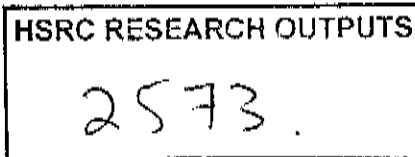# Consolidating Resources and Managing Growth? Challenges and Roles of Private Providers of Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The subject of private provision of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa is very important because the region requires a plethora of ideas and solutions to its higher education challenges, dubbed 'higher education crisis' by others. Thus, private providers of higher education should become part of the solutions to the problem and should not be seen as a burden. This, however, can only take place if private institutions themselves associate and engage with the problems and partake in the process of finding solutions. This article examines the roles of private higher education institutions in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Within the context of growth of higher education demand in the region, it looks at how private institutions are reacting and the challenges that confront them with regard to resources they require in order to keep abreast. Also, the article examines the possible resourcefulness of private higher education sectors and areas that can be improved in order to enhance their roles. Like public higher education institutions, private higher education institutions need to be made part of solutions to Africa's higher education challenges.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this article is to examine challenges that confront private providers of higher education within the context of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It particularly focuses on resources and growth and possible ways of dealing with the challenges. Awareness of challenges that confront the sector is important because, firstly, it is essential for everyone involved to keep abreast of developments and required skills and resources that should ensure development in higher education in the sub-continent. Secondly, challenges that confront private institutions may be common with those of public institutions, in which case, approaches to solutions may also be common.. Thirdly, once challenges are known it becomes incumbent upon institutions, policymakers and other participants in higher education (e.g. business, community leaders, parents and students) to find ways of addressing them. Institutions have a responsibility to organise resources for maintaining operations of institutions, which in turn should bring about a healthy growth of the system.

Introduction

The debate on whether developing countries need private provision of higher education institutions is redundant now. Many developing nations embrace the establishment of the private higher education sector to assist the ailing public sector systems to fulfil the education needs of individual countries. Besides, a number of developing countries, in South America, Africa and Asia have had private higher education institutions for many decades but the recent heightened attention on the sector has, only now, raised the awareness about the sector. Such heightened attention has been brought about by the unprecedented rise in the number of new private higher education institutions in areas where they were insignificant or never existed before, such as in Eastern Europe, some African and Asian countries.

The decline in government education budgets has been blamed by many as one of the causes of growth of the sector, especially in the 1990s. Coupled with this, are steady increases in population sizes that are not accompanied by similar increases in provision of higher education resources. Private higher education institutions in many developing countries arise out of these circumstances. Despite conditions that dictated their establishment there are, of course, positive spin-offs that accompany the establishment of the private higher education institutions. For instance, assisting the public sector in increasing access to higher education, thereby helping governments to meet their higher education obligations; increasing competitiveness of institutions thereby improving quality of provision and curriculum content; increasing institutional and programmatic diversification; diversifying the financial resource base for higher education systems; and many other reasons specific to individual countries. In considering the phenomenon of private higher education, Geiger (1985:386) attests to these benefits and concludes that privately controlled institutions possess an intrinsic potential for realising several positive results for higher education as a whole.

Of course, the benefits outlined above are ideal for many higher education systems. However, there are many competing forces that provide a context for higher education systems resulting in difficult conditions in which public and private higher education institutions operate. Besides, private higher education institutions themselves have under-performed in many systems with good conditions thereby failing to bring about a healthy system of higher education. Where they exist, private higher education institutions become relied upon, in the same way as public institutions, for the healthy state of higher education systems. Indeed, the juxtaposition of private and public higher education sectors should always be contextualised. Such comparison should consider the objectives for which institutions are established; their foci in terms of fields of study (specialising or multi-disciplinary); the levels of study they offer (whether focused on undergraduate studies, post-graduate studies or both, research, vocational and/or technical training) and type of institutions by mode of delivery (distance or face-to-face). The talking point, thus, is how private higher education sector institutions fit in the broader objectives of higher education systems in their respective countries, whether developing or developed.

This article, therefore, addresses itself, firstly, to all institutions involved in private provision of higher education, university and non-university. These are both the old generation, which are often universities, and the new or contemporary generation of institutions, which tend to be non-university type (colleges, institutes, academies, etc.). By new or contemporary this article refers to all those institutions established in the late 1980s and 1990s whose function mainly is to absorb excess demand for higher education. Generally, unlike the old generation of private institutions (universities), contemporary private institutions largely operate as 'colleges' and tend to specialise in specific fields of study instead of being multi-disciplinary.

Secondly, the article deals with challenges that confront private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. While they may all be faced with different challenges differently, depending on the country environments in which they are located, the broader context of the sub-continent is similar. The expectations of imparting higher learning, by virtue of them being institutions of higher learning, are also the same. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that different types of institutions address different demands that exist in our society. Naturally, therefore, their approaches would be expected to be different.

Thirdly, the article examines the type of resources that private higher education institutions in the sub-continent require in order to deal with the identified challenges and make meaningful contributions towards higher education objectives. Moreover, these are the resources they would require for working towards fulfilling the expectations of their existence, such as those already outlined above. Also, because private higher education institutions were established in different periods, their resources will differ. Thus, in dealing with this subject the article will be specific as to which group of institutions it is referring.

