

What Changed after “Peril and Promise”? An Analysis of Higher Education in Developing Countries

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Abstract

“Peril and Promise” (Task Force, 2000) was published when higher education in developing countries was under great stress and strain. The sector received only peripheral reference in development discourses, no priority in resource allocations, and low returns on investments. The higher education sector in developing countries was growing slow and gross enrollment ratios (GERs) were low.

This article attempts to analyze the transformation of the sector in the period after “Peril and Promise:” its revival; new forms of globalization; the move away from government funding and control and the ascent of private providers; the sector’s successful survival of severe global economic crises; and new forms of government and management.

« Péril et promesse » (Groupe de Travail sur l’Enseignement Supérieur et la Société, 2000) fut publié alors que l’enseignement supérieur subissait une importante pression et était mis en difficulté. Le secteur n’était mentionné qu’en annexe dans les discours sur le développement, ne bénéficiait d’aucune priorité dans les attributions de ressources et ne recevait que de faibles retours sur investissements. La croissance du secteur de l’enseignement supérieur dans les pays en voie de développement était lente et le taux brut de scolarisation (TBS) bas.

Cet article cherche à analyser la transformation du secteur durant la période qui a suivi la publication de “Péril et promesse” : son renouveau, les nouvelles formes de mondialisation, la réduction des financements

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gouvernementaux et du contrôle gouvernemental couplé à l'ascension des prestataires privés, la survie remarquable du secteur face à de sévères crises économiques mondiales, et l'apparition de nouvelles formes de gouvernement et de gestion.

Introduction

“Peril and Promise” (Task Force, 2000) was published when higher education in developing countries was under great stress and strain. The sector received only peripheral reference in development discourses, no priority in resource allocations, and low returns on investments. The higher education sector in developing countries was growing slow and gross enrollment ratios (GERs) were low.

Higher education in Africa was in a state of despair, with an enrollment ratio of 15 times less than that in the developed world. Further, studies showed that infrastructural facilities and teaching–learning conditions were deplorably poor (Saint, 1992). The Task Force document provided hope and optimism on the development of higher education when it argued that “higher education has never been as important to the future of the developing world as it is right now. It cannot guarantee rapid economic development—but sustained progress is impossible without it” (Task Force, 2000, p.19).

This article attempts to analyze the transformation of the higher education sector during the period after “Peril and Promise.” It shows that higher education in this century experienced a revival, new forms of globalization, a move away from government funding and control, and that it successfully survived a global economic crisis. Although the perspectives provided by “Peril and Promise” were very helpful as guiding principles, many changes in the world of higher education went beyond what was foreseen in it.

The plan of this article is as follows: The first section analyzes the revival of the sector. Section 2 discusses emerging trends and forms of globalization, followed by a discussion on the concern for quality and university rankings in section 3. Section 4 analyzes the phenomenon of privatization and private sector in higher education, followed by a discussion on higher education in a period of economic crisis in section 5. Section 6 discusses the changes in governance and management of higher education institutions. The final section draws some conclusions.

1. The Revival of Higher Education

Several conferences on higher education preceding and succeed-

ing “Peril and Promise” influenced higher education development. UNESCO organized the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998; the World Conference on Higher Education +5 in 2003; and the second World Conference on Higher Education in 2009. The WCHE 2009 was preceded by five regional conferences held in Cartagena de Indias for Latin America and the Caribbean region in 2008; in Macao (China) in 2008 and in New Delhi 2009 for Asia and the Pacific region; in Dakar in 2008 for the African region; in Bucharest in 2009 for the European region; and in Cairo in 2009 for the Arab States. In addition, several international and regional conferences were held by other agencies and national governments.

These and other conferences, and their conclusions, reaffirmed and underlined the global context of national policies on higher education. They have, no doubt, influenced the expansion and direction of changes in higher education in many developing countries. The higher education system in the developing world expanded considerably (Altbach, et al. 2009) and moved from a period of low and slow growth to a stage of revival and revitalization in this century (Varghese, 2012). The revitalization of the sector is reflected in terms of a favorable public policy environment; enhanced public funding support; increased household investment; multiplication of providers; and diversification of study programs leading to a proliferation of institutions (private and public) and an explosion in student numbers. The status of the sector transformed from “luxury ancillary—nice to have, but not necessary” (MacGregor, 2011) to one of the most important determinants of the pace of growth of the knowledge economy (World Bank, 2009). The accent on economic benefits from higher education encouraged public and private investment to revive the sector.

