenched policy deficit of the time—it needed to be anchored in the convening powers of two of the world's leading institutions—the World Bank and UNESCO—buttressed by prominent personalities from across the academic, geographical, economic, political, and developmental divides in the world.

In featuring a special issue of IJAHE on this ostensibly groundbreaking document, we are striving to gauge its significance and contribution to the development of higher education in the world in general, and Africa in particular. With reflections from multiple corners and divergent perspectives in this issue, we hope to have been successful.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the contributors to this special issue for their perspectives and views, which enrich the conversation and shape the discourse on the region's higher education systems at the present time—and in the future.

Damtew Teferra, Professor
Editor-in-Chief

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