The Ramphal Institute hosted a stimulating Roundtable Discussion at King’s College, London with the feature presentation on “The Evolving Role of Tertiary Education in Post-Colonial Societies” delivered by Professor Nigel Eon Harris, Chancellor of the University of Guyana. Participating at the event on October 14th 2015, were academics, diplomatic representatives and Commonwealth dignitaries including Sir Shridath Ramphal, former Commonwealth Secretary-General and former Chancellor of Warwick University and the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Keith Britto of King’s College welcomed the audience whilst Ramphal Institute’s Trustee, Dr Roli Degazon-Johnson introduced Professor Harris, the Institute’s Director Edwin Laurent moderated subsequent discussions and the Institute’s chairperson, Professor Patsy Robertson delivered the closing remarks.

**Professor Eon Nigel Harris** is the Chancellor of the University of Guyana prior to which he was Vice Chancellor at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Whilst Vice Chancellor he held a number of leadership positions including Chairman of the Caribbean Examination Council, Chairman of the Association of Caribbean Universities, and Chairman of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. Professor Harris is acknowledged internationally, for his contribution to the field of Rheumatology.
(Synopsis) In post-colonial societies the contribution of tertiary education is often undervalued in the discourse over higher education which is dominated by the West and OECD countries. Professor Harris noted that in the same way that the ‘Times 500’ gives status and credibility in industrialized countries to such institutions, in the developing world on the other hand – the Global South - universities do make a major contribution and bring value. These institutions forge a critical understanding locally of countries, their ecosystems, cultures, and economies.

Local and regional higher education institutions often become the cornerstones of small and developing societies. This can be illustrated in the case of the University of the West Indies, Professor Harris pointed out that:

“If the graduates of the UWI were to stop working for a single day, Prime Ministerial Offices would close in at least eight or nine Caribbean island-nations, because their Prime Ministers and most of their staff are UWI graduates. Also closed in all of the sixteen or seventeen island nations would be cabinet offices, the judiciary, hospitals, educational institutions at all levels, businesses and even the churches, because many clergymen too, are graduates”.

The exponential growth in, and demand for, higher education institutions in post-colonial societies speaks to the importance of these institutions in the economic and social development of countries. Professor Harris noted that knowledge and creativity are the drivers of growth and development and as such, investing in higher education institutions is in fact investing in a country’s future. The Human Development Index (HDI) shows that those countries which show improvements in their score have indeed invested in education.

A critical consideration however is the regulation, reach and funding of such institutions. With the increasing demand and competition for limited resources post-colonial societies need to seek out novel financing solutions or risk issuing worthless degrees. In the developing world, overworked, under-qualified staff, with inadequate technological support and facilities present a significant challenge for maintaining educational quality. Whilst privatisation has in certain cases been a successful solution, without proper regulation this too can pose problems relating to the quality of degrees gained.

One solution which has garnered much media attention has been that of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), which purport to provide access to world class education, free or at a low cost, to massive online audiences. Professor Harris noted however that such a platform “[ignores] the reality of a diverse multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic world with diverse pedagogical styles.” Smaller scale e-learning platforms are valuable and interesting ways in which to deliver higher education especially in spatially diverse populations. However such platforms could never replace the richness of learning that a campus delivers, as:

“I believe that the setting in which people are best moulded and enriched is within a classroom and in the grounds of a residential campus”.

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Professor Harris concluded his presentation by reiterating the importance of higher education in the growth of countries in the developing world.

Professor Teddy Brett – ‘The Crisis in University Education in Africa’

Professor Teddy Brett who has had extensive experience in Africa raised the issue of quality versus quantity in the education sphere in respect of African higher education. He drew on his own experience in Uganda and noted that with the right backing and support, students, regardless of country and race can be brilliant; however growing the institutions to enable this can be complex in the context of the developing world.

He gave the example of Makerere University in Uganda, which offered at one time a highly elite and selective form of tertiary education. The university offered three thousand students from three countries free education, with the result that the tremendous cost of running the university was unsustainable. At one point in time there was a notion that, Africa needed an educated elite as a necessity for development; however the reality of limited resources and funding meant that the required education could not be sustainably achieved.

With Idi Amin’s entrance elite education became obsolete, with the focus shifting to solely mass education. African public universities were forced to take on more students with the same number of staff. Education quality suffered as a result. Compounding factors were a vast increase in population size and the neo-liberalisation of universities which meant that many degrees attained had close to no real world value.

Professor Brett highlighted the need for state intervention, regulation and assessment in higher education institutions in the developing world. Such institutions cannot contribute to growth within a country without a clear set of accountability mechanisms in place so that students upon completion can get quality jobs.

Dr Sadhana Manik – ‘Calibrating the Barometer: Student Access and Success in South African Public Higher Education Institutions’

Dr Manik, speaking from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa noted that three key trends have dominated the discourse in higher education globally, these are: elitism, massification and access. In her presentation, Dr Manik looked at the access and dropout rates of black students in South Africa. She noted that there was need to level racial demographics in higher education institutions as the access for black students in post-apartheid South-Africa remains very low, whilst their dropout rates are high. In one qualitative study she found that many African students are still powerless to escape the poverty experienced during apartheid.

She noted that it is not a case of underprepared students but rather one of underprepared institutions. Marginalized students face an uphill battle in accessing education. Poverty, rural backgrounds and race are factors that all play heavily on their success. When entering higher education institutions, such students are further faced with insufficient financial support and a lack of other support structures to help them adjust to the new environment of the university.
Dr Casmir Chanda – ‘Gender Equity and Access to Tertiary Education in Post-Colonial Societies’

Dr Chanda, an Education Consultant, addressed the issue of gender equality in higher education. She noted that women’s education is of utmost importance to the successful growth of any country. She summed up the role of tertiary education as follows:

“Tertiary education is a key factor in a nation’s effort to develop a highly skilled workforce for competing in the global economy. There are important private and public benefits to participating in tertiary education, which include: higher salaries, better employment opportunities, increased savings, and upward mobility. It is also assumed that a tertiary education graduate obtains non-economic benefits including, a better quality of life, improved health, and greater opportunities for the future.”

In many regions, particularly, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, gender disparity in higher education continues to be an issue. Gender disparity holds back progress and leads to a shortfall in the ability to capture tremendous social and economic benefits. When women do have access to higher education, the additional challenge is not to limit them to ‘feminine fields’ such as the humanities, art, education, health and welfare, and the social sciences. The underrepresentation of women in science and engineering speaks of deeply entrenched and outdated social norms. Dr Chanda noted that whilst some universities in Africa are enacting simplistic affirmative action policies to facilitate women’s access to tertiary education, they do not necessarily enhance gender equity as they do not address the myriad challenges that women face in tertiary education. These include sexual harassment, funnelling female students into subjects where they are overrepresented, and not reserving sufficient places for female students.

To combat gender disparity, some of the recommendations that Dr Chanda made are: increasing financial investment in tertiary education to improve other sectors in education; investment in alternative delivery methods such as ICT and the infrastructure to support such provisions; implementing temporary affirmative action policies; combating sexual harassment in tertiary education; monitoring progress by disaggregating data to see whether gender parity has still to be achieved; and developing and implementing measures to reduce identified disparities (including the disadvantage of men).

The common themes that arose in the Roundtable were the importance of tertiary education to development, the need for regulation, assessment, appropriate policy formulation, and novel methods to increase access, advance gender equity, improve and maintain quality and eradicate disparity.
Annex 1: Professor Nigel Eon Harris – ‘The Evolving World of Tertiary education in Post-Colonial Societies’ remarks

Let me start by thanking Mr Edwin Laurent, The Sonny Ramphal Institute and King’s College for inviting me to speak. In truth, when planning my October vacation in London, thoughts of giving talks were furthest from my mind, but how does one say “no” to Edwin Laurent and how does one refuse an opportunity to speak at an institution, a part of which is St Thomas’ hospital where I spent two years as a Research Fellow. Of course, in the mid-1980s when I was at ‘Tommy’s’, I would have been talking about medicine rather than Tertiary Education—but such has been the evolution of my life.