Global enrollment in higher education increased from 100 million in 2000 to 195.6 million in 2012 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics [UIS], 2014), accounting for an average annual increase of around 8 million students. According to Martin Trow’s (2006) classification of stages of development of higher education, and based on the latest available data by UIS (UIS, 2014), higher education is at an elite stage in 23.8 percent of the countries; at a stage of massification in 34.5 percent of the countries; and at a stage of universalization in 41.7 percent of the countries.

It can be stated that all developed (OECD) countries have universalized higher education; most middle-income countries have massified their higher education systems; and the least developed countries have an elite, but fast expanding higher education (Table 1). Another positive aspect of this expansion is that an increasing share of the additional student enrollments are in the developing world. The share of devel-

oped countries in global enrollment declined from 45.1 percent in 1995 (Task Force, 2000) to 24.8 percent in 2012 (UIS, 2014).

Enrollment in the African region increased from 1.75 million in 1995 to 6.3 million in 2012, accounting for an average annual additional student enrollment of around 0.27 million (UIS, 2014). More interestingly, student enrollments in Africa grew faster in this century. For example, between 2004 and 2012, enrollment in the region increased from 3.3 to 6.3 million, accounting for an average annual increase of around 0.38 million. In fact, between 2004 and 2012, enrollment in higher education in Africa almost doubled (1.9 times).

Africa is one of the regions registering the fastest expansion in higher education in this century. Global enrollment grew at a rate of 5 percent during the period between 2004 and 2012, with an average annual rate of 8.4 percent. The rate of expansion in some countries in the region was even higher (Mohamedbhai, 2008). Although many African countries have not yet reached a stage of massification, high rates in enrollment growth helped improve GERs and the share of the region in global enrollment.

Thanks to the high rate of enrollment, sub-Saharan Africa doubled its GER from 4 percent in 2004 to 7.8 percent in 2012. The faster rate of growth in enrollment also helped the region to improve its share in global enrollment from 2.5 percent in 2004 to 3.2 percent in 2012. There is no doubt that since the start of the century, higher education in the African region has entered a phase of catching up and revival (World Bank, 2009). Recent estimates indicate that the total enrollment for 2015 is more than double of what is indicated in the UIS data for 2012. According to Teferra (2015), Africa now enrolls in excess of 15 million students. However, given the low level of GER, higher education in the region has to accelerate its catch-up rate in order to enter a stage of massification.

Several factors seem to have contributed to the fast expansion and revival of higher education. First, the success of the Education For All (EFA) movement put pressure on the secondary and higher levels of education to expand. The pressure was greater among countries in Africa, where school enrollments picked up while the higher education sector continued to be small. Second, the emergence of the knowledge economy implied an increase in skill levels and higher salaries. Studies show that in the United States the 30 fastest growing occupations require a minimum of postsecondary level of education, while 30 nearly disappearing occupations only need high school (McMohan, 2009).

Table 1: Gross enrollment ratios (GERs) in higher education

Regions	GER M 1999	GER F 1999	GER T 1999	GER M 2006	GER F 2006
World	18.0	18.0	18.0	24.0	25.0
Arab States	22.0	16.0	19.0	22.0	22.0
C&E Europe	36.0	43.0	39.0	53.0	66.0
Central Asia	20.0	18.0	19.0	24.0	26.0
E.Asia and Pac.	-	-	13.0	25.0	24.0
LA and Carrib.	20.0	23.0	21.0	29.0	34.0
N.America&W.Europe	55.0	68.0	61.0	60.0	80.0
S and W Asia	-	-	-	12.0	9.0
SSA	5.0	3.0	4.0	6.0	4.0
Total in millions			132.0		