Given this background, this article seeks to examine the broad context within which higher education institutions operate in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such context provides for demands and challenges that confront private higher education institutions in the sub-continent, some of which may be unique to the region.

The Sub-Saharan Africa Context in Brief

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2003:3) 20 of the 54 countries in the world, which had declining average per capita income in the 1990s, are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the region is among the world regions where the number of people surviving on less than $1 a day has increased (UNDP, 2003:5). That is, the rate of poverty in the region is on an increase. In fact, according to the UNDP (2003:6) South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are home to the largest concentrations of hungry people. This economic situation has serious implications for education, for the state of education is dependant upon the economic health of a country. Moreover, at individual family level, the priority rightly becomes food and not education, for there is no amount of concentration that can rises above hungry stomachs.

It is precisely the above outlined context that is responsible for low primary level enrolment rate, which is only 57% of the age group (UNDP, 2003:6). Additional to poverty and hunger, household costs for education, such as user fees and uniforms, also discourage enrolment (UNDP, 2003:7). To this end, the UNDP (2003:7) observes that "enrolments increased sharply when uniforms and fees were eliminated in Kenya, Malawi and Uganda". Low primary level enrolments mean even lower secondary and tertiary level enrolments, because many pupils will drop out before reaching these higher levels. In fact, according to the UNDP (2003: 6) "once enrolled, there is a pitiful one in three chance that a child in Africa will complete primary school". Yet, despite this context, higher education experienced an unprecedented increase in enrolments in the 1990s (see Sawyerr, 2002:12).

The reported increase in higher education enrolments is accompanied by the rise in the number of private higher education institutions established to absorb such increase. According to Sawyerr (2002: 15-16) private universities in Sub-Saharan Africa increased from an estimated 7 in 1960 to an estimated 27 in 1990. This growth exploded to

approximately 84 private universities in 2002. The increase is even more dramatic when considering non-university higher learning institutions, which are often not recognised or highly regarded within individual countries. In South Africa, for instance, private providers of higher education grew from fewer than 10 in 1990 to approximately 120 by 2003. This is in consideration of only those that are officially registered by the Department of Education. None of the private institutions are officially recognised as universities, including transnational institutions that operate as universities in their home countries, for example De Montfortd, Monash and Bond universities. One reason, among others, for this state of affairs is because transnational universities entered the South African system with a single field of study, offering one course (mostly, Masters in Business Administration) and only at post-graduate level. Some of these institutions have since increased their offerings.

A sound and plausible explanation for the rise in the number of private higher education institutions is that it is a direct consequence of the increase in the demand for higher education in developing countries. Thus, the growth of private higher education institutions, in developing countries in general, is due to excess demand for higher education (for further discussion on this issue see Ajayi *et.al.*, 1996; Levy, 1986a and 2002; Geiger, 1986; Mabizela, 2002 and Sawyerr, 2002). Basically, this arises where public higher education institutions are unable to admit all students and, as such, excess demand gets created, which private institutions come in to absorb. Hence, many of these institutions address themselves narrowly to what is demanded by these students and what they perceive are existing demands of the labour market.

Of course the sub-continent exists within the global community, which is fast undergoing changes termed globalisation. Globalisation is largely felt through the economies of individual countries and as such tends to do harm in the region mainly because its countries have poor economies. Besides, the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa are heavily dependant on primary resources whose exploitation and distribution is reliant on international market 'moods', given the context of globalisation. In this way, developed countries determine the movement of the economies of underdeveloped countries. Thus, Sawyerr (2002:8) observes,

> The *reality* of globalisation – deriving from movements in economy and production –
> erodes the capacity of the typically marginalized and dependent sub-Saharan state to
> generate enough h production, savings and investment to ensure sustainable
> development.

Developing countries are finding it hard to meet the demands of globalisation, mainly because of their historical colonial legacies. One of the reasons which account for this difficulty is the relatively high rate of illiteracy compared to that of developed nations. As such, and combined with other problems already outlined, many economies in Sub-Saharan Africa are on the brink of collapse. Putting more pressure on developing countries is the increase in the demand for knowledge and improved information technology. Given this background, Ajayi *et. al.* (1996:145) observe that

> The cruel "winds of stringency", consequent upon the severe economic recession of the
> past two decades or so, and the prevailing unjust international economic order, continue
> to blow unabated across the African continent with devastating consequences for the
> universities and other institutions of higher education in most African countries.

This is the context under which private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa operate. The following section examines challenges that confront private higher education institutions within this context and the roles that they can play in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges and Roles for Private Higher Education Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa

In many respects, the same challenges that face public higher education institutions also demand the participation of private providers. However, most importantly, there are additional challenges that private institutions have to confront and their approach to these challenges may be different from those of public higher education institutions. This article focuses on the issues it regards are most pertinent challenges that face private providers of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the list is by no means exhaustive. Moreover, these issues are in no way isolated from each other.