I have chosen as the subject of this presentation “The evolving role of tertiary education in post-colonial societies”. I have done so because I believe there is a need to remind people in OECD countries, such as the UK, that conversations about universities should not be limited only to the first 50 (or even the first 500) in the Times Higher Education ranking. In truth, there is an on-going global revolution in tertiary education and this is probably more impactful in what is called the developing world than in OECD countries. One example of how importantly Tertiary education is regarded in a developing country is exemplified in the case of Barbados in 2013, where in his annual budget speech presentation, the Finance Minister announced that Barbadian students attending the University of the West Indies would be expected to pay tuition and fees sufficient to cover 20 % of the economic cost of their education—which is around 2000 pounds annually. This announcement caused an uproar, with a prominent opposition MP famously calling the decision “an act of treason”. There were mass meetings, students took to the streets with petitions denouncing the decision and the local news media were inundated with stories against and for this decision.

Of course, the Barbadian protests brought to mind the tumultuous demonstrations here in the UK in November, December 2012 following Parliament’s decision to increase university fees based on the Lord John Browne Report, and similar uprisings have occurred in many other countries where university students have been asked to pay fees. In considering the decision by the Barbados government to charge fees, it should be borne in mind that many other West Indian governments have asked students attending the same university of the West Indies to pay fees amounting to the about the same as that being charged Barbadian students. However, successive Barbadian governments over their 50 post-independence years have held firmly to the policy that no student should pay for education -- primary, secondary or tertiary. But times are different! There has been a massive increase in the number of Barbadian students attending university and the cost of supporting these students totally has risen beyond what the government could afford. In the face of an uncertain economy still suffering the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis, the government was in arrears in payment to the University amounting to tens of millions of dollars accumulated over the period 2008 to 2013. The government believed few options
other than charging fees were available to meet the cost of a considerably expanded university population. This conundrum of expanded access to university and an inability of governments and for that matter students to pay for that education is a worldwide phenomenon but it is particularly pressing in the developing world –indeed even in the mighty USA where students are provided loans to pay for their university education, student debt exceeds one trillion US dollars.

It is in this context that there is increasing talk about alternatives to the traditional university as a means of meeting this massive increase in demand. Indeed there are numerous articles trumpeting the demise of the traditional university and the inevitability of a world dominated by a few universities teaching millions of students –of course, since the stories are in the media of the rich countries then what is visualised is that the top Western universities will have hegemony over global tertiary education –it is they that will have the millions of students –presumably other universities will close their doors. In an article entitled “The End of the University as we know it”, Nathan Harden wrote the following about Universities in the USA.

“In 50 years, if not much sooner, the roughly 4,500 colleges and universities now operating in the United States will have ceased to exist. The technology driving this change is already at work and nothing can stop it. The future looks like this – access to college led education will be free for everyone; the residential college campus will become largely obsolete; tens of thousands of professors will lose their jobs; the bachelor’s degree will become increasingly obsolete and ten years from now Harvard will enrol ten million students”.

Never mind the doomsday message, but when I read the last bit about Harvard with its 10 million students– I said to myself, “Heaven help Harvard–indeed, heaven help us all if this were to become true!”

In another related piece, a commentator said he searched the web for the statement “Universities in trouble” and came up with two million entries.

While the idea about universities being in trouble are an exaggeration, there is no denying that a revolution is taking place in tertiary education and this phenomenon is global, albeit it is manifest differently in different parts of the world. The revolution is driven by a number of factors - advances in technology, in particular Information and communication technology but more importantly huge government and population demands for access to tertiary education are also vitally important particularly in the developing world. This drive for access is fuelled by the perception (supported to a large degree by evidence) that knowledge, creativity and innovation are sources of national and personal advantage. In a globally competitive, free market universe, where one’s senses are numbed by stunning, daily advances in science and technology, countries without the capacity to invent, innovate, manufacture or provide highly sophisticated services face seemingly grim futures.

While the emphasis on the value of tertiary education is almost universal, the percentage growth in numbers of universities and students in the developing world probably far outstrips that in Europe and North America. Increasingly the conversation about universities in the world must not be limited to the first 500 but include “those elsewhere”, because they are becoming actors in driving global economic, social and cultural change – our diverse world has become greatly interconnected and our salvation will doubtless rely
on shared knowledge and an understanding and respect for our differences. This cannot be achieved by a few select universities acquiring hegemony over the accumulation and delivery of all global knowledge that exists – it is impossible for this to occur and at any rate, we cannot be nor should we all want to be same.

An example of the considerable impact of university education locally is the University of the West Indies, with which I have been associated for many years. The UWl is a regional University serving 16 Anglophone Caribbean island nations and was established only 60 years ago, just about a decade or two before those countries won independence from Britain.

The university has grown from 36 students on a single campus in Jamaica in 1948 to 45,000 students today with campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados and I, a virtual campus that was established in 2008 to deliver degree programmes by distance education. A measure of the success of this university, sixty five years after its founding, is captured in the following example. It is said that if the graduates of the UWl were to stop working for a single day, Prime Ministerial Offices would close in at least eight or nine Caribbean island-nations, because their PMs and most of their staff are UWl graduates. Also closed in all of the sixteen or seventeen island nations would be cabinet offices, the judiciary, hospitals, educational institutions at all levels, businesses and even the churches, because many clergymen too are graduates.

Clearly the impact of this University on the Anglophone Caribbean is broad and deep – how many universities can claim to have produced 18 Prime Ministers as graduates in the last three decades? –of course, I should say as an aside that, there are cynics who mutter that the benefits some of those prime ministers have brought to their countries have not always been robust. By way of contrast, half a century ago there were only a handful of people with degrees in those countries. Indeed I remember as a boy in the early 60s in Guyana, the public celebration on the return of two persons with PhD degrees. In those days, the few graduates who received degrees did so in distant lands with opportunities made possible by virtue of their own family funds or exceptional scholarship. Had indigenous universities not been established, our countries would never have made the progress that they did nor would they likely have remained the stable democracies that they are today. In addition, the scholarship produced by three generations of academics resident in the Caribbean has enabled our communities abundant opportunities to discover for ourselves and not through the eyes of others, who we are as a people - our history, our culture, our social and economic circumstances, our health and medical disorders prevalent in our region, our topography, fauna, flora and other physical features of our environment. There is an African proverb that says something like ‘until the lions learn to tell tales of the hunt, the stories will always be those of the hunters’.

What is true for one university in one small part of the world is doubtless true to a greater or lesser degree in Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Hence, wherever tertiary education may go in the 21st century the value of indigenous institutions committed not only to educating students but to local discovery and innovation and to enrichment of their communities cannot be surrendered to the THE’s mighty few.

In the foreseeable future, many developing countries continue to see massive growth in student enrolment and in the number of universities, both public and private. Where there
was only one university in Jamaica 30 years ago – the University of the West Indies – today over 40 tertiary institutions of all types, regional, national, international, public, private for profit, private not for profit or some blend of the above exist now. In Uganda, where up to 1987 there was only one public university with 10,000 students, today it is reported that there are 5 public and 24 private universities with 300,000 students (a 30 fold growth). The same is probably true in many other parts of the developing world.

