



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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International Institute
for Educational Planning

Governance reforms in higher education: A study of selected countries in Africa

N.V. Varghese

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List of abbreviations

AAU	Association of African Universities
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
BPR	business process reengineering
CHET	Centre for Higher Education Transformation
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DVC	deputy vice-chancellor
EFA	Education for All
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GER	gross enrolment rate
HDI	Human Development Index
HEMIS	higher education management information system
HERQAA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency
HESC	Higher Education Strategy Centre
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IAU	International Association of Universities
ITS	integrated tertiary software
LPO	local purchasing order
MOE	Ministry of Education
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
NCCE	National Commission for Colleges of Education
NER	net enrolment rate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NUC	National Universities Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	performance contract
PhD	doctoral degree
R&D	research and development
RBM	results-based management
SAPSE	South African post-secondary education
UGEL	University of Ghana Enterprises Limited
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VC	vice-chancellor
WGHE	Working Group on Higher Education
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction

The developments of past decades indicate that, globally, the higher education sector has moved from a state of decline and disrepair to a state of revival and revitalization. The 1980s was a period of decline in higher education when student enrolment fell, even in developed countries (Altbach, 1984), and developing countries, especially in Africa, experienced the erosion of facilities and capacities (Kinyanjui, 1994; Mamdani, 1993; Saint, 1992). Financial crisis and the resultant reduction in state funding were considered major causes of the decline.

Developed countries were quick to respond to this decline by introducing 'cut-back management' policies and withdrawing public subsidies for higher education. Developing countries, on the other hand, were slow in responding, though they too adopted reforms to reduce costs (through staff reduction, a freeze on new appointments, and a freeze on increases in staff salary, for example), share costs, generate income, and improve efficiency. Some of the reforms drove academic staff away from universities to other, more lucrative, lines of employment, both within the country and abroad. They also, in some cases, led to deterioration both of the higher education estate and of academic standards, contributing to a sharp decline in the quality of teaching and research.

In this century, these trends have been reversed in developing countries, notably in Africa. Between 2000 and 2010, not only did the higher education system expand considerably, increasing student numbers by more than 7.7 million annually, but developing countries accounted for a significant share of this increase. Budgetary allocations to higher education increased and staff salaries improved, as did teaching-learning conditions, leading to a revival of the sector. Today, the rates of growth in higher education are highest in countries in Africa, although their enrolment base remains low. It is important to note that the expansion of the system in this century has relied increasingly on non-state funding.

The revival of the sector, reflected in the increased availability of resources and the emergence of new programmes and more diverse forms of provision, is the result of reform. These reforms helped to reduce the sector's reliance on state funding and the state's control of institutional governance and management, made institutions more autonomous and self-reliant, and made households willing investors in higher education. These changes altered the way the higher education system is governed and how institutions are managed in developing countries. This paper elaborates on these changes, focusing on Africa and drawing on case studies from some of its countries.

The first section of the paper discusses global changes in higher education and their effects on its expansion. *Section 2* considers the development of higher education in Africa, focusing on initial concerns and orientations. This is followed by a discussion of the reform and expansion of higher education in Africa in *Section 3*. *Section 4* focuses on the reforms enacted in the case study countries, while their effects are the subject of *Section 5*. *Section 6* considers whether or not these reforms improved the sector as a whole, and the final section seeks to generalize some of the trends observed in the case study countries.

1 **Global context of higher education expansion**

The higher education sector has grown rapidly during this century. Its expansion is a global phenomenon experienced by countries in all regions. Greater recognition of its economic and social value has, no doubt, contributed to an increased propensity for public authorities, private corporations and households to invest in higher education.

In terms of economic value, higher education plays an important role in the production and distribution of national income. The sector produces knowledge and imparts skills which contribute to the growth of national income, while an expansion of the system contributes to its more equitable distribution. With the further development of the knowledge economy, the knowledge and skills of graduates are, increasingly, critical factors in the promotion of economic progress and social welfare.

Research indicates that knowledge has been the single most important engine of growth and the driving force of economic performance in OECD countries over recent decades (OECD, 2000; UIS-OECD, 2003). It is now widely recognized that universities and research organizations influence the economic competitiveness of individual economies. Countries with an expanded system of higher education and higher levels of investment in research and development (R&D) activities have greater potential to grow faster in a globalized knowledge economy.

The use of knowledge, even when it is produced externally, depends on the capacity to access, assimilate and absorb it. Education undoubtedly enhances the human capacity and willingness to access knowledge. A broad-based higher education provides 'the necessary foundation for a productive, prosperous and resilient country' (Group of Eight, 2013: 7). That is one of the reasons countries with universal higher education systems are economically more competitive than others.

The role of higher education in income distribution is just as important. Higher education contributes to improved individual incomes through a number of different channels. First, higher labour force participation rates are consistently associated with higher levels of educational attainment. For women in particular, participation rates are much higher for those who are university educated than they are for those who are only school educated (UIS-OECD, 2003). The labour force participation rate for women increases with every level of education, and improves significantly at tertiary level, where it approaches the rate for men. From this point of view, women gain more than men by obtaining higher-level qualifications.

Second, higher-educated people have better access to sectors and jobs which pay better, resulting in an enhanced average income for educated people in general. Third, there is a skills premium in the labour market, whereby high-skilled workers enjoy higher wages than low-skilled workers. This is accentuated by globalization, which increases the size of the labour market companies can access. In recent years, the earning advantages associated with being in an elite occupation increased considerably. These factors clearly show the benefits of higher education in increasing employability and the chances of being employed in the high-wage sector. Fourth, people who are educated only up to secondary level are more likely to be

unemployed, with the rate of unemployment declining the better educated a person is. It is evident that engagement in tertiary education reduces the chances of being unemployed.

Recent estimates of rates of return on investment in education show that returns on higher education are not only rising but also surpass returns on other levels of education. This is a significant change from the 1960s and 1970s (World Bank, 2002) when returns on primary education were higher than those at other levels. The earning advantage of male higher education graduates over secondary school graduates varies from 82 per cent in Indonesia to almost 300 per cent in Paraguay. For women, the advantage varies from 55 per cent in Indonesia to 179 per cent in Brazil (UIS-OECD, 2003).

Viewed from an individual level, higher education is one of the best options in terms of increasing lifetime earnings as well as offering insurance against unemployment. At a national level, investment in higher education and knowledge production is rewarding and a factor in promoting growth, especially in knowledge economies. However, the knowledge gap continues to be 'one of the most important social and economic divides in modern democratic societies' (Bergan, 2005: 15). Bridging this gap is an essential step in promoting more equal growth among and within countries.