Regions	GER T 2006	GER M 2012	GER F 2012	GER T 2012
World	25.0	30.8	33.3	32.0
Arab States	22.0	25.1	27.2	26.1
C&E Europe	60.0	64.9	77.2	70.9
Central Asia	25.0	23.4	25.8	24.5
E.Asia and Pac.	25.0	29.3	31.9	30.6
LA and Carrib.	31.0	37.7	48.0	42.8
N.America & W.Europe	70.0	68.3	90.1	79.0
S and W Asia	11.0	25.1	20.3	22.8
SSA	5.0	9.7	5.9	7.8
Total in millions	143.9			195.6

Source: UIS (several years)

Third, rate of return studies in recent decades show higher returns to higher education than to other levels of education (World Bank, 2002; DBIS, 2011). “Men with only high school earn about a fifth less than they did 35 years ago. The gap between the earnings of students with a college degree and those without one is bigger than ever” (Porter, 2015, B1). The returns to investments in higher education in some countries in Africa are not only high, at 21 percent, but also the highest in the world (McGregor, 2015). For example, the private rate of returns to investment in higher education was 25.1 percent in Kenya and 27 percent in Ethiopia (World Bank, 2009, Kemenyi, 2006).

2. New Forms of Globalization of Higher Education

New forms and modes of globalization of higher education have come into existence in the post “Peril and Promise” period. Under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) framework, four modes of cross-border trade in education are identified, namely: mobility of students; institutions; programs; and teachers. In this century, the new forms of institutional and program mobility have become fast expanding modes of globalization of higher education.

The number of cross-border students more than doubled (from 1.9 to 4 million) between 2000 and 2012. The favorite destinations for internationally mobile students continued to be the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Australia emerged as a new and favorable destination for cross-border students in the 2000s. Together, these four countries hosted 45 percent of cross-border students in 2012 (UIS, 2014). Anglophone countries have an advantage since English has become the “Latin of the 21st century” and the language of globalization of higher education. Countries such as France, Japan, Malaysia, Korea etc. that have been offering courses in their national languages, introduced courses delivered in English to attract international students.

The most important sending countries are China, India, and the Republic of Korea. These three countries accounted for more than 25 percent of the total number of cross-border students in 2012. Africa sends around 0.29 million students abroad for studies. Nigeria sends the largest number of students under study-abroad programs, followed by Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Senegal. Together, these countries account for 35.5 percent of the students from the region studying abroad. Nigeria and Kenya send a majority of their students to the United States and the United Kingdom, while France is the favorite destination for Senegalese students, followed by the United States. An overwhelming majority of students (83.2 percent) from Zimbabwe move to South Africa for higher education studies.

Institutional mobility and education hubs

While cross-border student mobility is a common phenomenon, what is new in the context of globalization is the “new global regionalism.” The emergence of “education hubs” is a relatively new phenomenon (Knight, 2014). Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai, Doha etc. are examples of education hubs in operation. According to the *Observatory of Borderless Higher Education*, there were around 200 branch campuses in 2011 (OBHE, 2012). The flow of cross-border institutional mobility (branch campuses) used to be from the United States to the

Gulf countries; now, an increasing number of branch campuses are opened in East and South Asia (Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012). Since education hubs offer courses and award foreign degrees at less than half the cost of getting a similar degree from the parent institution, students and families are willing to invest in education hubs. Cross-border institutions that are public institutions in the country of origin operate like private institutions in the education hubs.

For-profit institutions and the commercialization of the cross-border segment have also led to some undesirable influences and fraudulent practices. The best example for this trend is the growth of degree/diploma mills, which very often offer online courses that are substandard, or award degrees on payment that are bogus. Private institutions are not only a way for foreign institutions to enter a country, but also a way for some of them to collude with diploma mills (Cohen and Winch, 2011). Unfortunately, the countries that have the single largest number of diploma mills (the United States and the United Kingdom) are also the countries which are the favorite destination for internationally mobile students (King, 2011).

Although Africa attracts branch campuses, it has not yet emerged as a major player in developing education hubs. There are efforts in Botswana and Mauritius to develop higher education hubs (Clark, 2015). In 2008, Botswana established a branch campus of the Malaysia-based Limkokwing University. Nearly 30 international institutions and groups are involved in transforming Mauritius into an education hub. The country has plans to increase the number of international students from around 1000 in 2013 to 100,000 students over the next decade. This seems to be very ambitious, given the fact that the total domestic tertiary enrollment in the country is only around 50,000 (Clark, 2015).