Providing Quality Education while Offering Diversity

The issue of provision of quality education will always be a talking point in the broad sphere of public and private institutions. It is especially so with regard to private higher education mostly because the private sector is sometimes not regulated or monitored as is its public counterpart. In some countries, the private higher education sector is not monitored at all, whereas in other countries the monitoring has been recently introduced. In outlining challenges facing private universities in Africa, Banya (2001: 170) observes that

> Higher education conventionally has associated academic quality with resource "consumption", that is, with the amount of resources it has been able to attract and spend.
> In the past, a college or university whose enrolments and budget were growing was thus considered productive.

Increase in the number of enrolments and resources alone are not enough to show productivity of an institution. The measurement of productivity, hence the success of higher learning institutions, has been broadened to include quality of education offered, quality of graduates and the effectiveness of an institution within its community[1] and society at large. Thus, the growth of enrolments, budget and resources become a by-product of provision of quality education and effectiveness of successful institutions. In other words, good quality attracts larger numbers of potential students which, in turn, requires an increase in resources. Indeed, there is correlation between academic quality and resources at the disposal of an institution. Thus, private higher education institutions need to balance their enrolment growth with commensurate resources, in order to maintain a healthy balance of growth with quality. Banya (2001: 171), however, makes an important observation that

> Many private universities have tried to avoid a majority of shortcomings of quality by concentrating in few areas that they can manage. They are not everything to everyone like the state institutions. Because they get their funding partly from student tuition, private universities tend to make their programs more relevant and marketable.

There are nuances that I would like to add to this observation, though. Firstly, while many private higher education institutions identify and concentrate on particular niche areas, it is not often that they are able to manage and excel at them. For example, the Council on Higher

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[1] Reference to community in this article is used broadly to include both the immediate vicinity of an institution and the country in which it is located.

Education in South Africa observed that not always do programmes in which private institutions specialise offer the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies needed by young higher education graduates (Council on Higher Education, 2003: 13).

Secondly, the assertion that "private universities tend to make their programs more relevant and marketable" is also disputed in many quarters. While the establishment of private higher education institutions naturally enhances diversity and differentiation with regard to institutional choice, their responsiveness to the labour market results on their over-concentration in the same fields of study, among themselves and also offered by public institutions, thereby stifling the same diversity said to be brought about by their existence. Levy (1999: 17) argues that in order for private institutions to make a difference, "for better or worse," they "must bring something important not otherwise found in the higher education system". For, the following of what the system already does results in one form of isomorphism or the other (for different types of isomorphism see Levy 1999). Basically, isomorphism in this regard refers to a process of "convergence that yields similarities" among institutions (see Levy, 1999: 18). In fact, to this end Lee (1999:158) argues that

> the survival of a private institution depends on its ability to experiment with new and different kinds of programs so that it can offer more choices to its clients.

However, where private institutions absorb excess demand their attraction of students might be sustained while this demand exists. Moreover, contemporary private institutions in many countries offer relatively inexpensive programmes, for example, commercial courses and, to a lesser extent, humanities (except for religious studies that are offered by institutions established by various religious institutions). They tend to focus on training (vocational or technical) and less on academic training, *per se* (see James, 1991; Geiger, 1992; Jones, 1992 and Tilak, 1996). In addition, private higher education institutions also tend to offer shorter programmes than those offered by public sector institutions (see Levy, 1992). Their modes of delivery of teaching and learning are also less expensive. The reverse of these aspects is true for many public higher education institutions around the world (see, for example, Altbach, 1999; Levy, 1992 and 1999 and Holtta, 1990). Indeed, this is not to say that there is anything wrong with an emphasis on these aspects by education. However, the expensive programmes and research are left to the public higher education sector, thereby creating an imbalance in the system. For example, the implication, according to Badsha (interview cited in MacGregor, 2000: 27) is that public institutions find themselves losing income-earning courses they used to cross-subsidise expensive disciplines such as music and art, medicine and engineering. Similarly, regarding the congestion of institutions in the same fields of study Jones (1992:1447) cautions that while

> the market may encourage short-term thinking and demand immediate returns; "pure" research, academic standards, and esoteric subjects may all suffer, as may those academics whose productivity is not easily visible or measurable.

The imbalance can also be found where many students might be attracted to fields of study that are less essential in developing countries and the essential programmes such as Engineering, Information Technology, Physical Science, and others will be left with public institutions to attend. Moreover, contemporary private institutions largely offer coursework senior degrees with very little or no research at all. This has become common amongst many established public higher education institutions too. The consequences of this phenomenon are such that not only there is no contribution made to the generation of new knowledge, but a research culture is not inculcated in institutions and amongst their graduates. A balance,

therefore, needs to be found between what private and public higher education institutions do as well as between coursework and quality research.

Broadening Access to Higher Education and Ensuring Equity

Most common in developing countries, the establishment of private higher education institutions is intended to broaden access to higher education. Thus, the introduction of private higher education institutions, supposedly, should be a boost to the higher education system of a developing country in many respects. For instance, according to Levy (1986b:181-3) the establishment of private higher education institutions in Brazil averted a potential social revolution because the public sector could not absorb all the students and therefore the private sector had to be encouraged by the state. When private higher education institutions perform these duties in a country, it is well and good.