The globalization of production means demand for standardized skills and training to meet global requirements irrespective of location of production. Many of these skills and competencies are developed, in the main, at the post-secondary level of education. In other words, the knowledge-driven production of goods and services increases the demand for a higher-educated workforce. The proportion of employees with higher levels of education is increasing in developed countries which are more knowledge-based than others (World Bank, 2002).

The economic arguments aside, the success of Education for All (EFA) has increased the number of secondary school graduates seeking higher education, resulting in pressure for its expansion. At the same time, with the expansion of education at school level, the demand for more university graduates to work as teachers increased. The expansion of higher education is, therefore, propelled both by a growing pool of school graduates eligible for admission into higher education institutions and by the needs resulting from an expansion in lower levels of education.

From the social point of view, many of the social indicators of development improve once levels of education increase. One of the arguments for an expanded higher education system is that even people with low levels of education fare better in a well-educated society than in a society with a mediocre level of education (Weber, 2005). Thus, even when the effects of higher education are unequally distributed, the expansion of higher education is, in a sense, justified.

Who should finance the expansion?

When higher education was a small sector catering to students from elite backgrounds, it was, in most cases, highly subsidized by the state. When expansion of the sector became rapid, attracting even first-generation learners to higher education, the debate on financing higher education became very lively. On one side of the argument are those who consider higher education a public good to be funded entirely by the state. On the other are those who argue

that it brings huge individual dividends and hence should be financed privately and traded publicly – in other words, higher education should be treated as a commodity to be traded in the market just like any other commodity. This idea was behind moves to bring higher education under the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) (Knight, 2002; AAU, 2004; Tilak, 2011).

Many economists have argued that knowledge is a public good (Samuelson, 1954), and some consider it a global public good (Stiglitz, 1999), implying its non-rivalrous consumption and the non-excludability in its distribution. The communiqué adopted by ministers attending the Prague Higher Education Summit on the Bologna Process stated that 'higher education should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility' (Bergan, 2005: 13). One of the major policy issues that arise from categorizing higher education as a public good is that, in the absence of state investment, it will be under-produced and under-supplied.

Even when doubts are cast on the characterization of higher education as a public good, no one doubts the considerable external benefits of higher education. These imply that collective returns on investment in higher education are greater than the sum of individual returns. Markets may not take into account these external benefits and will, therefore, under-invest in higher education (Jonathan, 2001; Tilak, 2008). Since higher education produces external benefits, the state has to intervene to avoid under-provision. It is this understanding that has promoted state funding in higher education.

The state played a dominant role in development during post-World War II reconstruction in Europe and the nation-building that followed independence in developing countries. Most countries invested in higher education during this phase, recognizing the importance of a qualified and trained workforce in nation building. There was, in a sense, a 'state monopoly on tertiary education' (World Bank, 2002: 69) and public universities became the dominant feature of the development of higher education. This tradition continues and public universities still dominate in all regions except Latin America and East Asia.

The state-led model of development came under attack in the 1980s. Neo-liberal thinking, the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, and political changes in Eastern Europe brought into question the role of the state in development and the rationale for continued state investment in higher education. Critics argued for reduced public investment in education in general, and for a diversion of public investment from higher to primary education, in developing countries in particular (World Bank, 1986; Banya and Elu, 2001).

The market-friendly reforms and globalization of recent decades strengthened the argument for expanding higher education using resources other than the public exchequer. Households and other private sources are increasingly supporting the rising social demand for higher education. Consequently, both developed and developing countries have reduced, or withdrawn entirely, subsidies to higher education, and introduced, instead, cost-recovery measures, cost-sharing strategies, and income-generating activities (Sanyal, 1995; Ishengoma, 2004) to enable public higher education institutions to expand. These entrepreneurial universities (Clark, 1998) helped increase enrolment without drawing on public funds.

In terms of changes to the governance of public institutions, ministries of education by and large reduced their powers to overall policy, strategic planning, coordination, and funding negotiations with other ministries (of finance) and foreign agencies. Many governments

transferred responsibility for higher education and its governance to provincial level, delegated powers to buffer organizations, or granted autonomy to higher education institutions (Fielden, 2008).

This period was also notable for the emergence of the private sector in higher education. This was especially true in many of developing countries, which did not have a tradition of private higher education institutions. Higher education can be provided, produced, and financed by the state, by the market, or by a combination of the two. As discussed above, the state (public universities) is losing its monopoly on higher education provision and production. At the same time, there are no instances of totally market-driven provision (private for-profit institutions) being the dominant model of higher education. Instead, it is increasingly becoming common practice in higher education for public funds to be allocated more on the basis of market principles, and for markets in higher education very often not to be confined to for-profit entities (Weber, 2005).

Enrolment in higher education increased globally from 100 million to 177.7 million between 2000 and 2010 (UIS, 2012), reflecting an average annual increase in enrolment of more than 7.7 million students. The world average gross enrolment ratio (GER) in 2010 was 29 per cent. However, GER not only varies across regions but also, in some cases, has increased significantly in recent years. For example, the GER varies from 7 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to 76 per cent in North America and Western Europe. The GER more than doubled between 1991 and 2010 in the Arab region (from 11 per cent to 24 per cent), more than quadrupled in East Asia and the Pacific (from 7 per cent to 29 per cent), increased by almost three times (from 6 per cent to 17 per cent) in South and West Asia, and more than doubled (from 17 per cent to 41 per cent) in Latin America. This fast expansion of the sector is very often taking place with the support of non-state funding.

2 Higher education development in Africa

Developments in the higher education sector in Africa followed some of the global trends discussed above. At the time they became independent, most African countries heavily relied on external experts to manage the economy. The idea of 'development universities' (Cloete, Bailey, and Maassen, 2011) highlighted the role of universities in meeting the human resource needs of the economy. Both during and after countries' struggles for national liberation, there was a serious effort to 'Africanize' the administration and decision-making processes. 'The first step in African independence was to put Africans at the top of the government ... Africanization has everywhere gone more quickly than the colonials anticipated ... There has consequently been a strongly expansionist view of higher education' (Sutton, 1971).

