

Non-University Sector Reform: Response to Shifts in Global Development Ideology in Africa

Edith Omwami^{a,*}

^a*University of California, Los Angeles, USA*

The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) development within the non-university sector has been the focus for national development programming in Africa for the last 50 years. In the immediate post-independence period, the global development agencies promoted the non-university sector as the engine for promoting the accumulation of human capital stock needed for the advancement of the new nations. The post-secondary TVET sector was critical to the immediate production of the needed skilled manpower that the new African economies required to fill the gap left by the departing foreign colonial staff (Mukudi 2004; Sifuna 2007). Since the training circle was shorter, it also made to invest in this sector for a more efficient turnover of personnel in training for public sector appointments. This article examines reform and response efforts to the shifts in global development ideology in the non-university sector in the region.

The decision to expand the non-university sector by independent African countries fitted in the international development discourse for promoting investment in education in an effort to promote human capital accumulation that support economic development (Lewin 2008). At the national level, it would also be argued that both individuals and households derive economic benefits from investment in education (Sweetland 1996). The indispensable status of development of high skilled human resource base necessary to drive economic growth through technology and innovation remains a sustainable argument in a global competitive environment (Aneesh 2000).

The focus on the non-university sector was essentially a compromise that allowed for public investment in post-secondary education that would allow for ex-

panded access and a much higher return in service personnel yield in comparison to the yield from public investment in the university sector. The non-university higher education sector in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are relied upon to “offer a wide spectrum of vocational education that qualify for specific occupation or prepare for a profession” that serve local economies (Kyvi 2004, p. 393). This sector essentially became the sector of public interest in the face of global fiscal austerity, because it offered opportunity for a broader representation in private returns while contributing to better national economic and social benefits for public investment (Psacharopoulos 1997; Oketch 2007). In spite of a significant expansion in enrollment in university sector in the region in the recent years, opportunities to access the sector remains highly restricted.

The 1950s marked an era when much of the Western world was concerned with human rights and national development. Primarily influenced by Keynesianism, the nation state became the focal point in the assessment of development and goal towards modernization. The Western states that emerged following World War II subscribed to the Keynesian welfare state economic model; an economic ideology in which domestic development was tied to the goal of expanding the world economy (Mundy 1999). It was therefore inevitable that they would conceptualize the public sector as the driver of economic growth and modernization in their engagement in global development. As such, the state was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the re-allocative and redistributive social policy (Mundy 1999) that was imperative for fostering economic growth while eliminating poverty and inequality.

The belief in the redeeming capability of skilled manpower was driven by the ideas of Schultz (1960,

*Corresponding author: Email: omwami@gseis.ucla.edu;
Address: University of California, Los Angeles, Moore Hall
2131, 405 Hilgard Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521, USA.

1961), who proposed that there were positive externalities derived from having an educated workforce. Schultz argued that knowledge and skill attained through education are important to the realization of the full potential of human capital, the result of which is increased productivity. He was a strong advocate of development aid for the accumulation of human capital in the emerging nations of the post-World War II period. Both Keynesianism and human capital theory thus informed education sector development from the very beginning.

The non-university sector was tasked with the specific aim “of raising the level of Skills (especially technical and management skills) needed to support economic growth, and of providing an adequate supply of the whole range of professional expertise” (Sifuna 1992, p. 7). Indeed vocational and technical education had been considered as a significant component of the industrialization and modernization input for the emerging nations states of the 1960s (Kelly and Altbach 1986). The non-university public sector at the time of independence was differentiated into teacher training colleges, ministry affiliated service specific institutions (department training schools) and the open enrollment polytechnic system. The response to the global shift in development ideology and practice very much depended on the type of institution under consideration. I explore the specific shifts in development ideology and what each change meant with respect to reform measures facing the non-university sectors at the time.

In the immediate post-independence period, TVET sector development in the region was primarily financed by governments, with support from some multilateral and bilateral aid agencies. The bilateral aid agencies mostly financed the construction of infrastructure for middle-level colleges. Even though the development ideology was one that promoted the welfare state, it was not lost to the parties that the interest of each donor nation could only be served efficiently through bilateral arrangements (Mundy 1999). Between 1960 and 1970, bilateral agencies assisted in the development of agriculture and technology-focused middle-level colleges in different countries in the region. In each country, each

specific non-university institution was to be identified with a specific donor.