In some developing countries, tertiary education can bring monetary value through what may seem an unusual route. I speak specifically about the appearance of what are called “Off-Shore Medical and Veterinary Schools” in the Caribbean, which are essentially for-profit business enterprises catering primarily to students from the USA or the UK who cannot get into medicine in their own countries – there are over 30 such schools in the Caribbean, the oldest and most prominent St George’s University in Grenada admits over a thousand medical and veterinary students each year – how a university manages these numbers is in itself a story worth pursuing. These entities are a boon to the small Caribbean islands in which they are located. St Georges University is reported to contribute about 15% of GDP to tiny Grenada where it is located. Other small Caribbean countries inevitably see the profit that can accrue to them by hosting these schools and have been doing so. In St Lucia, where I now live, with a population of about 160,000, there are about five of these medical schools.

This growth of Tertiary Institutions may have brought gains to developing countries, but they have wrought significant challenges. All too often, huge numbers of students are crammed into inadequate facilities with questionable technological support, taught by too few over-worked academics, many with inadequate qualifications. One estimate is that half of the world’s university academics have only Bachelor’s degrees; in China, one report states that only 9% of academics have doctoral degrees; in India it is 35% according to the same report. 80% of academics in Latin America are believed to be part time and those who are full time are often said to be moonlighting at other institutions for salaries that are at best modest and not commensurate with their level of education. Research productivity is severely compromised in these settings, as one might expect.

The quality of education provided is questionable particularly by some of the private for profit institutions. Interestingly, there was an article by Patricia Cohen in yesterday’s New York Times on for-profit universities in the USA. She argued that a number of “for-profit’ HE institutions in the USA prey on the poor and minorities by charging exorbitant fees for degrees that mostly fail to deliver promised skills and jobs – unfortunately, the story of these for-profits in other parts of the world are not very different. Of course, even graduates of accredited public universities are facing challenges to find employment commensurate with their degrees while the private sector and governments are questioning the relevance of degrees these graduates receive.

As mentioned at the start of my presentation, the greatest challenge facing countries and the citizenry where Tertiary education has expanded is the ability of governments and students to finance an expanded Tertiary Education enrolment. Governments have responded differently to this challenge. Some have kept elite public institutions small, catering to the “talented few” while shifting the responsibility for tertiary education to private institutions. In countries like Japan, Korea, Indonesia, it is reported that 70% of
higher education is private; it is estimated that in Latin America, 50% of students go to private institutions, and in Central and Eastern Europe and Africa, about 15-30% enrolment is private.

Other governments, like those in the Caribbean, have largely supported public institutions, some paying all the economic costs and others asking their students to pay a small portion of those costs. Invariably, public institutions in many parts of the developing world are under-funded and the numbers and educational level of academic staff are inadequate, as are libraries and other facilities. Faced with the same challenges, the University of the West Indies introduced several revenue generating activities including taught Master’s degree programmes for which students pay full fees, an evening university to attract part time working students who pay full fees, provision of incremental numbers of places for students in medicine or law willing to pay full costs of their education, commercialisation of student housing facilities, outsourcing eating places to businesses and other commercial endeavours. They are investing too in attracting philanthropic gifts from the private sector and alumni. Where governments accounted for about 70% of UWI’s university’s revenues a decade ago, today it is 45% with the University generating the remaining 55%. I should point out that Caribbean governments provide little funding for research and so many academics must go after support from international donor agencies often linking with colleagues in the North (like a Kings College) who have access to much more funding. In truth, the strategies by UWI to raise funds have been used for decades by Private and Public Universities in the USA over many decades and these strategies are being adopted increasingly by similar institutions in many parts of the world, both developed as in the UK and developing.

Despite best efforts everywhere to expand access to tertiary institutions there is still a large unmet need for persons living in rural areas and other places remote from universities. Invariably authorities are turning to e-learning options. A few years ago there was much excitement about Massive On-Line Open Courses (or MOOCs) and the idea was being pushed (mainly by investors and the Media that supported them) that a few well-endowed universities, possessed with the supposedly best teachers in the world, would provide education to the world for free or at low cost - but these projections ignored the reality of a diverse multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic world with diverse pedagogical styles.

However, advances in Information Communication Technology as a means of delivery of education, utilising teaching modalities in written and/or interactive video streaming formats have changed the playing field for students who may be unable to get to university campuses because of distance or insufficient funds. E-learning opportunities exist even in some of the least developed parts of the world. When one considers that in some countries in Africa, in Haiti and other lesser developed countries that 80% of banking and other financial transactions are conducted using cell phones, it is easy to imagine how the same people utilising a variety of mobile devices can access an education using similar devices. At the UWI, over 4000 students are doing full degrees On-line. Campus based students have been provided tablets relatively inexpensively and thus able to access all their text book materials and other sources of information at a fraction of the cost of acquisition of hard copies of the same text books.

There are estimated to be 24 mega-universities worldwide providing On-Line education. Some like Ghandi National Open University in India and the University of South Africa are
said to have hundreds of thousands of students. Many traditional public universities in developing countries, like the UWI, launched On-line degree programmes more than a decade ago. This was all happening before the excitement about MOOCs, but seldom reported in the mainstream media of OECD countries.

Of course, E-learning is not a panacea. The majority of enrolled students today tend to be older, working adults, studying part-time and without the option or a desire to be present on residential campuses. While there are ample studies showing that the quality of a well organised On-line programme is equivalent to face-to-face offerings, business owners and others prefer to hire graduates of residential universities and on line students are less competitive for entry to postgraduate programmes. Presumably, as On-line degrees are increasingly provided by “reputable institutions” prejudices against these degrees will probably diminish. Other challenges include the difficulty with preparation of On-Line courses; rejection by some academics teaching in traditional face to face modes; and the need for instructors to be more frequently available to students.

To date and I believe for the foreseeable future, 16-24 year olds, although demanding more technological infrastructure and other learning modalities in the classroom and on campuses, still prefer an education on residential campuses. It is noteworthy that application numbers to the UWI’s campuses continue to grow exponentially, outstripping applications for our On-line degree programmes. In truth, I believe that preparing students today for the world in which they will live is best done in communities of students on a campus. In future settings where the constant of today may change dramatically in a decade, where the work they do will likely change several times in a life time, it will not be the knowledge that is possessed today that will count, but the ability to keep learning, to question, analyse and synthesize information, to communicate and interact with diverse people and ideas. I believe that the setting in which such people are moulded and enriched is within classrooms and grounds of a residential campus – invariably what we remember about our universities is not so much what we were taught, but the people we came to know and in some cases to love, the opportunities for debate and reflection on every and all things important and unimportant. In the last few years, I have visited universities in Latin America, South Africa, the Grand Canary Islands, Hong Kong, Australia and elsewhere and I am struck by how alive and vibrant university communities are.

One does not have to be at a Harvard, Yale, or even King’s College to appreciate the immense value of universities – tertiary institutions are becoming equally prized in the developing world, despite the challenges. Of relevance is the UNDP Human Development Report in 2013 entitled “the Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World”. One of its central theses is captured in the following statement.

“Over the past decades countries across the world have been converging towards higher levels of human development as shown by the Human Development index – a composite of three indicators- life expectancy, education attainment and command over resources needed for a decent living. Nearly all countries with data have shown notable improvement in all HDI components (over the last decade) with faster progress in low and medium HDI countries. On this basis the world is becoming less unequal”.

Unquestionably the growth in numbers of educated persons in the developing world has contributed to this growth in HDI.
I close with a quotation from Nelson Mandela that is applicable to the value of Tertiary education the world over.