One of the important roles played by the higher education sector during the post-independence period of many countries was that of the indigenization (nationalization) of development. This process of indigenization took two forms: a) the indigenization of development; and b) the indigenization of education (Atal, 1995). The former involved the replacement of expatriates in administration and decision-making positions with nationals. However, many newly independent countries did not have the universities to provide the training high-level professional staff would need to replace the expatriates, so these countries relied on sending people abroad for training (Kidd, 1991). The establishment of national universities in many instances helped train nationals and indigenize development.

The indigenization of educational development involved indigenizing teaching staff, curriculum, and language at the different levels of education. The priority for national governments was to train nationals to teach in schools, especially primary schools. Although this sector too was dependent on expatriates, the domestic higher education institutions succeeded in producing trained nationals and replacing expatriates in the teaching profession. At present, teaching at all levels of education in most of the countries in Africa is dominated by nationals.

The state and public sector institutions were central to the development strategy of newly independent countries in Africa. This model was replicated in education. Higher education was provided through public universities. The 1960s and 1970s saw the establishment of new universities in African countries. Public universities in these countries 'symbolized national pride and self-respect' (Coleman and Court, 1993) and self-reliance. It can be seen from this that the expansion of higher education served both the political and the economic aspirations of newly independent African governments. For that reason, governments were willing to invest resources in higher education.

The post-independence period, therefore, was notable for a positive political attitude and favorable resource allocation towards higher education. Higher education in Africa benefited from the need to replace expatriates who occupied more than 60 per cent of jobs requiring university-level qualification. In the decade following independence, allocations to higher education averaged around 19 per cent of the total education budget, even in countries where less than 1 per cent of the relevant age-group enrolled, making unit costs very high (Hinchliffe,

1987). During this period, higher education remained an elite sector with limited access but generous public funding.

African universities, like those in other regions, were modelled on the institutions of higher education operating in the respective colonial powers. Universities in Francophone Africa were based on French universities, and those in Anglophone countries were based on British and American universities. The universities had limited access, instruction was in a foreign language, and institutions enjoyed limited autonomy (Teferra and Altbach, 2003). In many instances, political leaders (presidents and prime ministers) became university chancellors and patrons, thus enjoying considerable power and influence over university affairs and limiting the autonomy of these institutions.

International agencies also helped shape the development of higher education in Africa. UNESCO sponsored the first Africa-wide conference on higher education, in Tananarive in 1962. This paved the way for the creation of the Association of African Universities (AAU). The heads of universities who participated in the Tananarive conference met in Khartoum to form AAU, which was formally inaugurated in Rabat, Morocco, in 1967. AAU organized regular meetings to provide the vision and framework for the development of higher education in Africa.

During this period, the main source of funding was the government, which supported the expansion of higher education through highly subsidized public institutions. The other source of finance was external funding. The World Bank was the single largest source of external funding for higher education in Africa (Habte, 1989). Many private foundations also made substantial contributions to developing institutional capacity to carry out research and training in Africa. The Rockefeller Foundation concentrated its efforts on certain universities and provided fellowships and grants for programmes of study abroad, especially at master's and doctoral level, appointed visiting staff, and provided research grants to promote local research (World Bank, 1988). The Carnegie Corporation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Ford Foundation were among other notable private donors.

These trends in external funding continued into the new millennium. In 2000, a consortium of four US philanthropic foundations began a five-year programme to assist selected universities in some African countries. Higher education institutions in Africa also received support from governments and agencies in many European countries, including Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK. Recent trends in the external funding of higher education show that a major share of higher education aid is indirect, increasing from 62 per cent in 2002 to around 90 per cent in 2006 (Varghese, 2010).

This state-funded, heavily subsidized model of higher education did not last long. In the 1980s, the proportion of higher education funded by the state declined, as did levels of external funding for higher education. As a result, many public universities fell into a 'severe state of disrepair'. The deterioration of physical facilities and academic provision, combined with faculty flight due to low pay scales and non-payment of salaries, led to a sharp decline in the quality of African higher education (Mamdani, 1993; Mwiria, 1992; Teferra, 1997; Adeyemi, 2000). Net migration from sub-Saharan Africa doubled from 0.57 million in 1995 to 1.07 million in 2005, with an estimated third of this number university graduates (World Bank, 2009).

These developments have undoubtedly contributed to a deterioration of teaching standards, a depletion of research capacity, and an erosion of national analytical capacities to support policy-making (Saint, 1992; Otieno, 2003). The major question in the 1990s was how to design survival strategies to reconstruct and revive higher education in the region (World Bank, 1988; Eisemon, 1989). Educational reforms in Africa in the 1990s centred on the issue of financing alternatives to promote an expanding system of higher education and managing universities more efficiently and effectively (Sanyal, 1995).

3 Higher education reforms and expansion of higher education in Africa

The revival of higher education required reforms that could mobilize resources and lead to the restructuring of study programmes, governance and management to ensure better alignment with markets. The economic reforms of the 1990s indicated a move away from the state to the market. Market-friendly reforms became common in economic sectors and their influence was reflected in education, especially higher education. However, the pressure to reform higher education was worldwide as the knowledge-based economy became the motor of economic growth and competitiveness (Fielden, 2008).

A global environment positively inclined towards market-friendly reform in higher education no doubt encouraged and promoted similar reform in Africa. However, African countries had their own motivations. First, political changes and a return to democracy in several countries during the 1990s were important influencing factors in moves to democratize higher education and improve access to it (Moja, 2004; Cloete and Bunting, 2000). Second, the financial crisis and the resultant inability of the state to fund an expanding system of higher education forced countries to develop alternative strategies for the financing of higher education (Kinyanjui, 1994; Court, 1999; Chuta, 1998). Positive economic growth accompanied by improved household income and better employment prospects increased the capacity and willingness of households to invest in quality higher education and provided fertile ground for market operations in higher education.

The pressure for reform came from three sets of actors: the state and the corporate sector for improving economic growth and competitiveness; employers looking for relevant skills; and households willing to pay for their higher education. The reforms are in part an effort to satisfy these actors and respond to their concerns. The core concerns are common across reforms in a number of different countries, although their relative importance varies according to the level of development in the country (Varghese, 2012). Most reforms express: (a) a concern for knowledge production and use of knowledge in production – the preoccupation in many countries with university ranking and the establishment of world class universities (Salmi, 2009) stems from this premise; (b) a concern for realigning higher education to the employment market (Al-Samarrai and Bennell, 2003; UNESCO, 2012); and (c) a concern for expanding higher education.