However, in many instances private higher education institutions are seen as elitist and separatist. Any form of education system that seeks to stratify a country according to class cannot be condoned. Some countries have striven to make higher education affordable, if not free, and the introduction of private institutions, which set their entry requirements very high and charge relatively 'exorbitant' fees, naturally, polarises communities between the rich and poor. The rich, who can afford to pay for their education, are, therefore, afforded access to it by virtue of their richness while the poor are left out. According to Banya (2001: 172), most students at the private universities in Sub-Saharan Africa "are from well-to do houses". Although this observation is not accurate for all the countries and all private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is a phenomenon that truly exists in some, and therefore not only tarnishes the image of private higher education institutions but also becomes divisive in communities.

Moreover, private institutions in some countries are associated with status while public institutions, which are often under-resourced, have to accommodate the struggling masses. While this may be true for developed countries such as Japan and the US, it is slowly creeping in in some developing countries. The effects of this kind of social stratification are devastating in developing societies and equally to the cause of private higher education sectors. Private institutions should be there to serve as centres of higher learning for all and a resource to their communities. Communities within which private institutions operate choose the way in which to regard them. This is largely based on the behaviour and attitude which private higher education institutions themselves display. To this end, Levy (2003: 12) observes that in much of the world, private higher education is often a vehicle for social separation (when negatively labelled) or social pluralism (when positively labelled).

Therefore, in their operations, private higher education institutions should not only seek to make a meaningful contribution to higher education systems but also need to be seen to be contributing in closing existing yawning gaps of inequality. Schwartzman (2002:101) suggests that

> it can make higher education a little less inequitable when providing low-cost education and opportunities for students who are rejected by the entrance examinations of selective, public institutions.

Indeed, this suggestion should apply to all higher education institutions wherever possible. The suggestion does not necessarily mean that private institutions should focus on underachievers, instead, it implies giving opportunities to everyone and addressing social

imbalances by availing resources to all. Such an engagement will not only benefit them but may have far reaching consequences of trusting relationship with the communities, and leave an invaluable gain to society.

Partaking in Human Resources Development and Servicing the Poor with Relevant Education

The contribution of higher education to human resources development (HRD) should not be incidental, nor should it be left to chance. But, such a contribution takes a conscious effort by institutions of higher learning. Firstly, this can be achieved by higher learning institutions putting together necessary policies and structures that would seek to develop their own capacity and HRD strategies. It is in this regard that Young (2001: 82) cautions that the consequence of neglecting the need to improve the capacity of institutions is that their priorities tend to be diverted to fiscal rather than educational issues, "as educational institutions come to see themselves as businesses struggling for financial survival". Secondly, HRD requires institutions to conduct needs analyses of their communities through research and by applying appropriate curriculum designs which would seek to address the identified 'trouble spots', *per se*. The implementation of this process could be seen through the application of one or a combination of models (or portions thereof) as suggested by many practitioners (see, for example, Nadler, 1982; McLagan, 1983 and Kilpatrick, 1987). Great care, however, should always be taken in choosing and implementing relevant approaches. There is nothing stopping institutions from implementing their own designed approaches to human resources development as long as they are within the ambit of addressing identified social problems and their remedies are acceptable to the communities with which they work.

Thirdly, the streamlining of curricula to meet the demands of communities and the labour market is referred to as responsiveness. Unfortunately, the concept has been misused and abused especially by many private higher education institutions, which regard it as a marketing tool that can net them larger numbers of student enrolments and, in turn, more money. Indeed, curriculum relevance is a challenge to all higher education institutions especially in developing countries such as are found in Africa. According to Banya (2001:171), rising graduate unemployment, inadequate job performance and weak research production combine to put the relevance of higher learning to national needs under public scrutiny. He observes that

> Relevance is understood to include educational choices within the university that are in tune with the national economy and responsive to the prevailing labour market; appropriate curricula; capacity and innovative thinking on issues of national importance; the transmission of essential professional and cultural values; institutional processes and behaviour that equip graduates for leadership in society; and adequate regional, gender, and ethnic representation [and I add race in the context of South Africa] in the composition of staff and students (Banya, 2001: 171).

Curriculum relevance does not necessarily mean acceding to the demands of 'customers' in the form of students, whose demands may not have been determined scientifically but through perception and popularity of certain qualifications. Curriculum relevance means conducting proper research on labour market requirements and streamlining of curricula accordingly. In addressing the relevance of higher education institutions to society, Sawyerr (2002: 33-35) suggests guidelines for any discussion in this regard. Firstly, that universities are primarily institutions for the generation and dissemination of knowledge. However, this should not only be a responsibility associated with universities but with all institutions

claiming to be participating in the delivery of higher learning. Secondly, private higher education institutions should balance the identified community needs with their capabilities. That is, the institutions should do what is essential according to their strengths. In addition, Sawyerr (2002:34) observes that higher education institutions require the support of the public and policy makers in order to get the resources they need to rehabilitate themselves, revamp their courses and facilities and produce good teaching, research and service. The support will come if the institutions maintain good quality education and steadfast administration of their resources.