I quote:

“Education is the great driver of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we achieve not what we are given that separates one person from another.”
Annex 2: Dr Sadhana Manik – ‘Calibrating the Barometer: Student Access and Success in South African Public Higher Education Institutions’

Abstract

In the mid twenty first century there have been three key trends which have been identified across the world in the higher education sector: elitism, massification and access. Studies in South Africa (SA), post-apartheid have also revealed these trends, with an emphasis on massification and the widening of access for previously disadvantaged Black students (with a focus on African students in particular who suffered the worst level of disadvantage in apartheid SA) taking centre stage. Whilst there has been significant progress with regards to broadening access for students into public higher education in the South African context, public higher education institutions have been feeling the pressure to demonstrate that these students are achieving success (good throughput levels and reduced dropout) and this continues to be a challenge. This article provides an overview of some of the discussions related to selected discourses within student access and success in SA higher education, by undertaking a review of the recent local literature with the aim of highlighting the progress made towards understanding these phenomena and the gaps in knowledge that still require more research for greater understanding in the pursuit of achieving student success in South African public higher education institutions.

Keywords: access, success, first generation students, the first year experience, student support

Introduction

There has been three basic trends identified in higher education development worldwide: elitism, massification (i.e. the move from a system that served an elite only to one that every member of society might aspire to experience), and universal access (Altbach 2010). It has been asserted that South Africa (SA) is no different, post –apartheid (after 1994), showing the very same trends (Bundy 2006) but Lange (2006) argues that in the SA context the higher education shifts was more about achieving social justice rather than mimicking an international trend. The CHE (2010:02) by contrast acknowledged that there have been multiple influences stemming from a development perspective on the trajectory of South African Higher education by stating that “The policy agenda for South African higher education that has been developing since 1995 has also been influenced by a number of international trends shaping higher education institutions in developed and developing countries.” It is apparent that there are various perceptions on the influences in the South African higher education arena upon SA becoming a democratic country in 1994. Despite the differences of opinion, the merging of institutions in SA from the year 2002, to the present 23 public institutions (consisting of two types namely comprehensive universities and universities of technology) and the genesis of multiple private institutions have positively altered the higher education terrain in promoting greater student access (Maphosa, Sikhwari, Ndebele and Masehela 2014).

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This paper examines selected current discussions centred on access and success which have become focal points in public higher education institutions (HEIs) in SA.

**Access and Participation**

Ultimately, the SA higher education transformation agenda has demonstrated a particular emphasis on massification and the widening of access to the previously disadvantaged Black racial groups especially that of the majority population, namely Africans. Studies have shown that there has been significant positive improvements in the composition of the student population in higher education in democratic South Africa with “The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2013) and MacGregor (2014) reporting that the number of African students in public higher education comprised 81% of the total student body of 938 200 by 2011. In a presentation to parliament on the 5 March 2014, Dr Saleem Badat, Chairperson of Higher Education South Africa (HESA) announced that access into higher education had been achieved citing statistics that since South Africa became a democracy in 1994 to 2014; student enrolment had close to doubled. In addition, representation in HEIs had altered to being more in accordance to the demographics of South Africa. Interestingly he (Badat 2014) also reported that historically white institutions still had fewer black students than historically black institutions implying that the task of changing the historical racial trends at institutions were not rapid enough to overcome the past student demographics. This levelling of the racial demographics at these HEI’s still remains one of the challenges requiring further research, in the local access discourse.

Another strand worthy of mention locally relates to participation. Hemsley-Brown (2012), reporting on international higher education, noted that almost all countries had dramatically increased their higher education participation rates whilst it has been argued that in South Africa, participation rates have been relatively slow to increase when compared to the increases in student access. The participation rate in 2005 was 16% (Strydom et al. 2010) and five years later in 2010, a mere 18% (CHE, 2011). A racial carving of participation levels in higher education locally is instructive. The participation of White and Indian students presently is 57% and 47% respectively (CHE 2014). Historically, the statistics are more revealing when a comparison is made between African students in public HEIs and the African population in the country. Here the CHE (2011) reported that the share of African students located in the public higher education institutions increased from 2006 to 2011 by 12%, which reflected a growth from 451 106 in 2006 to 640 442 in 2011. This signals a phenomenal jump, however, they note that despite the increase in African enrollments in 1995 from 49% to 68% in 2011, racially this reflects 14% lower than the share of Africans in South Africa. Thus, how to increase the participation of African students in public HEIs remains a central area of discussion and a target to achieve for key higher education stakeholders.

Despite the shifts in the general student demographics stated above, another area of concern in higher education relates to student success especially that of African students.

**Access but not Success**

It has been argued that despite the great inroads made in increasing access for marginalized groups in South Africa, the success of these students has not been evident (Scott 2012, Maphosa, Sikhwari, Ndebele and Masehela 2014, Sosibo and Katiya 2015). It therefore
comes as no surprise that Sisobo and Katiya (2015: 272) in their paper report on The Department of Higher Education and Training noted that “improving student access, success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge...and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves” (DHET 2014: 31). As can be seen here, emphasis on the phenomenon of student access and their success is being mooted by the DHET in 2014 for institutional and national discussion. What is interesting is that access is still being perceived by DHET as a target to achieve and that for DHET, student access cannot be divorced from student success which is linked to student throughput and dropout discussions. Sosibo and Katiya (2015: 271) also cite several scholars (such as Fisher and Scott 2011; Wingfield 2011; Mabelebele 2012 and Parry 2012) who note that “high access and disproportionately low output and throughput rates in South African HEIs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels have been widely documented.”

It is very evident that the close relationship between access and success has been noticed by researchers in this field, (see CHE, 2010, Scott, 2012) and Scott (2012:26) warns that “unless there are decisive steps to improve success across the student body, African student attrition will increase disproportionately, defeating the object of widening access.” It must be chronicled that this appeal for attention by DHET is not a new calling in SA as The CHE, a body which advises the ministry of education, (2010) five years previously acknowledged that there are complexities involved in access, retention and throughput in HE in SA. It then undertook several studies related to the salient trends and challenges within higher education. In a similar vein, public HEIs have also been engaging in studying and monitoring their own students’ success / lack thereof with studies on access, throughput, drop-out and related discourses.

Thus, in recent years there has emerged a burgeoning literature in the South African context on student access and their success with key emphasis being devoted to discussions on how to increase student throughput and measures to address student dropout (REAP 2008; Prinsloo 2009, Ramrathan 2013, Heymann and Carolissen 2011; Horn et al. 2011; Bojuwoyo, 2014; Bokana and Tewari 2014, Sosibo and Katiya 2015). Institutional work has included for example Ramrathan’s (2013) paper on a conceptual framework to understand student drop-out based on a study undertaken at UKZN; Heymann and Carolissen’s (2011) paper on First Generation Students at Stellenbosch university, Bojuwoyo’s (2014) paper on first year students’ stresses undertaken at five institutions; Manik’s (2014, 2015) papers on student drop out and support at one institution: UKZN, Sosibo and Katiya’s (2015) paper on support initiatives implemented in the Western Cape, to name but a few. These are the results of recent research at South African public HEIs which attempt to expand institutional understandings of the challenges facing them with regard to these phenomena and to respond with steps in working towards achieving student success.