Although all three concerns are relevant to higher education reform in Africa, the immediate concern was to expand the system since the region was characterized not only by low GERs but also, in many cases, by stagnating, if not declining, enrolment rates. Certain aspects of globalization, particularly the spread of market principles to all sectors, including education, prompted strategies for expansion which relied on non-state resources. The impact of globalization on higher education in Africa can be summarized in terms of six Cs: corporatization of management; collectivization of access; commercialization of learning; commodification of knowledge; computerization of education; and connectivity of institutions (Zezeza, 2004).

The reform of higher education in Africa might be said to have stemmed from the desire of the state to expand higher education and the fiscal constraints faced in financing this expansion. Market-friendly policy-making was an integral part of this package of reforms, enacted in the context of globalization. From this perspective, the reforms implemented in African universities can broadly be categorized as: (a) the privatization of public institutions; and (b) the promotion of private institutions (Varghese, 2006).

The privatization measures imply that, while institutions remain in public ownership, their operations are guided by market principles. Some of the specific privatization measures adopted by countries and universities in Africa include: a university enterprise scheme and parallel programmes at the University of Nairobi (Lindow, 2009); dual-track admission policies – with sponsored and private students – in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, and Uganda (Makerere University) (Mamdani, 2008; Court, 1999); residential and non-residential programmes in Malawi; institutional transformation programmes, cost-sharing, and revenue diversification strategies at the University of Dar-es-Salaam (Ishengoma, 2004); dual-track systems in Zambia; and the cost-recovery measures adopted widely through the abolition of subsidies, the pricing of services, and the introduction of tuition fees and student loan programmes in several countries in the region (Johnstone, 2003; Oketch, 2003; World Bank, 2010).

The establishment of private higher education institutions gained momentum from the late 1990s onwards (Oketch, 2003). There are private universities, private colleges, and non-university private institutions in Africa. Private universities offer courses leading to a degree, while others offer short-duration courses leading to a certificate or diploma. In many African countries it is the private higher education segment that is expanding very rapidly (Levy, 2006; Mabizela, 2002; Taver, 2003; Varghese, 2006). In many countries in Africa, the number of private universities now outnumber the number of public universities. It has been noted that non-university private institutions are expanding faster than the university sector.

Some private higher education institutions are owned by nationals while others are owned by transnational corporations and institutions. Some foreign universities operate branch campuses in many African countries. Similarly, a number of private institutions are operated by religious – notably Christian and Islamic – organizations. Many of the private institutions offer courses in a limited number of subject areas (Varghese, 2006). They very often offer market-friendly courses in areas such as business administration, computer sciences, accounting, marketing, economics, and communication, and rarely offer courses in the sciences, or in medicine or engineering, which require heavy investment in laboratories and equipment (ADEA-WGHE-AAU-IIEP, 2009).

Another major global reform which affected all regions was the move towards the harmonization of degree structure, student assessment, and external quality-assurance mechanisms to drive the system towards better convergences and integration. Although efforts to harmonize higher education very often stem from the Bologna Process, the harmonization efforts in Africa started in the 1980s. UNESCO, at the Arusha convention of 1981, mooted the idea of developing a structure to ensure the comparability of diplomas awarded by universities in the region. Although not all countries ratified the convention conclusions, the African Union Convention came up with a plan of action for the harmonization and mutual recognition of degrees, contents, and quality of education offered in the institutions of different countries in the region

(Oyewole, 2013). All the reforms discussed above contributed in one form or another to the expansion of higher education in Africa.

Expansion of higher education in Africa

The enrolment ratios at various levels of education (*Table 1*) indicate that disparities between global and African averages are narrowing. In 2010, Africa's average GER was almost equal to the world average at primary level, while the difference is less than two times at the secondary level, and more than four times at the higher education level. It can be seen from *Table 1* that educational disparities are positively associated with levels of education, with the largest regional disparities in enrolment in higher education.

Table 1. Gross enrolment ratios (GER) 1970–2010

		Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
		Both sexes	Both sexes	Both sexes
World total	1970	89.9	36.4	9.2
	1980	95.9	46.5	12.3
	1990	99.2	51.8	13.8
	1997	101.8	60.1	17.4
	2010	106.0	70.0	29.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	1970	52.5	7.1	0.8
	1980	79.5	17.5	1.7
	1990	74.8	22.4	3.0
	1997	76.8	26.2	3.90
	2010	101.0	40.0	7.0

Sources:

(a) 1970–1990: Estimates drawn from the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999.

(b) 2000 and 2010: Estimates compiled from the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999 and the UIS online statistical database (www.uis.unesco.org) that provided values for 2000.

African higher education has come a long way since the first students graduated from an African institution (Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone) in 1879. Some 5.2 million students enrolled in African institutions of higher education in 2010. However, the GER in sub-Saharan African countries is only 7 per cent, the lowest for any region in the world. In 2010, the GER was as low as 1 per cent in Malawi, and 2 per cent in Eritrea, Niger, and Tanzania, among other countries. Mauritius, with a GER of 25 per cent, ranks highest among African countries (*Table 2*). The largest gains in enrolment ratios were made over the last decade. This is partly due to the expansion of higher education through private institutions and private student schemes in public institutions.

Trends in growth in enrolment in Africa over the past four decades (*Table 2*) show that higher education was either growing very slowly or stagnating until the beginning of this century when the GER started improving quickly. Between 2000 and 2010, the GER doubled in many countries, and increased by three or four times in others.

That the reform measures discussed in the previous section helped expand the sector is confirmed by the fact that most expansion took place in the private segment of public institutions (fee-paying students) and in private institutions of higher education. At present, many countries in Africa maintain high rates of enrolment growth in higher education (Mohammedbhai, 2008) and the region has the highest rates of growth in enrolment in institutions of higher education in this century.