In the 1980s, Keynesianism gave way to neo-liberal monetarism as the dominant development economic ideology (Carnoy 1995). With the adoption of the World Bank-mandated structural adjustment programs (SAPs), public sector budgetary limitations inevitably resulted in either a freeze in education budget growth or reduction in sector allocation. Informed by the rate of return analysis, the 1980s World Bank policy framework had guided development finance support towards primary education—opting to emphasize equity and expand access to basic education. Public sector education finance budgets were to be directed towards basic education. Further, even though the World Bank questioned the reliance on the vocational training-driven development investment model, it still preferred the polytechnics system as a cheaper alternative to the university system (Banya and Etu 2001). The result was that no significant expansion in middle-level non-university infrastructure was witnessed throughout the 1980s. In the face of overwhelming fiscal austerity, African governments introduced cost-sharing in the form of direct tuition cost at the public middle level colleges towards the end of the 1980s.

A radical global shift in both political and economic ideology ushered in the 1990s, made possible by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. This brand of neo-conservatism, largely influenced by the United States experience of the 1970s through 1980s, emphasized political individualism and unfettered free market capitalism. The global education development agenda shifted to focus on efforts to universalize basic education as a priority arising from the 1990 Jomtien Conference Declaration (UNESCO 1990); many governments redirected their already limited public sector resources to primary education.

Demand for university education had outpaced the available space by 1990. In the face of global democratization movements expressed at the national level, African governments had no choice but to respond to consumer demand in an effort to buy political states legitimacy imperative for their very survival in the global environment of the 1990s (Hughes and Mwiria

1990; Mwiria and Nyukuri 1992; Sifuna 2010). The response in the public sector meant that middle-level colleges were systematically upgraded to either constituent colleges of existing universities or granted full-fledged university status (Teferra and Altbach 2004; Sifuna 2010) as governments lacked adequate resources to expand public university sector infrastructure.

The free market capitalism of the 1990s allowed for private sector participation in the non-university education market as well. On the private initiative front, a significant number of entrepreneurs entered into the post-secondary education market that served to fill the non-university education demand. A number of Christian organizations established teacher training colleges across the region. Private entrepreneurs established specific vocational skills related non-university schools, majority of which were located in urban areas. As profits took precedence over service to community, quality of education was compromised in most of the new non-university schools. Overall, quality of education had declined in all post-secondary education institutions as evidenced from the Kenyan experience (Sifuna 2010).

By 2000, the democratization wave that had nurtured civil society throughout the 1990s had made gains in influencing the shift in the global development rhetoric towards a rights-based development paradigm. While the post-Dakar framework called for reforms that foster lifelong learning and diversification of education program options (UNESCO 2000), the reform measures that have been witnessed in the education sector—and in the non-university system in particular—have mainly been competitive market driven. For the most part, the annexation of the public sector non-university institutions into the university system continued into the post-2000 era. The more recent development involves partnership initiatives between the public university sector and the private non-university sector that seeks to expand their reach for consumers (students). In the Kenyan context, for example, the traditional university has engaged in the provision of non-degree programs with a variety of private partners (Sifuna 2010). Such efforts have taken the university system away from the traditional mandate of training students at the bachelor's and graduate levels, and into the diverse world of non-

university education and training. In effect, while the university has entered into the street mall education entrepreneurship, it has also served to expand the delivery of non-university education, albeit with little attention to quality concerns.

More recently, the UNESCO-sponsored Dubai forum in March 2013 reaffirmed that public-private partnership in the delivery of education services remained important given that governments faced continued “austerity, public sector reform and budget cuts” (UNESCO 2013, p. 1). The second decade of the new millennium shifts the focus in the whole education sector towards equity and access to education opportunity. The impetus for the latest development could be seen as the return of the welfare state model that reaffirms the role of the state in meeting the rights of its citizens. The Dakar conference recommitted to supporting expansion in the higher education sector for development (UNESCO 2000). This point was made clear in the preamble quoting Mr. Thabo Mbeki, then president of South Africa, in saying that, “nowhere in the world has sustained development been attained without a well-functioning system of education, without universal and sound primary education, without an effective higher education sector, without equality of educational opportunities” (UNESCO 2000, p. 25).