At its general assembly held in April 1998 (Lejeune, 1998), the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutions of Africa and Madagascar (ACUHIAM) resolved that

- each Catholic university or higher education institute in Africa wants to be a centre of academic excellence;
- in the choice of its curricula and subjects of study, ACUHIAM participants will try to answer the real needs of the country in which they are established;
- ACUHIAM will focus its attention on the poor and underprivileged, so as to give equal opportunity to all; and
- in the pursuit of academic excellence, regional links will be created, leading to broader international cooperation between Catholic universities.

It is encouraging to note that these resolutions largely focus on serving communities, broadly shown in the Sub-Saharan Africa context outlined above. In fact, Lejeune (1998) attests that

> it is the conviction of ACUHIAM that the poor should be an important target in their endeavours and that is up to each university to discover the best way to implement this directive.

Indeed, these are similar issues with which many institutions of higher learning, public or private, grapple within the sub-continent. While institutions of higher learning want to be centres of academic excellence and be globally competitive, they are challenged to balance that by being able to address the needs of their immediate communities, which may not necessarily be similar to global challenges. The measurement of their success, therefore, will lie in their ability to balance the two successfully. The need to be globally competitive will only go as far as many institutions are able to keep up with the latest innovations and developments in different fields of study in which they also engage. This should be regarded as an achievement on its own, for not all institutions have the same resources to develop knowledge and be able to be competitive.

Building a Reputation and Improving the Image of Private Providers

The establishment of private higher education institutions seeks to break through into the area previously dominated by the public sector. Public sector institutions in many countries have existed for long, providing their respective states with qualified and skilled personnel many of whom served the state. Thus, the relationship between the state, higher education institutions and the local communities became organic. That is, the relationship between these three sectors became harmonious and in concert, despite the problems that were encountered from time to time. In fact, this relationship may have waned with time, but compassion remains within the hearts and minds of the millions of alumni and those whose lives were touched, in one way or the other, by these higher learning institutions. Thus, over the years public higher education institutions did not only accumulate expertise and resources but sentimental attachment to their communities as well.

The introduction of private higher education institutions, therefore, is seen by many as intrusive and a direct challenge and competition to the established and trusted public institutions. Thus, private higher education institutions, especially the contemporary group, are seen as breaking the existing mould in terms of the relationship that the society has developed with public higher education institutions. Even more challenging is the introduction of non-university private institutions in a context where only universities are regarded as institutions of higher learning. As Levy (2003:13) puts it, "the rapid growth of non-university higher education in much of the world creates dissonance". In addition, Levy (1999:19) observes that even when these new institutions call themselves universities, they are met with derision. Therefore, in building their profiles private higher education institutions have to deal with the delicate environment in which they seek to operate. They need to make sure that they take communities along in their confidence.

Generally, there are many negative perceptions towards private higher education institutions in developing countries, some of which originate from the actions of private institutions themselves. If left unattended, perceptions tend to grow into 'reality'. For instance, Banya (2001: 172) observes that the acceptance of the idea of private institutions in some African states can be a problem. This is based on perceptions that the quality of education provided in private institutions does not parallel that of public higher education institutions. While this may be true for some private higher education institutions it is not for others. However, the sector as a whole becomes affected and as such, it becomes the responsibility of all the institutions within the sector to work on the image and reputation of the sector. In this context, there is great temptation to market private institutions as the best there are, beating the logic of the saying that 'to be the best, beat the best'. Such claims of easy victories do not do well for private institutions in general, including those that are indeed best at what they do.

Identifying with Challenges Facing Local Communities

Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are faced with many challenges, some of which are already outlined above. Among the most prominent challenges are fights against the scourge of diseases such as Malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and others, as well as prevalence of political conflicts that have ravaged the economies of countries in the region. In addition, the countries in Sub-Sahara are suffering from poverty and hunger, which are among the highest in the world. These are exactly some of the problems which institutions of higher learning are expected to relate to and engage with local communities in search for solutions. Private higher education institutions, therefore, should not be exception to becoming part of seeking such solutions. They cannot absolve themselves for they are also affected. Such engagement would, at least, have dual benefits. The first is that communities would receive an extra helping hand. The second is that genuine identifying with local challenges by private higher education institutions could also improve their acceptance in their respective communities.

Building Holistic Citizens Holistically

Many students in developing countries enter higher education without proper knowledge of qualifications they need to study towards, which may be relevant to their background and/or aspirations. Partly, this situation is due to poor secondary education systems that are inadequately resourced for giving good foundational education. Part of the responsibility also goes to the socialisation of students. For example, students may be unable to look beyond what they have always been exposed to in their upbringing. Thus, private higher education institutions require proper resources in order to address the problem.

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Guidance of students does not end with advice on courses to choose but also cover social aspects of raising a young adult. While higher education institutions cannot substitute the role of parents, curriculum can play a major role in moulding certain behaviours. The lean and mean focus of study fields and curriculum by many contemporary private institutions has often led to them being viewed as commercially driven; low quality and 'not quite' higher education institutions. This is also because private institutions are viewed as not giving attention to issues of moral regeneration and instillation of values and attitudes amongst their students. According to Schwartzman (2002:102) contemporary private institutions "do not aspire to play any significant role in the definition and construction of a new social order". He observes that

> higher education is not just about providing students with a profession and skills, but also with values and attitudes that contribute to countries' national and cultural identities" (Schwartzman, 2002: 101).