Below, I present some of the critical discussions that have been unfolding around student access, and their success in these and other related studies. Some studies are quantitative studies along statistical lines whilst others have started to probe qualitatively, the challenges experienced by students from their perspectives, with the hope that understanding students’ experiences from their points of view will assist institutions to hone in on what they can implement at institutional level in their own context to make student success a reality. I also outline some of the nuances that these studies have revealed in respect of access and success.
The Statistics ‘Speak’

A document on access and success at universities in SA by Lewin and Mawoyo (2014:09) revealed that graduation and throughput rates are low following on the findings of the CHE (2013) and “thus a matter of serious concern.” This year as well, it was revealed that if throughput and graduation rates are demographically sliced, they are considered to be low for black students, whilst amongst white students the throughput and graduation rates are significantly higher than for black students (Badat 2014). It had long been argued by the CHE (CHE higher education Monitor 9, 2010) and it is very much still an issue that “overall the higher education system still reflects the legacy of apartheid when it comes to participation by ‘race’ group and socio-economic status, and when it comes to who among these students finish their degrees on time and with good marks.” Lewin and Mawoyo (2014:09) cite the CHE’s cohort studies on the time students take to complete their studies by reporting that “only 27% of all undergraduate students complete their studies in the minimum time.” The implication here is that the majority of students do not complete their studies on time and this had led to national discussions on the extension of the 3 year undergraduate degree to 4 years. Furthermore, Govender (2013) reported on a study where statistics tracking students from their enrolment in school revealed that an “analysis of throughput data indicates that fewer than five South Africans in 100 who enroll in Grade one of schooling graduate from university.” So, clearly there are greater systemic issues impacting on higher education’s output.

What is also of interest in the statistics being presented, is the nomenclature that accompanies it which Heymann and Carolissen (2011) warn about: namely that so called ‘historically disadvantaged students’ continue to be at risk of not graduating timeously despite an increase in funding initiatives (such as NFSAS) to financially support them. It was reported (Govender 2013) that the “problem is particularly acute for disadvantaged students: only 28% of students in the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa, or NSFAS, make it to graduation.” The implication here is that measures to financially support students are insufficient in propelling them to achieve success and that additional measures need to be institutionalized, factoring in the impact of educational history. The above signals the need for a deeper interrogation and analysis of the term ‘disadvantaged’ when applied to students. In addition, clearly not only financial imperatives must be prioritized. I return later to the role of finances in SA higher education.

Shifting Stances, Shifting Terms

Inadvertently, improving the success of students also depends on the attitude of the institution which may have bought into the shift of moving from the narrative of ‘unprepared students’ (REAP, 2008) to ‘underprepared students to ‘underprepared institutions’ (Dhunpath and Vithal 2012). This is reflected in the institutional decisions to take responsibility for poor student success by introducing innovative measures to support students after access has been granted. Largely, what has occurred in the past as REAP (2008) has articulated, and at times in the present is the continuation of students being addressed through a deficit discourse, that they are ‘unprepared’ / ‘underprepared’ for higher education, they are ‘lacking in skills’ etc. and insufficient attention is then given to institutional shortfalls because they lack preparedness in dealing with the increase of students experiencing numerous challenges. The DHET is not immune to this form of
'deficit' articulation and allocating responsibility. Sosibo and Katiya (2015) note that the department of Higher education and Training (DHET 2012: 42), has stated that “inadequate student preparedness for university education is probably the main factor contributing to low success rates.” Dhunpath and Vithal (2012) boldly took this bull of ‘underpreparedness’ by the horns in their book focusing on access to higher education in SA by asking the question of whether it is a case of ‘underprepared students or underprepared institutions.’ The former authors have advocated that universities will have to continue to assist underprepared students to make the transition to a successful university career. It was thus evident that a pathologising of students was the discourse for some time and this hasn’t totally disappeared. Interestingly, internationally Woodley (2004) had long warned that there is this danger of pathologising students when discussing their lack of success.

The Throughput and Drop-Out Discussion Threads

Local research on student dropout, throughput and retention span over 10 years (Prinsloo 2009). Recently, Manik (2014) drew on studies to assert that the discourses on dropout in South Africa have been dominated by a discussion of the rates, that is the statistical aspects nationally and institutionally of student drop-out. The same very same argument can be made in respect of access and throughput and these rates discourses have come at the expense of a qualitative deeper analysis and understanding of these phenomena.

In addition, using the category of Blacks in the statistics (see Badat, 2014 earlier in this article) is misleading because Africans and Coloureds have lower rates of success when compared to Indians, yet all fall within the category of Black. An example of this can also be found in a study conducted by Scott et al. (2007: 19) years ago, in which they concluded the following: “The major racial disparities in completion rates in undergraduate programs, together with the particularly high attrition rates of Black students across the board, have the effect of negating much of the growth in Black access that has been achieved.” Sosibo and Katiya (2015) maintain that this variance has major repercussions institution wise in the attempts to align access and success for all students and not just designated groups.

With regards to drop-outs specifically, there have been 2 interesting current discourses: the dropout rates (as explained above) and the reasons for dropout incorporating the notion of first generation students and the ‘first year’ experience at university.

Dropout rates

The dropout rates are still considered in some quarters to be high (Badat 2014, Beck 2011, Sapa 2008) and there hasn’t been significant improvement since the HESA study on dropout which revealed that some institutions had a rate of 35%. Badat (2014) reported to the parliamentary committee that 55% of all higher education students never graduated. Given these alarming statistics on drop-out, it is important to understand how dropout is conceptualized locally. Spady (1970) had long ago highlighted various definitions of student dropout. He noted that one definition could be that it “includes anyone leaving a college at which he is registered” and another definition could be that it refers “only to those who never receive a degree from any college.” Spady (1970: 68) does allude to the fact that the former is methodologically easier than the latter “but it fails to provide a broad enough perspective on the actual rates of retention and attrition pertinent to the system of higher education as a whole.” This difference in definitions has significance because Manik (2014:...
recently reported that in the capturing of dropout statistics at higher education institutions “there is no distinction drawn between students who have dropped out to transfer to another institution, short term drop out and re-entry at a later stage.” This presents a quandary because students could possibly be transferring across HEIs and this is being erroneously presented as student dropout, with the implication that they have halted their pursuit of higher education when indeed they have not done so, but rather migrated to another HEI or picked up study after a break.

The dropout statistics in South Africa have also been segmented along categories of economic status and race which has revealed particular trends, most pronounced of which being that drop-out rates were high amongst African students. Manik (2014) undertaking a qualitative analysis of student drop-out across multiple sites of UKZN, maintained that many Africans are still powerless to escape the poverty they have experienced since apartheid. Even small scale discipline studies such as that undertaken by Beck (2011) amongst the school of Accounting postgraduates at NMMU on dropout revealed other interesting racial threads, namely that dropout rates were the highest amongst Coloureds followed by Whites. He established that dropout amongst Coloureds and Whites in specific fields also necessitate some level of responsiveness.

The Socio-economic and Academic Influence in Student dropout

Prinsloo (2009:18) undertaking research in SA has maintained that the heart of student retention in higher education is the result of any one of 3 levels: individual, institutional and supra-institutional. He has explained that “some operate at the level of the individual student (motivation and ability and other personal characteristics and circumstances), others at institutional level (quality of advice, guidance and general quality of provision), and yet others operate at supra-institutional level (finance and other socio-economic factors).” He unfortunately overlooks that there could be interconnectivity between the 3 levels and students could be dropping out due to a composite of levels as numerous studies have recognized (REAP 2008; Manik 2014).

Nevertheless, Tinto’s ground breaking theory (1993) internationally on socio-economic integration of students into higher education in the US has impacted theoretically on local research which has found areas of resonance and dissonance. Tinto suggested that student success and retention in higher education is influenced by the following characteristics: their personal aspirations, objectives, their competences and skills, their academic history and their family’s. Locally, Lewin and Mawoyo (2014:10) reported that the “factors influencing access and success at university are complex and multi-dimensional” and they have separated these factors into social and academic factors. Their explanation of these factors is as follows: “Social factors influencing access and success include schooling background, socio-economic status, race and gender, and the social context of learning. Academic factors influencing access and success are ....student and staff related, and include issues of pedagogy, language, and literacy, teaching and assessment practices, and curriculum structure.” In this paper, a number of these issues are flagged for discussion.