Program mobility and MOOCs

Open universities gave way to Open Educational Resources (OER) and massive open online courses (MOOCs) to promote faster cross-border program mobility. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Open Course Ware project of 2002 and the Open Learn program of the Open University (United Kingdom) in 2006 extended free access to their courses online and popularized OER. MOOCs reinforced the ideals of openness in education, sharing of knowledge, and opportunities to learn without boundaries. Many argue that MOOCs mark the “end of university as we know it” (Harden, 2013) and that they will replace the brick-and-mortar universities. However, experience has shown that MOOCs still remain complementary to the brick-and-mortar system, rather than replacing them.

MOOCs got a warm welcome with Coursera enrolling 3.1 million learners signed up for various courses offered for free from 62 leading colleges and universities within a year of its launch (*Washington Post*, 6 April 2013). The fact that enrollments in 2012 for courses offered by Coursera, EdX, and Udacity together (2.4 million) was around four times that of the Open Learning Initiative (OLI), the Open University, and the University of Phoenix put together (0.66 million), shows faster globalization possibilities of higher education with MOOCs.

The African region has a linguistic advantage to participate in globalization processes through program mobility. Many countries in Africa use English as medium of instruction in the universities. The Francophone countries have also introduced English language in schools. Therefore, Africa has a good potential to exploit the opportunity provided by technological changes.

The expansion of MOOCs in developing countries is constrained by factors such as technology, language of instruction, and granting credits and certification. MOOCs need regular access to reliable broadband internet connectivity, which is not always available at affordable prices in developing countries (Trucano, 2013). Another constraint is the language of instruction and communication, which is (mostly) English. Many students in developing countries, especially in Asia and Latin America, may not have the language proficiency expected to pursue and complete MOOC courses. Realizing the language barrier, many universities have started offering MOOCs in local languages. Another important problem is the lack of reliable mechanisms for evaluation, assessment, and certification of students following MOOCs. This may also be a reason for low completion rates (less than 10 percent) in many courses.

The limited empirical evidence from studies and surveys on MOOCs indicate that around 70 percent of MOOC participants already possess a university degree (Gaebel, 2014). MOOC students mostly belong to the educated and wealthy segments of society and are already employed. Therefore, it can be argued that MOOCs are a resource to get additional degrees, rather than to increase access to higher education for those who seek opportunities for their first university degree. It seems that MOOCs may not be the most reliable channel to improve access and expand higher education in developing countries.

3. Concern for Quality and Global Standards

The globalization process has enhanced the national demand for skills and the production of skills for global markets. Accreditation, university rankings, the creation of higher education hubs, and an urge to create

world-class universities are new initiatives to remain competitive in the globalized world of higher education.

Many countries have set up external quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms to carry out accreditation, in order to maintain a balance between compulsion to expand and pressures to assure quality. However, EQA mechanisms and accreditation processes have not proven to be the best way to maintain quality and monitor student learning. Consequently, many countries have established internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms at the institutional level. The IQA cells monitor and review academic programs, conduct student surveys on teaching effectiveness and student and staff satisfaction surveys, and analyze student progression.

The quality and accreditation movements are very strong in Africa. Most countries have not only established accreditation agencies, but make sure that national initiatives and experiences are shared among policy makers and practitioners in the region. The largest number of conferences and seminars in higher education organized by the countries in the region are probably on issues related to quality and accreditation. The region has also developed training modules and has organized orientation programs for senior managers on quality of higher education.

While EQA and IQA mechanisms attempt to ensure quality across institutions and strengthen accountability measures, new mechanisms to ensure learning outcomes in higher education and the employability of graduates is taking a concrete shape. This is reflected in the move toward developing national qualification frameworks (NQFs) to facilitate the comparability of skills, employability, and the mobility of workers within countries and across borders. It is felt that degrees awarded by institutions do not necessarily reflect what graduates can do or are competent to do. Many employers have lost confidence in the qualifications and degrees awarded by institutions. There is a “crisis of legitimacy” of existing qualification systems. NQFs are seen as a means to regain employers’ trust in the credibility and relevance of qualifications.