Thus, offering of specialised courses in particular fields of study should not necessarily mean negation of other important components of building a holistic person. The non-contribution of many private higher education institutions to the construction of holistic citizens through non-holistic curricula leaves a huge gap in the quest for development of well rounded citizens.

Cooperating with Local Public Higher Education Institutions

There are many reasons for the requirement of cooperation between private and public higher education institutions. Firstly, the most obvious and common should be to avoid duplication of services and encouragement of diversity. Thus, the cooperation between private and public institutions of higher learning should lead to complementarity of roles and functions. Secondly, it should be to promote articulation, mobility and the transferability of credits from one institution to the other, especially from non-university higher learning institutions for students who wish to continue their studies at universities. Thirdly, cooperation between private and public higher education institutions should seek to exchange knowledge and develop the less developed, which are often private institutions. It is in this regard that Sawyerr (2002:39) observes that such linkages "whether with foreign or local institutions serve the purpose, primarily, of providing legitimacy as well as programme and staff support for these young institutions".

However, there is a general tendency among private and public institutions to selfishly use these kinds of partnerships for generating profit; legitimation of poorly resourced private and under-performing institutions and endorsement of sub-standard qualifications. Certainly, partnerships like these do lead to crippling consequences for students who are lured to study towards poorly constructed qualifications. Pursuing legitimacy in this manner does not help the cause of private higher education institutions. The most credible forms of partnerships are those whose purpose is to nurture the weaker and less developed partners, often private higher education institutions. Such partnerships need to be encouraged and developed further.

Fourthly, a phenomenon observed in South Africa is that of partnerships that are aimed at providing face-to-face mediated distance education (Mabizela, forthcoming). In such cooperations, public distance education institutions (and sometimes face-to-face public institutions that venture into distance education) enter into partnerships with face-to-face private institutions. These private partner institutions take up the role of offering face-to-face delivery of teaching. Students are enrolled and certificated by public institutions. Curriculum

and course material belong to the public partner institutions. The only role of private partner institutions is to deliver teaching and, in some cases, offer supplementary materials. Despite the opportunism in making maximum financial gains, from both sides (public and private), the idea behind this type of partnership is indeed huge. Also, the demand is high. While many students require further education through distance provision, the need for face-to-face contact has not dissipated. Instead, it appears that it is in distance education contexts that face-to-face teaching is required. This is because there are now many school-leavers who further their studies through distance education and still require the support of face-to-face provision. Besides, even adult students already with tertiary qualifications appreciate face-to-face supported distance education. Registering through distance to these students is not by choice but dictated by circumstances.

Compliance with State Regulations and Policies

Private higher education sectors are often regulated separately from public higher education sectors. Thus, compliance with state policies and laws and fulfilling the state's higher education objectives are among challenges that confront private higher education institutions. These are not necessarily significant issues with public institutions because they are there to serve the state which may not necessarily be the case with private institutions. Compliance with the law for private institutions, therefore, is not only a challenge but also a necessity that can prove very essential for the survival and effectiveness of private higher education institutions. For private institutions to make a meaningful contribution to higher education systems they need the support and confidence of policymakers, the general public and local higher education institutions.

Of course, private higher education institutions cannot achieve their goals and those of contributing to higher education systems if conditions are not conducive to their operations. To this end, Geiger (1988:709) argues that

> The challenge of higher education policy, then, is to influence the characteristics of given types of private sector in order to realize such advantages [e.g., diversity, pluralism, responsiveness and mobilization of private resources for higher education] as are feasible, while also seeking to minimize the effects of inherent weaknesses [e.g., weak resource base and low academic standards].

Therefore, policymakers on their side also have a responsibility to ensure that state laws and policies that govern private higher education institutions are balanced such that they ensure a healthy development of the sector and the system as a whole. A carefully regulated private higher education sector can be the right remedy for a stable and healthy higher education system. There is very little that private higher education institutions can achieve without having favourable policies that allow for their operations. Where possible, therefore, private institutions must make a contribution in the way that states regulate them. This is not easy and is not always possible but it is essential.

Indeed, the challenges that confront private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be dealt with without dealing with hurdles first. The important element in dealing with challenges is to know the capacity of an institution and how much it can afford, as Ajayi et al. (1996: 197-198) put it, "it is important for universities to strike a balance between what is essential and possible and what is desirable and possible but not essential". The crucial element is for private institutions to know the individual directions they choose and the resources required for such choices.

All the challenges enumerated above are those for which private higher education institutions in the Sub-Saharan Africa need to consolidate resources. In order to meet these challenges, private higher education institutions need to match their needs and targets with resources, which are the backbone of provision of quality education. Their resources need to match and even exceed those of public higher education institutions if they are to attract and retain best students. Thus, private institutions have to consolidate resources so that they can manage the growth, brought about by an increasing demand for more higher education. But, what kind of resources?

What Kind of Resources?