Whilst Tinto initially (1982) did not factor in finance as a reason for dropping out, noting that it’s the last consideration and not the first, he did comment that future models ought to take note of the value of finances. Studies in SA have outlined some identical reasons to international studies on student dropout. These include students’ inadequate preparation
for the academic demands of higher education, poor matching of courses which resulted in students’ lack of commitment, financial burdens, adverse academic experiences, a lack of adequate integration into the culture dominating higher education and a plethora of personal trials (Beck 2011, Manik 2014, Van Zyl 2015). Van Zyl (2015) recently commented on ‘academic problems and life problems’ (housing, finance and food) playing a role in drop out and this has resonance with the earlier findings of Manik (2014) who interviewed students who had dropped out. Makoni (2014:online) has asserted that government has responded to “the need for more historically disadvantaged students to access higher education and the rising costs of a degree through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS.” But he has also commented that “students have complained that too few students are accessing loans and grants and that, for those who do, the loans are not enough to cover study expenses at a top university.” It thus appears that there is a host of inter-related factors that impact on students’ dropping out of higher education making an understanding of student drop-out far more complex that it was previously envisaged.

Furthermore, Tinto’s model has been criticized by authors (in Koen 2008:69-70) such as Tierney (1992) and Braxton and Lien (2002), who argue that the Tinto’s model does not adequately consider “the notion of cognitive dissonance and even dislocation that students may experience when they enter higher education and encounter various forms of epistemological and ontological dissonances.” Locally, ‘epistemological access’ has been a key area of concern raised by scholars who research student access and success (see for example Boughey 2005; Dhunpath and Vithal 2012; Maphosa et al 2014). In addition, poor academic preparation at school has been known to disadvantage students who pursue higher education MacFarlane (2013) and Manik (2014) has commented that there is a price that HEIs in SA pay in increasing access to students who have poor matric results, namely the domino effect of their drop out: whilst these students have been provided with an opportunity to be in a HEI, they lack preparedness for sustained study in a HE environment which demands students be independent learners.

But of growing importance in SA, has been the drop-out rate of first year students, understanding the drop-out rate amongst first year students is perplexing because their dropout occurs at the nexus of multiple interconnecting factors. It’s no wonder Van Zyl (2015: 08) has stated that there is ‘no magic bullet that could solve the problems of first years.’

Drop out amongst First Years

Initially, discussions around the preparedness of students was being mooted as the reason for student drop ( Scott et al 2007) and later (see Prinsloo, 2009; Bojuwoyo (2014) there was an acknowledgement that several factors were responsible for dropout and not all of them fell within either the ambit of the student or the institution.

Bojuwoyo (2014:286) undertook a study of the stress experienced by first year students at five HEIs in SA. His case studies have particular historical influences stemming from apartheid and communities which have been unable to progress sufficiently in a democratic SA. Four of the five institutions were termed HDIs or Historically Disadvantaged Institutions with the following characteristics: being under resourced and for Africans from poor rural contexts. He reported that there are 2 main ways in which first year students suffer stress at university through: “(a) lack of adequate financial support or poor budget to subsist, and
that of (a) lack of information to assist in decision-making and early adjustment to the new environment of their universities.....” Maphosa et al (2014: 410) also point out that the dropout literature does capture the change from school to university and that first year students have to move from being “dependent learners” to becoming “independent learners.” This idea conceptualized as the ‘articulation gap’ (Lewin and Mawoyo 2014; Sosibo and Katiya 2015) has been frequently cited as a key problem- linked to scholars writing about the underpreparedness of students. I pick up this idea of under preparedness yet once again, in a later section on language.

The influence of Rurality

Bojuwoyo (2014), similar to Manik (2014) reports that poverty is responsible for the numerous difficulties that students face when they shift from high school to university. But this is not new news because in 2008, the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP) which undertook a study on the factors impacting on the success of previously disadvantaged students established that rurality negatively affects students’ success and furthermore, insufficient finances were a key reason for student drop out. REAP was also cognizant that the ‘unpreparedness of students’ was renowned “but the unpreparedness of higher education institutions for these types of students is less taken into account” (REAP 2008:6). Earlier, I noted that the discourse since 2008, has altered slightly from ‘unprepared’ to ‘underprepared’ in respect of students and institutions suggesting that there is some level of preparation but it is inadequate.

Students termed to be ‘first generation students’ (FGS) also appear to be at risk of dropping out given that they are the first in their families to transition from school to university without the necessary support. FGSs have been defined by Dumais and Ward (2010) to be either students whose parents have not studied further than high school or students whose parents may have attended a tertiary institution but not graduated. REAP (2008:08) links the concepts of rurality and first generation students in demonstrating the influences inhibiting students’ chances of achieving success: rural students may now have to study in a language that isn’t their first language, which they haven’t previously experienced and “being the first generation in their families, and perhaps even in their communities, to enter higher education. This means that students’ families do not have the educational capital or resources to assist their integration or support them in their academic studies.” But FGSs should not be perceived as a helpless group. Heymann and Carolissen (2011) note that some of the problems faced by FGSs at Stellenbosch University (SU) related to them as individuals or to the environment of the institution where they were studying. They draw on FGS studies which point to a tendency to conceive of FGSs as a ‘deficit’ group which needs to be ‘rescued’ but they report on FGSs at SU demonstrating their ‘action’ by forming a group and stating their needs and making the institution aware of their requirements which need to be met. Due to a third of students dropping out by the end of their first year, Heymann and Carolissen (2011: 1390) assert that FGSs must be understood as having “real challenges” and in need of institutional support but they caution that a patronizing attitude should be avoided in classifying students according to categories which will lead to labelling: being “pathologised as problematic” for their specific needs.

Language of instruction
The role of language (Jama et al. 2008; REAP 2008; Maphosa et al. 2014) in terms of the medium of instruction at HEIs has been foregrounded as having an impact on students’ achieving success. Jama et al. (2008) cite language acquisition as a key area recognizing that students may be struggling with critical skills in English such as speaking, reading and writing and this has been part of the ‘underpreparedness’ discourse of first year students. Sosibo and Katiya (2015: 274) further explain that “under-preparedness refers to the state of students who are in general not academically ready, especially in areas such as reading and writing, and particularly in the language of learning and teaching, which in most cases is English.” They add that this trend is more evident in students for whom English is a second language than for students studying in their home language. The CHE (2010: 04) had long recognized that in HEIs “staff had to adapt to teaching more students for whom the language of instruction was their second or even third language. Students had to adapt to an increasingly multilingual social and learning environment.” Thus, the language of instruction at institutions carries weight in determining their success. Another element of value stems from REAP (2008:08) which advanced the link between language and rurality stating that “disadvantaged students experience…..having to study in a second or third language, to which rural students in particular may have had little exposure.” Maphosa et al (2014) also builds on this idea of the medium of instruction and notes language competence as a reason affecting the learning ability of students and their academic performance.

From the above discussion and numerous publications, there appears to be consensus that the reasons for local student drop-out are multiple and complex (Prinsloo 2009; Manik, 2014; Lewin and Mawoyo 2014) and this parallels the findings internationally on student dropout (see for example Crosling, Heagney and Thomas 2009). Recently, Van Zyl (2015:08) commented at a press gathering that “the reasons are as complex for drop-out as for those who drop-out.” Clearly there exists the understanding that unpacking dropout through the lens of the institution as well as through students’ perspectives is multifaceted and intricate. So how can these reasons be channeled into providing some clarity of insight?

Working towards Success

Prinsloo (2009) advocates 2 key factors, namely timing and appropriateness, in the provision of effective academic support for students offered by HEIs and he draws on the “Rural Education Action Programme (REAP) (2008:11) which stated that “in order to be able to provide timeous and appropriate academic support, institutions need to be able to identify at-risk students at an early stage, to track and monitor their progress, and to evaluate the effectiveness of support systems and programmes offered.” In a similar vein, Sosibo and Katiya (2015: 271) argue in their paper based on a study at one HEI in The Cape that “early identification of at-risk students is at the heart of improving student success, especially for those who enter higher education with gaps in their knowledge.”