An NQF defines qualifications through learning outcomes and competencies (Wagenaar, 2014) and is designed to provide quality-assured, nationally recognized, and internationally accepted education and training standards. NQF initiatives started in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, spread rapidly to other developed countries, and reached many developing countries of Africa and Asia in the late 1990s. The development of NQFs has become a major international trend in reforming national education and training systems. Through funding support, the OECD, ILO, the World Bank and the European Union

have helped promote NQFs in many developing countries (Tuk, 2007).

4. Privatization and Private Sector in Higher Education

While higher education was traditionally dominated by public institutions and state funding, in this century private institutions and non-state funding have been key to the expansion of the system. With the permeation of market ideology, higher education has lost its status as a public good, its “publicness” (Longaneckar, 2005), and public funding support. There has been a move away from state control and funding to the privatization of public institutions and the promotion of the private sector (Varghese, 2006).

Privatization is facilitated by granting autonomy to public institutions without giving them adequate financial support, and by forcing them to venture into cost recovery, income generation, and for-profit activities (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt, 2005). It is true that privatization measures have helped many universities survive. For example, privatization measures helped Makerere University to “move back from the brink.” Nairobi University started admitting privately sponsored students and engaging in income-generating activities (Kiamba, 2004). Privatization measures in Africa helped many public institutions to mobilize resources, increase enrollment, improve staff salaries, working, and living conditions, limit staff depletion, and improve the market relevance of their programs.

The other trend is the proliferation and fast expansion of the private sector in higher education. Private institutions can be either for profit or not for profit. Experience shows that both types have surged ahead, and, in the process, “private non-profit institutions became much more entrepreneurial in many respects like for-profit institutions” (Levy, 2005, p.35).

Many private higher education institutions in Africa are faith-based; they are the fastest growing segment of private higher education in Africa (Varghese, 2006; Karram, 2011). While the Catholic Church dominates in the provision of private higher education in Latin America, Evangelical and Islamic faith-based institutions are common in Africa (Levy, 2006). Many are for profit and operate as “pseudouniversities,” doing education business (Altbach, 2005, p.23). Many private institutions maintain a formal non-profit legal status while functioning like for-profit entities. Most private universities in Africa offer employment-friendly courses in economics, commerce, management, and IT (Varghese, 2006; World Bank, 2009).

One interesting trend is that, in the less mature market economies of the developing countries, access to higher education has been expanded

through private institutions, while in more mature market economies, “massification” and the universalization of higher education has taken place at public institutions. Universities in Western Europe became more entrepreneurial and diversified their sources of funding, but remained public institutions. Private institutions are not very common in most developed countries, except for example in Japan, while private institutions have proliferated in Africa and other developing countries in the period after “Peril and Promise.”

5. The Economic Crisis and Higher Education

Public measures and individual responses to higher education varied between the two crises—the East Asian crisis of 1998 and the global crisis a decade after, in 2008. A review of policies during the East Asian crisis (Varghese, 2001) shows that government allocations to higher education declined, staff recruitments were deferred, and the number of cross-border students declined. Many parents moved children from high fee-paying private institutions over to public institutions, and many private universities lost revenue facing insolvency situations. Domestic enrollment continued to increase as a result of the return of students enrolled in universities abroad (Varghese, 2001).

Although it started in the United States, the economic crisis of 2008 was global in nature. Unlike during previous crises, higher education budgets were less affected by that crisis, though the impact on US public institutions was dramatic. Budget cuts were also severe in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Meanwhile, several countries increased allocations to higher education during the crisis period. These included countries both less affected and severely affected by the crisis (Varghese, 2010). Countries in Africa and Asia, in general, were less affected by the crisis and allocations to higher education did not show any visible decline.

During the crisis, enrollments in higher education continued to increase. The cross-border flow of students also increased during the crisis period. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of overseas students applying to UK universities rose with almost 17 percent, to the United States with 8 percent, and the flow of student applications to Australia followed the same trend. Except for a decrease of students from Africa (–3.6 percent), there was an increase in the flow of students from all regions of the world to the United States: 9.1 percent from Asia; 4.4 percent from Europe; 5.1 percent from Latin America; and 17.7 percent from the Middle East. In particular, cross-border students from India increased by 9.2 percent, while those from China increased by 21 percent.