In order to be able to address challenges that confront private higher education institutions there is a plethora of resources required with varying levels of importance. This article focuses only on those it regards as most pertinent. Similar to the challenges, the resources required by private institutions are identical to those required by public institutions. The difference is mainly with access to those resources; how they are utilised and what they mean to private institutions. Successful operations of higher education institutions, in general, hinge on availability and maintenance of resources and management of proportionate growth.

The increasing demand for higher education, whether as part of credentialism or genuine intellectual capacity development, ensures that there is steady growth in higher education enrolments. More so, such growth is even outside the boundaries of traditional demands often put on higher education. The contemporary higher education 'clientele' includes employed adults, company executives and small enterprise entrepreneurs, among others. These groups come with different and diverse demands such as for distance learning, short certificate courses, diploma courses, courses for upgrading and even full degree programmes both at graduate and post-graduate levels. Thus, institutions of higher learning have to organise and consolidate appropriate resources to cater for these requirements.

In an attempt to address the question: What kind of resources? Below are broad categories of resources required by private higher education institutions and a brief examination of what they mean to the sector.

Financial Resources

Many contemporary private institutions around the world do not have 'back-up' financial services offered by the state (to public institutions) and religious institutions (to institutions established by churches). Private institutions largely rely on tuition fees for their financial resources. This pushes institutions to concentrate on saving schemes, such as offering less expensive courses, focusing on a single field of study, offering short courses, use of hired buildings and other cost cutting measures. Above all, the priority seems to be profit rather than improving the provision of education. Avoiding spending on essential components of an educational provision leads to poor quality of education offered by such institutions. Therefore, private providers of higher education, firstly, need to ensure that they have sufficient funds for running fully-fledged institutions of higher learning, and not universities necessarily. Secondly, they need to prioritise their expenditure, concentrating on essential services that will improve their quality of services, teaching and curriculum content.

The state of the economies of Sub-Saharan countries does not allow governments to support private higher education institutions financially, even if the will exists. This is unlike in other

developing countries such as Brazil and Chile, where the private higher education sectors are supported by some state funding (Levy, 1986b). Therefore, to remain competitive private higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa need to charge competitive tuition fees and devise other creative means of raising money for their operational costs. Murapa (2003, 18-26) suggests some possible revenue generating endeavours for private institutions, such as endowment, tuition and pricing, facilities rental, short courses, corporate sponsorships/foundations, distance education, adult education, part-time programmes, consultancies, sale of goods and services and sports and recreation.

Personnel and Institutional Support Structures

For an institution to be able to deliver quality education, it requires qualified and skilled administrative personnel, suitably qualified academic staff and appropriate committees that see to the proper running of an institution. Set policies and procedures, vision and mission, objectives and goals of institutions add to the equation for a proper guide to the success of an institution. Suitably qualified academic staff will not only deliver good teaching but will also ensure high quality curriculum development. In turn, such curriculum becomes an asset for that institution not only in its physical form but also in terms of knowledge imparted to learners that pass through its doors. Thus, both administrative staff and academics should possess competencies for effective steering of an institution towards stability, academic success and growth.

The institutional personnel and, possibly, co-opted individuals come together to form committees that are part of the life-blood of institutions of higher learning. Such committees plan growth and strategise about the resources required to enhance such growth. This is the 'melting pot' of institutional personnel, policies, growth and resources utilisation. Thus, planning of institutional growth and accompanying resource allocation is crucial in the development of an institution. While this is a way of life with public institutions, it is a skill that contemporary private institutions have to learn and build into their planning and operations.

Other than in the church-established private institutions, the administrative personnel in contemporary private institutions, often, is synonymous with company personnel whose duty is to run a profitable business. That is, it is often individuals with 'good' business acumen that are preferred, if they are not owners of the institution itself. Private provision of higher education, however, does not only need good business acumen but requires a bigger responsibility of engaging with educational issues and benefiting society. It is on this basis that Murphy et. al. (1998:3) argue that we are moving from one educational era to another and as such the change

> is from bahaviorally grounded to social constructivist anchored views of learning and teaching. At the managerial level, the shift is from hierarchically grounded to community anchored perspectives on organisations. And at the institutional level, the evolution is from views of schooling grounded in conceptions of public monopolies to market-sensitive conceptions of education

Moreover, conditions created for the operation of personnel are equally crucial. For instance, Sawyerr (2002: 26) observes that the success of African universities after independence from colonial rule owes to the fact that conditions created for staff to deliver their services, among other things, were reasonably good. He observes that "there was in place an adequate staff development programme which ensured that young faculty moved on to higher qualifications,

while senior faculty had leave and other opportunities for self-renewal and updating". While the same may not be easy to replicate given the lean times through which the economics of Sub-Saharan Africa have recently moved, good working conditions and academic development may be achieved through other creative and innovative means. In this regard, Murapa (2003:15) relates the experience of Africa University, a private university in Zimbabwe

> Staff are given incentives for good performance. Remuneration, over and above the basic pay is performance related. Performance evaluation is carried out by both students and supervisors. The University ensures that staff stick to their performance objectives and attain them.

Literature on higher education governance and other literature outside higher education should contribute to the development of personnel and creation of good working conditions.