Table 2. Gross enrolment ratio for higher education in sub-Saharan Africa 1970–2010

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Angola	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.0	4.0
Benin	0.1	1.4	2.7	4.0	11.0
Burkina Faso	0.0	0.3	0.7	...	4.0
Burundi	0.1	0.5	0.7	1.0	3.0
Cameroon	0.5	1.7	3.3	5.0	11.0
Central African Republic	0.1	0.9	1.5	2.0	3.0
Congo	1.7	5.1	5.4	5.0	6.0
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.7	1.2	2.4	1.0	6.0
Equatorial Guinea	...	5.6	1.8	3.0	2.0
Ethiopia	0.2	0.4	0.8	2.0	5.0
Ghana	0.7	1.6	1.4	3.0	12.0
Kenya	0.8	0.9	1.6	3.0	4.0
Madagascar	1.0	2.6	3.0	2.0	4.0
Malawi	0.4	0.5	0.6	...	1.0
Mali	0.2	0.8	0.6	2.0	6.0
Mauritius	2.5	1.0	3.5	11.0	25.0
Namibia	3.3	6.0	9.0
Niger	...	0.3	0.7	1.0	2.0
Rwanda	0.2	0.3	0.6	2.0	5.0
Senegal	1.4	2.7	3.0	4.0	8.0
Uganda	0.5	0.5	1.2	3.0	4.0
United Republic of Tanzania	0.2	0.3	0.3	1.0	2.0
Zimbabwe	...	1.3	5.2	4.0	6.0

Sources:

(a) 1970–1990: Estimates drawn from the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999.

(b) 2000 and 2010: Estimates compiled from the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999 and the UIS online statistical database (www.uis.unesco.org) that provided values for 2000.

4 Nature of higher education reforms in the case study countries

Traditionally, higher education in Africa has been offered by the public institutions funded, managed, and controlled by the government. With shrinking public resources, the concept of 'new public management' crept into the higher education sector. Many governments transferred part of their authority and responsibility to institutions, which became more autonomous and market-friendly in their operations. The institutions have introduced several reform measures which have resulted in substantial changes in the way their activities are organized and managed. The present research study is an effort to analyse these reforms in selected countries and understand their effects on the governance of higher education at institutional and national levels.

The case studies centred on two major research questions:

- a. What new reform measures related to the governance and management of higher education were introduced in the recent past?
- b. What are the effects of these reform measures on institutional governance and management?

The term *governance* refers to the structures and processes of decision-making. It may entail the creation of new structures. *Structure* mainly concerns offices, positions, and formal roles within an organization. The term *management* refers to the implementation of decisions, which involves specification criteria for the allocation of resources to various activities, the allotment of tasks to various groups, and the evaluation of performance. The term *effect* concerns the changes resulting from the reform measure.

This study aimed to analyse similarities and differences in governance reforms and steering policies across countries with varying developmental contexts. The comparative approach provided an analytical framework for examining trends, with flexibility to contextualize the evidence generated. The study relied on secondary and primary data sources. The secondary sources were used to analyse the provision and progress of higher education and the policies followed in the country in question. The information generated from the primary sources included data collected through questionnaires conducted with different segments of the university community, and through interviews with people holding positions of responsibility, at both institutional and national level.

The countries examined in the research had all experienced higher education reform and the introduction of new steering policies. However, to give a comparative picture and to ascertain the possibilities of generalizing the findings, countries with different development contexts were also selected.

The countries selected as case studies were: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. These countries vary in terms of economic and higher education development and thus provide a continuum, from a low-income country such as Ethiopia to a relatively high-income country

like South Africa. All of the countries have several public universities, the regulation of which necessitates reform at a national level.

The countries were selected in such a way that the variations are substantial, and, as noted above, taken together, provide a development continuum. Four variables were identified to guide selection: (i) the Human Development Index (HDI) of 2011; (ii) the primary school net enrolment rate (NER) for 2009; (iii) the secondary NER for 2009; and (iv) the GER for higher education in 2010. Based on these indicators, Ethiopia is the least developed, followed by Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, which is the most developed (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Characteristics of selected countries

	HDI 2011	NER primary 2009	NER secondary 2009	GER higher education 2010
Ethiopia	0.363	84.0	34.0	4.0
Nigeria	0.459	59.0	30.0	10.0*
Kenya	0.509	83.0	59.0	4.0
Ghana	0.541	76.0	57.0	9.0
South Africa	0.619	90.0	94.0	15.0*
World Average		90.0	68.0	29.0

Note: * 2006

Sources: (a) UNDP 2011 for HDI; (b) UIS 2011 for enrolment data.

The nature of reforms in the selected countries

The specific reform measures studied were identified by the national research teams from the respective countries. Each research team discussed and finalized the specific reforms to be examined in a workshop in Addis Ababa. The reforms selected for detailed analysis are set out below.

In Ethiopia, the higher education proclamation of 2003 (No. 351/2003) grants autonomy to higher education institutions in respect of personnel, finances, internal organization, and linkages with national and international organizations. The reforms also led to the introduction of a block grant system, enrolment-based budgeting, and cost sharing.

The reforms envisage that all public higher education institutions will be established with autonomy and accountability. They also define the governance structure as comprising an independent board of governors, the senate (academic deans and directors with a few elected academics), academic commissions, and department assemblies. Changes in the higher education governance system included a shift from a collegiate model based on shared responsibility to a managerial model, the creation of buffer organizations, and the introduction of an outcomes-based strategic plan.

The proclamation allowed private higher education institutions to be established in Ethiopia and helped make cost sharing common practice in many universities. It also introduced the block grant system to universities, established a Council of Universities, and set up buffer organizations such as the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQAA)

and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC). While the former sets quality standards and benchmarks, the latter was entrusted with providing, designing, and developing strategic directions for higher education, with the aim of ensuring relevance. Before 2003, all higher education institutions, except Addis Ababa University and Haramaya University, were governed directly by a department in the Ministry of Education (MOE). Today, each university has its own board, established by the government proclamation, making it autonomous from the direct interference of the MOE.

In Nigeria, following the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1998), public universities became autonomous, protected from over-regulation by the government, and subject to accountability measures. Autonomy gave universities the freedom to appoint key officers, determine the conditions of service of their staff, regulate student admissions and academic curricula, and control their finances. The autonomy measures included the freedom to introduce courses and generate income, and the introduction of institutional evaluation, staff appraisals, and so on.

The Nigerian federal government, in its efforts to democratize public educational institutions, changed the law in 2003 to improve autonomy for the university system. The 2003 act provided them with the freedom to govern and regulate themselves as independent legal entities, without interference from the government and its agencies. Prior to the reforms, vice-chancellors were appointed and removed by the president of the country. Now, the university council appoints the vice-chancellor (VC) from a list of three candidates recommended to it. The buffer institutions include the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

In Kenya, the government followed up on the public service reforms of the 1990s by introducing results-based management (RBM) as the basic approach to the governance and management of public institutions. The performance contract (PC) was one of the main elements of this reform. A PC is a negotiated agreement between the government and a public institution focusing on its performance and outcomes. It provides managerial and operational autonomy to public institutions and is based on performance criteria or the tenets of good corporate governance. Each performance criterion has selected performance indicators to measure the progress made. In a typical PC, performance indicators and targets for each criterion are represented in a matrix and form part of the contract.