But there are other aspects to improving the success of students and the CHE report (2010: 01) on access and throughput using three case studies (at the Universities of Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Western Cape) reported that whilst all the universities “share a common past” in terms of their apartheid history, they had different contextual realities given their staff profiles, the location from which they draw their students, culture and access to resources.
This means that discussions on access and success have to also be carved according to the uniqueness of each case study institution.

Conclusions

Internationally, Hall’s report on retention and wastage (2001: iv) warned that “widening access is likely to result in increasing levels of student drop-out” so it’s not a revelation that locally SA is experiencing the same situation. Without a doubt, at present student success in higher education has become a mainstream issue. The political discourse about gaining access to university will not abate soon and continues to be controversial given the CHE statistics on less than 30% of students completing their degrees in the minimum time. I am in agreement with Lewin and Maywoyo (2014) who state that there are “diverse and complex factors” affecting access and success in SA universities and all of them require attention. One can fall into the trap of agreeing with the gloomy picture portrayed by Lewin and Mawoyo (2014:112) who assert that “The South African higher education system faces daunting challenges in addressing student access and success. It is a relatively poor performing and highly unequal system, with low participation, high attrition and substantial class and racial inequity.” However, there is arguably an expanse in the literature on student access and success in SA in the past few years, and studies clearly indicate that addressing student success is context specific and strategies have to be fashioned through the lens of each unique case study institution. This is a view that was once echoed by Prinsloo (2009:19) who drew on Tinto’s (2002:3) “warning that research findings are context-specific and that what works in one context” may not necessarily be of benefit in another.

Thus there is adequate evidence to indicate that public HEIs and researchers are fervently undertaking research on student success and following through with measures to address these context specific challenges and embarking on evaluations of the measures to inform future practices. These are active measures which speak to the emergence of a positive trend in SA higher education to address concerns around student success. This is bound to lead to how institutions and policy can work to accommodate the majority of students who are unable to graduate in the minimum time and possibly also in some quarters, a persistence of the discourse on the “deficient” student or ‘deficit’ institution. Equally so, on-going discussions on epistemological access and ‘underprepared institutions’ will serve as an impetus for continued and concerted efforts to address student access and success. It appears that ultimately the ball will remain in the court of public HEIs who will have to continue in their quest to find creative ways to serve an ace or a series of aces that can work towards reducing student dropout and promoting higher throughput levels for which they will gain recognition as students graduate on time. Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that the most significant aspect when choosing where to study is the institution’s reputation which precedes it (Workman 2011).

References


Annex 3: Dr Casmir Chanda – ‘Gender Equity and Access to Tertiary Education in Post-Colonial Societies’

Introduction

Tertiary education is a key factor in a nation’s effort to develop a highly skilled workforce for competing in the global economy. There are important private and public benefits to participating in tertiary education, which include: higher salaries, better employment opportunities, increased savings, and upward mobility. It is also assumed that a tertiary education graduate obtains non-economic benefits including, a better quality of life, improved health, and greater opportunities for the future.

Many developing nations continue to struggle in achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education, although education of children is universally accepted as a leading mechanism of poverty eradication and social development. It may be argued that poverty will not cease until girls and women have the same rights and opportunities in life as boys and men (Psacharopoulus, and Patrinos 2004; World Bank 2014).

This paper will focus on tertiary education in post-colonial societies, particularly some Commonwealth developing countries and highlight some of the barriers to access, benefits and policy recommendations to improve Tertiary Education.

Education attainment and access to tertiary education

Education attainment at all levels of education is important and may highlight the gender gaps in various countries. The Global Gender Gap Report (2014) shows the gap between women’s and men’s current access to education and this gap is captured through ratios of women to men in primary, secondary and tertiary level education (see education attainment column 1 in table 1). A longer-term view of the country’s ability to educate women and men in equal numbers is captured through the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate. There are three basic concepts underlying the Global Gender Gap Index, forming the basis of the choice of indicators, how the data is treated and the scale used. First, it focuses on measuring gaps rather than levels. Second, it captures gaps in outcome variables rather than gaps in input variables. Third, it ranks countries according to gender equality rather than women’s empowerment.

Table 1 also shows the Tertiary Education Enrolment percentage (TTE %). This is the total enrolment in tertiary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving. The figures shown highlight investment in education and the percentage of boys and girls accessing tertiary education.

Factors and Barriers affecting Access to Tertiary Education

There are serious disparities in access to tertiary education which could be aggregated by gender, the intersection of gender with a rural, remote location (more risk in getting to school) and with cultures, traditions, and religious beliefs; these prescribe different roles for girls and boys may narrow the educational choices available to girls.

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2 The World Bank, Education Indicators on Tertiary Education; accessed on 11 October 2015; http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR
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Even when enrolment rates at the undergraduate level are at parity (or even favour girls), disparities may appear in graduation rates, in the professional courses available to girls, and in opportunities for higher degrees (World Bank 2014).

A study conducted in Mozambique (Roby et.al 2008) indicates that some prevailing social norms and cultural practices have a powerful negative influence on the life opportunities of girls and include key barriers to education such as: discriminatory education practices, child labour, early marriage, and some prevailing social norms that support gender based violence.

There is a strong economic efficiency argument in favour of promoting equity in tertiary education. The lack of opportunities for access and success in tertiary education lead to under-developed human resources and a resulting shortfall in the capacity to capture economic and social benefits (Ramcharan, 2004).

Gender inequality in tertiary education persists in many parts of the developing world, particularly in the countries of the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Even in the few countries where gender parity has been achieved in tertiary education, —gender streaming of women toward specific types of non-university institutions and/or toward specific disciplines leading to low-paying occupations can be observed. Female over-representation persists in teaching institutes, nursing schools, and administration/secretarial schools. Women are commonly over-represented in the humanities, yet most often underrepresented in subject areas such as agriculture, medicine, business, science and engineering programs. In tertiary education institutions, women are

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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Key: n/a (data not available); TEE (Tertiary Education Enrolment)
underrepresented in leadership roles, which may contribute to lack of female role models in management.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2004) states that, in general, Sub-Saharan Africa has low enrolment rates and strong gender disparities and inequalities. For instance, in tertiary education, the GPI indicates a disparity of .40 percent in favour of males and enrolment rate is at 2.5 percent.\(^3\) This means that women are less represented than men, i.e., fewer than five women to ten men, and the report also claims that the few women who have access to tertiary education are confined to what is traditionally rendered as —feminine fields, such as social sciences, humanities, services, and health-related areas of study; in turn, this disparity of access to tertiary education combined with the confined access extends to disparity in employment opportunities. However, it is noted the report makes a contradictory assumption by attributing the disparity in fields of access to women’s choice—this is contradictory because if women were entering these fields by choice, then there would be no reason to —protest it as disparity.

Gender disparities in secondary school enrolment are wider and occur in more countries than at the primary level. Due to the unprecedented expansion of tertiary education the past two decades, one of the most noticeable improvements in women’s enrolment is registered at the tertiary level. Men’s dominance in tertiary education has been reversed globally and gender disparities currently favour women, except in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Western Asia. The distribution of tertiary enrolment across various fields of study brings to light the gender dimension of, and inequalities in, participation in tertiary education. Gender differences in tertiary participation are apparent throughout the world, with women predominant in the fields of education, health and welfare, social sciences, humanities and art, while they remain severely underrepresented in the fields of science and engineering.