This trend is the opposite of what happened during the East Asian economic crisis. That crisis and its negative impact on the value of domestic currencies against the dollar adversely affected enrollment in cross-border higher education. Students dropped out and returned to their home countries without having completed their programs, and the number of new entrants declined. For example, in 1999, a large number of Korean and Malaysian students returned home, especially from Australia and the United Kingdom, mainly due to the drop in the value of local currency against the pound sterling and Australian dollar. Between 1997 and 1998, visa applications from Malaysia to Australia declined by 80 percent (Lee, 1999). This, in fact, was one of the reasons for the surge in enrollment at domestic universities.

One important lesson from both crises is that the mode of financing moved from financing institutions to supporting students. Student support systems and scholarships increased considerably during the crises periods. This was a direct way of supporting students and an indirect way of saving many private institutions from bankruptcy and closure. Another lesson is that it is not the intensity of the crisis per se, but the priorities set by public authorities that affect budgets for higher education. With the crisis of 2008, it seems the world moved from a situation where higher education was seen as part of the problem, to a situation where it was seen as part of the solution (Varghese, 2010).

6. Emergence of New Governance Structures and Financing Arrangements

Universities across the globe adopted new forms of management. While government funding and control characterized the management of the sector in the past decades, autonomy and accountability measures became common features in the public institutions during the post “Peril and Promise” period. Governments passed new laws, granted autonomy to public institutions, created buffer bodies, introduced performance monitoring, and established external quality assurance mechanisms to help govern higher education institutions effectively in the changed context.

Public authorities in Africa created buffer bodies to support the governance of higher education systems. National Councils of Higher Education or their equivalents were established in most Anglophone African countries. Countries such as Nigeria went a step further and established separate buffer organizations for universities and nonuniversity tertiary institutions (Varghese, 2013).

Autonomy transformed the nature of institutional governance. Autonomy gives a convenient mediating position between governments

and markets. It helps maintain the image of a public institution while enforcing market principles in its operation. It permits institutions to set priorities, outline strategies, develop strategic plans and new study programs, select institutional leaders, recruit staff, diversify funding sources, and decide on internal resource allocation criteria. The introduction of performance contracts, quality assurance and accreditation, multiyear agreements between institutions and the state, and a move to lumpsum budgets are indications of increased accountability and institutional autonomy and have changed governance at the institutional level (EC, 2011).

Higher education institutions reduced their reliance on government and became more market-oriented in their approaches and result-driven in their operations. Institutions introduced cost-reduction strategies, cost-recovery measures, and income-generating activities. In a sense, universities in Africa led their own reforms.

7. Concluding Observations

The discussions in this article show that the optimism raised by “Peril and Promise” was a good incentive to frame policies and programs that helped revive the higher education sector in developing countries. The revival and revitalization of higher education in this century is reflected in terms of public policy and funding support, increased household investment, proliferation of providers, diversification of study programs, and unprecedented expansion of the sector. Higher rates of economic growth improve national and personal incomes, leading to increased capacity and willingness of public authorities and households to invest in higher education.

The improvement in household income levels has contributed to the development of higher education in two ways—through privatization of public institutions and promotion of private institutions. First, public higher education institutions introduced market principles in their operations. They became more autonomous, diversified their sources of funding, introduced cost-recovery measures, and responded more favorably to market demands. The privatization process enhanced institutional initiatives and succeeded in overcoming financial crisis and resource crunch.

Second, private providers were encouraged and proliferated in numbers and types. In the process, the sector came out of its total reliance on government funding and control. At present, private higher education has become an important, if not a dominant, segment of higher education in many countries. Many private higher education institutions have become thriving entrepreneurial and commercial

enterprises—for-profit entities.

Whether the proliferation of private institutions increases inequalities in access to higher education or not is an important issue. There is evidence pointing to widening inequalities accompanying expansion through private institutions. However, given the size of social demand for higher education and the lack of capacity of public institutions to absorb this demand, reliance on the private sector becomes necessary. The future challenge lies in putting in place regulatory mechanisms to develop a people-friendly market sector in higher education, to expand, massify, and eventually universalize higher education in developing countries in general, and Africa in particular, rather than creating barriers to the entry of private providers in the sector.

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