In Ghana, internal reforms initiated by the University of Ghana in 2007 led to the review and replacement of the act of parliament and statutes guiding the internal organization and operations of public universities in the country. The reforms included: new institutional evaluation procedures; the merging of courses; the introduction of a credit system, cost-recovery measures, and new funding formula; the creation of new governing bodies and buffer institutions; new staff recruitment procedures; and the transition of staff from the civil service to becoming university employees. The Ghana study explored the interface between the internal reforms of 2007 and the national legal and educational framework. It examined the degree to which the reforms initiated by the university have achieved the desired results, as well as the impact they have had on the governance of systems of tertiary institutions, nationally and internally.

In South Africa, the planning and funding reforms of 2003 helped steer the higher education system to becoming more responsive to national development needs. The new funding/

planning framework replaced the South African post-secondary education (SAPSE) funding model. The new framework indicated the mechanisms by which government grants would be distributed to individual institutions, in accordance with: (a) national planning and policy priorities; (b) the quantum of funds made available in the national higher education budget; and (c) the approved plans of individual institutions. The new framework has had considerable influence in steering institutions of higher education to achieve the intended national goals. A basic feature of the new funding framework was that it linked resource allocations to national planning and institutional plans. The planning/funding link made the framework essentially a goal-directed mechanism for the distribution of government grants to institutions in accordance with national policy and planning priorities.

The various measures implemented in these countries show how reforms in these countries aimed, on the one hand, to give more operational freedom to institutions of higher education, while, at the same time, making them more accountable. Although not all case studies focus on the issue of autonomy, it is an underlying theme of the reforms initiated in these countries.

The reforms and their effects were studied in the context of changes in governance and management, academic domains, financial issues, staff management, monitoring and evaluation procedures, and so on.

5 Did the reforms effect changes in governance and management of higher education?

The reforms resulted in changes in the way the governance and management of institutions of higher education are carried out. The following paragraphs try to capture some of these changes in certain specific areas.

New governance structures

One of the visible effects of the reforms was the creation of new structures. For example, in an initial step to develop autonomy and implement other reforms, Addis Ababa University created a new executive office, the Reform Office. The new governance structure also included five new vice-president offices: for academic matters, for business and development, for research and postgraduate programmes, for communication and external relations, and for health. Six new senior academic offices were created under the management of the six vice-presidents. Changes in the higher education governance system included a shift from the collegiate to the managerial model, the creation of buffer organizations, and the introduction of an outcome-based strategic plan.

The existing faculties and schools in the university were clustered into seven colleges headed by the directors in addition to the faculty or school deans. The directors report to the university president while the deans report to the vice-presidents. The seven colleges became more autonomous in financial matters, in executing and supervising their activities. The greater autonomy they now enjoyed gave each college the freedom to use its budget without the approval of officials in central administration.

In Nigeria, greater autonomy led to the formation of university councils, each of which serves a four-year term. There was an impact on institutional governance and structure and the process whereby new VCs, deans, and heads of departments are selected was changed. However, institutional autonomy proved precarious. The National University Commission (NUC) became involved in the management of institutional finances, as well as in the selection of institutional leaders and members of governing councils, the approval of new curriculum, and the physical development plans for each university. As university autonomy became compromised, academic staff and student organizations voiced public criticism to press for renewed autonomy.

In Kenya, at national level, a permanent secretary with responsibility for performance contracting was appointed to the office of the Prime Minister. In the Ministry of Higher Education, two officers were put in charge of performance contracting. At university level: (a) an ad-hoc committee, chaired by the deputy vice-chancellor (DVC) for administration and finance, was created and mandated to develop university corporate strategic plans and performance contracts with the ministry; (b) a full-time performance contract secretariat was created under the office of the DVC (administration and finance), within some of the colleges; (c) an ad-hoc International Organization for Standardization (ISO) steering committee was established under the office of the VC, with ad-hoc committees at the college level; (d) a DVC post with responsibility for

research, production, and extension was created; and (e) a DVC was appointed in charge of student affairs to improve service delivery.

Since the introduction of performance contracts, institutional governance and management has been shared among the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the university councils, and the performance contracting secretariat. The buffer institution, the Commission for Higher Education, has not had much of a role. However, the new Universities Act 2012 gives the Commission for University Education a supervisory role over all universities.

The University of Ghana constituted an expanded council with a number of committees and sub-committees in specific areas. The Academic Board was reconstituted with new committees for the: (i) Business and Executive Committee; (ii) Academic Quality, Curriculum, and Staff Development Committee; (iii) Office of Research, Innovation and Development Advisory Board; and (iv) Office of Research, Innovation and Development Management Board. The new structure also included a new finance director and audit director.

Management processes

The principles guiding the governance reforms at Addis Ababa University were: (i) vertical decentralization; (ii) horizontal decentralization; (iii) self-governance; (iv) inclusiveness; (v) transparency; and (vi) recourse. These principles helped extend autonomy by creating decision-making bodies and committees at all levels. The university introduced the 'business process reengineering' (BPR) approach to manage institutional affairs. The introduction of BPR was intended to optimize efficiency in service delivery and improve core work processes. One of the major issues at the university is the large number of support staff. It has 5,000 support staff compared to 2,000 academic staff. The reforms could do very little to alter this ratio between support staff and academic staff.

In Nigeria, autonomy led to a more democratic process for the election of heads of department and deans. It also resulted in the introduction of a committee system with an established due process and procedure for doing things, which reduced the arbitrariness of decision-making. In the area of staff management, selection procedures were changed. The new appointments procedure includes an inter-departmental interview panel, and a written examination and presentation by applicants. The university also established promotion committees at departmental levels.

At Nairobi University, the management style has become more transparent, accountable, participatory, and inclusive, with more scope for unions to negotiate for better terms. Kenya introduced the competitive hiring of senior managers. For example, the secretary in charge of higher education is hired competitively. Similarly, staff recruitment and promotion are based on the evaluation of their performance. Staff in ministries need to attend specific courses at the Kenya Institute of Management before they may be considered for promotion. The competitive hiring of all top managers helped minimize political interference.

Academic programmes

Addis Ababa University established multidisciplinary centres, expanded and diversified programmes of study, and strengthened science and technology programmes. Fifteen

new centres of excellence and institutes were established to provide multidisciplinary competency-based training and education. The university also introduced the modularization of curriculum and courses to enhance 'customer satisfaction'.