The development of personnel and academics can only meaningfully take place if private institutions employ full-time staff and are serious about their development as institutions of higher learning. The general tendency observed in a number of countries is that contemporary private higher education institutions avoid employing on a full-time basis, especially the academic staff component. It has been observed in countries like Japan, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia and Romania, amongst others, that higher education institutions employ retired, part-time and under-qualified teachers (see Tilak, 1996: 62 and Eisemon, et al., 1999: 43). Similar observations have been made in Sub-Saharan Africa that private higher education institutions "rely very heavily on part-time faculty drawn mostly from the public institutions" (Sawyerr, 2002:39). Indeed, as Sawyerr attests (2002:39), if this state of affairs persists, there are serious implications for the quality of work in both public and private institutions alike. The effects of this approach on the quality of education at these institutions can be too costly to contemplate. Chief among such implications is what Levy (1999: 22) refers to as *normative isomorphism,* which arises where professionals (e.g., professors, administrators) or others feel clear about what to do but work according to their prior socialisation to dominant norms. The dominant norm in this case would be the public institutions in which the faculty (academics) were socialised and continue to be employed full-time. In this way, any possibility for diversification is thwarted from its embryonic stage. That is, both quality education and diversity are compromised. Indeed there are exceptions, in that there are private institutions that specialise and are able to offer good quality, but further studies in the sector need to uncover best practices in developing countries, since most examples come from developed countries (see, for example, Geiger, 1985: 388). Besides the impact on diversification, this kind of arrangement could lead to overworked academics and stifling of their creativity and, in turn, have a crippling effect on the development of students. Moreover, this situation does not bode well for the development of private institutions and academics as well. It is a situation that private higher education institutions need to remedy by investing in permanent and full-time employment and academic staff development.

Material or Physical Resources
By material or physical resources, I mean such items as physical structures (buildings - classrooms, libraries, and laboratories) and working equipment such as desks, books, technological equipment and stationery. As with other resources already mentioned, higher learning institutions cannot survive without material and physical resources. The general tendency of contemporary private higher education institutions is to neglect the acquisition of these resources and rather depend on the minimum. In some cases, they hire buildings which

may not be suitable for proper learning or do not provide proper resources for the type of learning they offer, for example, computers for computer based courses. A study by the Council on Higher Education (2003:35) on some private higher education institutions in South Africa revealed that

> Libraries and library collections appeared to be far more problematic than availability and access to computers. The data showed that institutional provision for libraries and in-house library collections ranged from poor to non-existent.

While this cannot be generalised for all types of private higher education institutions and across different countries, where it takes place is a cause for concern for higher education as a whole. It leads to questioning of education offered in such institutions.

Conclusions

Firstly, provision of quality education is not an option but a necessity with all higher education institutions regardless of their affiliation. Private higher education institutions need to take their involvement in higher education seriously. In some countries, the general tendency among this sector is to concentrate on profit making and lag on crucial areas of curriculum development and quality provision of education. In the words of Schwartzman (2002:108) it is "not true that education and profit are always driven by opposite goals and motivations". Thus, while fighting for survival and, in some cases, making profit, quality should not be compromised.

Furthermore, in order to ensure better quality and results, private higher education institutions need to improve on employment patterns and conditions of employment. Concentration should be on building own academia that is driven by passion of keeping abreast with the developments in their respective areas of specialisation and higher education in general. Private higher education institutions have to learn to produce not only consumers of knowledge but producers, in large quantities. Producers of knowledge are increasingly becoming a debilitating shortage. To meet this and other challenges, some of which are outlined in this article, public and private higher education institutions need appropriate and share resources. Some of these resources are within easy reach of the institutions but they require astute leadership which is prepared to take bold moves to implement meaningful and effective change.

Secondly, in considering and contemplating their resources and student enrolments growth, private higher education institutions should be aware of the implications involved. These include having structures to make meaningful decisions on strategic growth and consolidating necessary resources to meet such growth. That is, growth has to be planned, strategic, and not left to take place haphazardly. Many contemporary private higher education institutions lack the resources and expertise to address the existing demand for higher education. They were expediently created in order to cash in on the existing demand without prior proper planning requisite for institutions operating at higher education level. This pressured situation leads to many private institutions only addressing themselves to the expedient need for qualifications by students who expediently need to enter the labour market. This is typical of profiteering on higher education where the demand (by 'clientele'- students- and not necessarily the labour market) determines the supply. That is, many private higher education institutions supply higher education based on quantitative demand by students and not on qualitative demand by the labour market. The students are often a mixture of school leavers and employed

professionals. Their needs, therefore, are various and the resources required to address them should be varied as well. Private higher education institutions, therefore, need the necessary resources in order to assess the requirements of the labour market and not necessarily that of 'customers' because the two may be different.

Lastly, private higher education institutions should work on the negative image associated with them. They have to associate their work with the needs of communities they ought to serve. Moreover, they need to make sure that their accumulated resources are not only made available to a few who can afford but creatively and innovatively inclusive of the poor, equally. Thus, private higher education institutions have to broaden their access in order to give opportunities to the rich and poor alike. Private, as well as, public higher education institutions should be centres of societal development through education in moral regeneration, values and attitudes of citizens. None of this function should be left for either because it is important to all.

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