There are both non-monetary and monetary barriers to entry into tertiary education. Academic ability, information access, motivation, inflexibility of university admission processes, and family environment and others forms of cultural capital are some of the non-monetary reasons that have been recognized as important factors in explaining poor participation of low-income individuals in tertiary education. One other main barrier to tertiary education is the financial constraint, divided into three barriers: the cost-benefit barrier, the cash-constraint or liquidity barrier and the internalized liquidity constraint or the debt aversion barrier.\(^4\)

The cost-benefit barrier occurs when an individual decides that the costs of attending university (including tuition and living expenses as well as opportunity costs of not working during the duration of the course) outweigh the returns to their education. Liquidity barriers refer to a student’s inability to gather the necessary resources to pursue tertiary education after having decided that the benefits do outweigh the costs. And, the debt aversion constraints occur when a student values the benefits of tertiary education to its costs, can borrow to access the sufficient financial resources, but, regardless of these factors, chooses

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\(^3\) GPI means Gender Parity Index. Ratio of female to male value of a given indicator. GPI=1 indicates parity between sexes; 0≤GPI≤1 indicates a disparity in favour of boys; GPI>1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls.

not to matriculate because the financial resources available to him/her include loans. All three of these monetary barriers contribute to rising inequity in tertiary education participation.

Bloom, Canning, and Chan (2006) report that, in general, Africa continues to struggle with the issue of very low access and participation in tertiary education—for instance, Malawi is unable to provide proper channels that link tertiary education to employment, thus unemployment of the few tertiary graduates is high\(^5\); while Mozambique’s high cost of tertiary education results in less than three percent of graduates holding public administration positions.\(^6\)

There is evidence that some countries in Africa identified equity and access as major concerns in their tertiary education sector or identified a policy-driven plan for equity and access in tertiary education (Bloom et. al. 2006) and took steps to improve access. For example Ghana identified the difficulty students faced in gaining university entry at the undergraduate level and created more places in various universities, while Malawi reserved 30 per cent of university places for girls; introduced scholarship schemes for girls and boys who lacked financial support from parents or guardians; and expanded university places from 3526 to 6824.

Dunne & Sayed (2002) argue that to increase women’s participation in higher education, in Africa, does not presuppose equity because such participation has been mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Onsongo (2009) provides an analysis of the outcomes of affirmative action policies pertaining to improving access for women in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and argues that there are limitations and weaknesses inherent in the strategies that focus only at admission levels to university; thus, concludes that affirmative action, in these three countries, does not enhance access and gender equity in higher education. More is needed to ensure access as well as success.

Bunyi (2003) unveils the problem of lower enrolments especially for female students; and lower enrolments at higher degree levels and in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. In addition, Bunyi lists the following constraints to women’s enrolment in tertiary institutions: (a) inadequate qualified female candidates to join tertiary institutions; (b) insufficient places in TE (Tertiary Education) institutions; (c) women unfriendly TE environments; (d) insufficient female role models; (e) socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices that militate against the education of girls; and, (f) high rates of unemployment of both male and female TE graduates.

If there are no job prospects after Tertiary Education, what are the benefits especially for women in developing countries?

**Benefits of Gender Equity in Tertiary Education**

Investing in women and using gender analysis and approaches lead to better program results for everyone. Tertiary education for women especially in developing countries is an added benefit:

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**Food Security and Less Hunger:** If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent. This could reduce the number of hungry people worldwide by up to 17 percent. (FAO, 2011).

**Healthier Families:** When women are empowered to have more influence over economic decisions, their families allocate more income to food, health, education, children’s clothing and children’s nutrition. (FAO, 2011).

**Smaller and healthier families:** Girls' education helps women control how many children they have. Increasing girls' participation in school over time decreases the number of children a woman has. In some countries in Africa, women with secondary education or higher have an average of 3 children while those with no education have an average of 7 children.\(^7\)

**Maternal Health:** Increasing girls' access to education improves maternal health. Mothers with secondary education or higher are twice as likely to give birth more safely in health facilities as those with no education.\(^8\) It has been estimated that an additional year of schooling for 1,000 women helps prevent two maternal deaths. If most women achieved tertiary education globally, millions of lives would be saved.

**Child Survival:** Increasing girls' education has positive effects on infant and child health. A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past the age of 5 than a child born to an illiterate woman. The survival rates are much higher for women with tertiary education.\(^9\) In Indonesia, child vaccination rates are 19 percent when mothers have no education. This figure increases to 68 percent when mothers have at least secondary school education. In Bangladesh and Indonesia, the odds of having a child who is shorter than average for its age decreases by around 5 percent for every additional year of formal education a mother has.\(^10\)

**Decrease of HIV/AIDS:** Education decreases a girl's or woman’s risk for contracting HIV or transmitting HIV to her baby. Women in 32 countries who remained in school after primary school were five times more likely to know basic facts about HIV than illiterate women.\(^11\) According to the 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, in Malawi, only 27 percent of women without any education know that HIV transmission risks can be reduced by taking drugs during pregnancy, but that figure rises to 59 percent for women with secondary education and may be much higher for women with tertiary education. A study in Zambia finds that HIV spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls.\(^12\) A study in Uganda demonstrated that each additional year of education for girls reduces their chances of contracting HIV by 6.7 percent.\(^13\)

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\(^9\) UNESCO, *Education Counts*

\(^10\) UNESCO, *Education Counts*


\(^12\) Vandemoortele and Delamonica, "Education Vaccine Against HIV/AIDS."

**Income Potential**: Education boosts women’s earning power. A single year of primary school has been shown to increase women’s wages later in life by 10 percent to 20 percent, while the returns to female secondary education are between 15 percent and 25 percent; therefore women with tertiary education would have returns higher than 25%.

**Stronger Economies**: Research shows that countries with highly educated men and women have stronger economies. For example, one study found that states in India with the highest percentage of women in the labour force over the past five years grew the fastest and had the largest reductions in poverty. (World Bank, 2014)

**Power and Decision making**

Around the world, a lack of gender balance in decision-making positions in government persists. Women continue to be underrepresented in national parliaments, where on average only 17 per cent of seats are occupied by women. The share of women among ministers also averages 17 per cent. The highest positions are even more elusive: only 7 of 150 elected Heads of State in the world are women, and only 11 of 192 Heads of Government. The situation is similar at the level of local government: female elected councillors are underrepresented in all regions of the world and female mayors even more so.

In the private sector, women are on most boards of directors of large companies but their number remains low compared to men. Furthermore, the “glass ceiling” has hindered women’s access to leadership positions in private companies. This is especially notable in the largest corporations, which remain male-dominated. Of the 500 largest corporations in the world, only 13 have a female chief executive officer.

**Recommendations to increase enrolments, access and success:**

- Financial investment in tertiary education is crucial and may help improve the other sectors in education - early learning, primary, secondary, adult education and life-long learning.
- Finding ways to implement (temporary) Affirmative Action policies in such a way as to minimize the backlash on female students.
- Expansion of tertiary places should be pursued through private provision, self-sponsored programmes in public institutions, and diverse course offerings including flexible scheduling and innovative delivery methods such as by use of ICTs.
- Investment in infrastructure to support ICT is very important (electricity, other sources of power supply, internet access etc.)
- Combating Sexual Harassment to ensure that female students and staff study and work in an environment that allows them to grow and succeed.
- Data related to gender issues in education (i.e., both access/participation and achievement) should be disaggregated by location, ethnicity, socio-economic status,

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etc., in order to identify where gender parity has still not been achieved – with a special focus on all types and levels of higher education.

- Measures to reduce any identified disparities (including to the disadvantage of men) should be developed and implemented.

References


Social Science Quarterly, Volume 87, Number 3, September 2006, Southwestern Social Science Association