Because of performance contracts, the University of Nairobi introduced many academic programmes, improved student enrolment at all levels, including doctoral level, published more academic papers, and increased the participation of academic staff in conferences. In Nigeria, autonomy created more freedom for innovative curriculum development. Academic programmes developed in the university are now more responsive to societal needs. Classroom interactions and research efforts reflect the needs of the society and have helped develop new market-driven and employment-oriented courses.

The University of Ghana reviewed its course credit and semester system and introduced a four-year degree structure. It also introduced a new grading system to reflect the course-credit/semester system. The Department of Classical History and Civilization and the Department of Philosophy became the Department of Philosophy and Classics to enable a better use of resources. The university established faculty-based research review committees and mechanisms for the periodic review of departmental curricula. To improve quality, a doctorate degree was made the minimum qualification for academic appointment at the university.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

In Kenya, monitoring and evaluation procedures were strengthened. Quarterly monitoring was introduced, along with semi-annual and annual evaluation of the results. However, the department in charge of performance contracting often did not find the time and resources to analyse the quarterly reports or to monitor performance on the ground. Such issues did impact on universities such as the University of Nairobi, where systematic monitoring seems to have improved performance at both individual and university levels.

In Nigeria, changes were introduced to ensure staff accountability and establish evaluation procedures. The university set up an internal quality assurance unit, and introduced team teaching and mechanisms to reward good performance and deal with poor performance.

In South Africa, a performance-based funding framework and the need for institutions to adhere to agreed enrolment and output targets required universities to put in place closer monitoring mechanisms to ensure delivery against the agreed targets. The reforms also resulted in the establishment of the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) as a planning tool to monitor enrolments and a mechanism for the distribution of subsidies to institutions. Institutions had to use the same software and planning tools as the department to facilitate easy compliance and monitoring of plans. HEMIS brought stability and predictability to the system.

One of the features of the funding framework is that it is performance-based, rewarding institutions according to the quantity of their outputs. The linking of the distribution of funds to research outputs made institutions compete for research funds, which, in turn, made the system more competitive. According to the HEMIS (2012) data, there was a 52 per cent increase in the number of research publication units between 2002 and 2011, with a significant increase in the output of historically black institutions.

Financial management

In Ethiopia, line-item budget-based resource transfer was replaced by a system of block grants. This had many implications for the governance and management of universities. In Kenya, the reforms helped introduce an automated accounting system, zero-based budgeting, and better financial management. Some of these efforts led to the generation of an operational surplus in the University of Nairobi. Prior to the reforms on university autonomy, the acute shortage of funds almost led to the total collapse of the university system, resulting in a decline in research output and quality of teaching within the Association of African Universities.

In Nigeria, the University of Ibadan diversified sources of funding through interventions including competitive research funding, a special project fund, tuition fees, and income-generating ventures. The university also established direct collaborations with international organizations and grant partners. The changes introduced in the area of budget and financial management include the establishment of a finance committee at department level and the use of a local purchasing order (LPO) for the purchase of important items. Greater autonomy increased the income-generating activities of departments and faculties, although the income generated was limited.

In Ghana, the government's National Institutional Renewal Programme obliged public universities to generate 30 per cent of their budgetary requirements. The University of Ghana has been generating around 25 per cent of its income from student fees, the privatization of some services, such as guest house services and land leases for private hostels, and market-driven courses. The university has a committee that oversees its investment portfolio. A limited liability company, University of Ghana Enterprises Limited (UGEL), has been set up to manage income-generating activities. The university introduced integrated tertiary software (ITS) to handle administrative functions, including finance, student records, human resource management, and the payroll system. This has allowed the institution to reduce the number of bank accounts managed in the university and has made financial reporting easier.

The discussions above indicate that the reforms effected changes in crucial areas of the governance and management of universities. However, the more difficult question is whether these reforms improved the higher education system as a whole.

6 Did governance reforms improve higher education?

In Ethiopia, senior management feel that the changes brought about by granting autonomy have been broadly positive. With autonomy, the financial procedures have changed. Allocations from government have come directly from the Ministry of Economic Development and Finance to the university, and government control has reduced. The involvement of the government in the affairs of Addis Ababa University is merely supervisory and not administrative or managerial. However, whether these changes have improved the financial situation or managerial efficiency is not very clear.

Criticism has been raised against the outcomes-based strategic plan (whose main component was business process reengineering, or BPR) which was one of the basic elements of the reform. Many in the university community feel that the reforms based on BPR caused a paradigm shift from academic competence to operational competence, leading to the vocationalization of the curriculum. Administrative staff, too, expressed a very negative opinion of BPR and its implementation. Even those who supported BPR felt that it was a badly implemented idea. This suggests that the autonomy gained by the university may not have contributed to an improvement in institutional effectiveness, as was expected. It should be mentioned that an assessment of reforms in Addis Ababa University, carried out in 2011 by the Reform Council, was very critical of the changes and their implementation.

In Kenya, performance contracting led to increased autonomy of public universities and resulted in a greater sense of partnership between universities and the government, with partners placed on a more equal footing. The PC helped reorganize internal operations and its success made decision-making quicker and more efficient. It increased accountability measures and the measures, in turn, helped ensure increased output by the university. Research productivity increased, leading to an improvement in the national ranking of the university. In fact, the University of Nairobi moved from 21st place in national rankings in 2005 to 1st place in 2011. This is a very positive development.

The reforms in Ghana helped promote a greater sense of responsibility among staff and students and stimulated intellectualism. It also strengthened the decision-making process at faculty level, and enhanced teaching and research. The reforms were beneficial particularly to the reorganization of the collegiate system. The reforms also brought about greater clarity among administrators as to university goals and institutional direction, and constraints on their effectiveness.

The reforms in South Africa brought stability and predictability to the higher education system. The new funding and enrolment planning policies helped the government to shape and scale the system of higher education. Institutions such as the University of Pretoria adopted the national enrolment planning and funding frameworks to plan and manage their operations at institutional level. Over the past decade, disadvantaged groups have benefited from the expansion of university institutions. For example, the review of the National Student Financial

Aid Scheme (NSFAS) indicated that, between 1999 and 2009, the NSFAS had been able to provide financial aid to 650,000 disadvantaged students.