The 1990 Jomtien conference had cautioned governments that commitment to ensure universal basic education should not result in the higher education sector being starved of public resources. In the follow-up Dakar conference of 2000, the position in support of higher education expansion was reiterated in the declaration urging governments to increase EFA budgets “without sacrificing needed resources for higher levels of education” and focus on the goal to increase “the number of students that completed basic, middle and higher education” (UNESCO 2000, pp. 59 and 71).

Cost remains a barrier to access to higher education for many poor students in Africa (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009; Sifuna 2010). The education finance discourse has thus shifted to consider extending loans to students in both public and private higher education institutions. In his policy brief to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning Asso-

ciation for the Development of Education in Africa, for example, Varghese (2009) makes the case for the need to expand private sector higher education and “extending provisions such as student loans, travel concessions” and other benefits that have so far been accorded to students in the public higher education sector. Within public higher education, it will remain to be seen if the privileges accorded to bachelor’s and graduate students will be extended to students enrolled in the newly-embraced, traditionally non-university programs.

References

- Altbach, Philip G., Liz Reisberg, and Laura E. Rumbley. 2009. *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution*. A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education. Paris: UNESCO.
- Aneesh, A. 2000. *Rethinking Migration: High Skilled Labor Flows from India to the United States*. San Diego, CA: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego.
- Banya, Kingsley, and Juliet Elu. 2001. “The World Bank and Financing Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Higher Education* 42 (1): 1-34.
- Carnoy, Martin. 1995. “Structural Adjustment and the Changing Face of Education.” *International Labour Review* 134 (6): 653-673.
- Hughes, Rees, and Kilemi Mwiria. 1990. “An Essay on the Implications of University Expansion in Kenya.” *Higher Education* 19 (2): 215-237.
- Kelly, Gail P., and Altbach, Philip G. 1986. “Comparative Education: Challenges and Responses.” *Comparative Education Review* 30 (1): 89-107.
- Kyvik, Svein. 2004. “Structural Changes in Higher Education Systems in Western Europe.” *Higher Education in Europe* 24 (3): 393-409.
- Lewin, Keith M. 2008. *Four Decades of Educational Planning: Retrospect and Prospect*. Paris: UNESCO International Institute for International Planning (IIEP).
- Mundy, Karen. 1999. *Educational Multilateralism in a Changing World Order: UNESCO and the Limits of the Possible*. *International Journal of Educational Development* 19 (1): 27-52.
- Mwiria, Kilemi, and Mulati S. Nyukuri. 1992. *The Management of Double Intakes: A Case of Kenyatta University*. Paris: UNESCO IIEP.
- Oketch, Moses O. 2007. “To Vocationalise or Not to Vocationalise? Perspectives on Current Trends and Issues in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Africa.” *International Journal of Educational Development* 27: 220-234.
- Psacharopoulos, George. 1997. “Vocational Education and Training Today: Challenges and Responses.” *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 49 (3): 385-394.
- Schultz, Theodore W. 1960. “Capital Formation in Education.” *Journal of Political Economy* 6 (6): 571-583.
- Schultz, Theodore W. 1961. “Investment in Human Capital.” *American Economic Review* 1 (2): 1-17.
- Sifuna, Daniel N. 2010. “Some Reflections on the Expansion and Quality of Higher Education in Public Universities in Kenya.” *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 15 (4): 415-425.
- Sifuna, Daniel N. 1992. “Diversifying the Secondary Curriculum: The African Experience.” *International Review of Education* 38 (1): 5-18.
- Sweetland, Scott R. 1996. “Human Capital Theory: Foundations of a Field of Inquiry.” *Review of Educational Research* 66 (3): 341-359.
- Teferra, Damtew, and Philip G. Altbach. 2004. “African Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century.” *Higher Education* 47 (1): 21-50.
- UNESCO. 1990. *World Conference on Education for All- Meeting Basic Learning Needs: A Vision for the 1990s*. 5-9 March 1990, Jomtien, Thailand. New York: The Inter-Agency Commission for the World Conference on Education for All.
- UNESCO. 2000. *Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments: The Dakar Framework for Action*. World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 2013. *The Global Education and Skills Forum*, 15-17 March 2013, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
- Varghese, N. V. 2009. *Private Sector as a Partner in Higher Education Development in Africa*. Policy Brief IIEP/Prg.NVV/09.11. Paris: UNESCO.