Unfortunately, while the objective of access was achieved, there is less agreement as to whether or not this constitutes a success. Between 2000 and 2010, a large number of NSFAS-sponsored students failed to graduate (the graduation rate among them was only 19 per cent). More importantly, nearly 48 per cent of the students dropped out. It seems that the GER for black students did not change substantially while this programme was being implemented.

Closer examination of the effects of the reforms indicate that they were, in most instances, helpful in improving the governance and operational efficiency of institutions. The reforms also helped to reduce reliance on the state for funds. However, there is less agreement as to the effects of the reforms on the quality of services and on equity in access and success. For example, despite their impressive success in improving efficiency in operation through improved accountability measures, the effect of PCs in Kenya in improving the quality of services is not certain. In Ethiopia, the success of the reforms in general is still debatable. It seems the university community was not in favour of BPR and its opposition is reflected in its assessment on the benefits of autonomy. In Nigeria, too, it is not clear whether or not autonomy led to improvements in the quality of services provided by the university and in equity of access.

7 Toward some generalizations

The evolution of universities and other institutions of higher education in Africa shows that the state and public-sector institutions played a dominant role for many years, with public institutions in the dominant position, if not enjoying a monopoly, in the provision of higher education in African countries. Public universities, public funding, and government control characterized the governance and management of higher education during the period following independence.

While Africanization was an important consideration, inherited colonial structures reproduced a sense of elitism in the respective countries. Limited access to universities, the fact that the medium of instruction was a foreign language, and so on, all reinforced the process of elite reproduction. As noted by Moja (2004), 'unfortunately, the reformed post-colonial universities continued to serve the same purpose as the colonial universities by producing the elite for the bureaucracy and the private sector' (p. 26).

However, as the reforms studied show, higher education in Africa has changed. Although the reform measures varied among countries, closer examination reveals that there is one underlying feature which unites all these measures, namely their focus on institutional initiatives and autonomy. All these reforms provided the institutions with enough scope to be autonomous in their operations and this is an important change in the governance of institutions of higher education in Africa. Similar trends are noticed in other IIEP studies in Asia (Varghese and Martin, 2014). Similarly, another IIEP study indicates that the governance reforms led to a reinforcement of autonomy and a collegiate form of management in Francophone countries in Africa (Martin, 2013).

The granting of autonomy may, in part, be because states realized that the resource requirements for an expanding higher education sector cannot be met by the public exchequer. To accommodate the growing social demand for higher education, there was a need to diversify provision, proliferate providers, and multiply modes of delivery. This necessitated diversified sources of funding rather than a total reliance on government funding. Market-friendly reforms helped to diversify sources of funding, while, at the same time, warranting changes in governance structures to accommodate more and more market signals. With this reduced funding role of the state, the higher education system in many countries in Africa moved from a 'state-controlled' to a 'state-supervised' model of governance in higher education.

As the case studies indicate, the reforms gave institutions autonomy which permitted them to set priorities, develop strategies and study programmes, mobilize resources, and so on. The reforms also resulted in the creation of new structures of governance. Most institutions created governing bodies to take decisions, develop their own staff recruitment and management policies, develop new study programmes and courses, define institutional strategies, and regulate student admissions. Institutions diversified sources of funding, mobilized resources, and allocated them internally based on commonly accepted and objectively verifiable criteria (Varghese, 2013). The decision-making process became more transparent.

Many countries created buffer organizations and performance monitoring, and the establishment of external quality-assurance mechanisms became common. Buffer bodies such as the National Council of Higher Education or the University Grants Commission/Committee, or their equivalents, have become common in anglophone countries. These buffer institutions provide policy support, ensure quality control, regulate the growth of private institutions, and implement accountability measures to ensure improved performance. Some of them have played a very important role in regulating the system. For example, interventions by the National University Commission (NUC) in Nigeria helped close down many of the country's 'degree mills' (Okebukola, 2008).

New legislation defining institutional governance structures were introduced in many countries, reflecting the changing context of higher education (Saint, 2009). Following the legislative changes, heads of states were replaced as chancellors of universities. Another important step in governance reform concerned the process by which governing boards/councils are constituted. In countries such as Kenya there are separate management boards at institutional and school levels. The deans in several countries are elected by the academic staff. This, in a sense, has increased participation in decision-making.

The reforms have also meant that institutions have become increasingly accountable for their performance in meeting societal expectations, realizing targets, maintaining excellence and high quality, and using public funds responsibly. The strategic plans, performance indicators, regular monitoring and evaluation procedures all indicate increased accountability measures. External quality-assurance mechanisms are commonly used to ensure the quality of the outcomes (Martin and Antony, 2007).

Did government influence on decision-making decline as a result of the reforms and the increase in autonomy? Government influence is, in many cases, evident in the appointment of board members. In some cases, such as in Ghana, the board appoints its own members. In some countries, they are appointed in consultation with the government or directly by the head of state. In a few countries, some of the members are appointed by the board, while the remaining are appointed by the government. Some of the reforms, especially in South Africa, indicated that the reforms helped to align institutional activities with national objectives.

It is not true, however, that all government interventions are bad and all market processes are good. Even when institutions are autonomous, governments do play a role – an important role – in ensuring that the system is functioning well. The state provides a framework for all institutions (including private institutions) to operate, and it insists on accountability measures to ensure the operations in the sector help achieve national objectives.

It is true that the autonomy and market processes – cost recovery, income-generating activities, and so on – helped many universities survive financial difficulty. These reforms also contributed to improved performance, increased research output, arrested staff depletion, improved the market relevance of courses, and reduced reliance on state funds. The privatization measures and private institutions have helped expand the system. However, access to higher education under these arrangements is on a capacity-to-pay principle. The implications of such a policy for long-term equity are not clear, even though expansion of the sector is welcomed.

The studies showed that government intervention in the form of regulations may be necessary to enforce accountability measures and to ensure the more balanced growth of higher education in the region. The regulations may help target subsidies and ensure equity. In other words, the case studies show an important role for the state in higher education development, even when its capacity to finance an expanding higher education system is weak. The state may not be marginalized in the process of market orientation in higher education, though its role has been redefined more in terms of developing a framework for operation and regulating the system than of financing, managing, and controlling institutions of higher education.

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The booklet

Following a decline in the 1980s, and reforms in the 1990s aiming to find alternative forms of financing and increasing managerial efficiency, higher education in developing countries, and notably in Africa, has experienced rapid growth in this century. Though enrolment in higher education remains low, African countries currently have the highest rates of growth globally.

The revival of the sector is the result of reforms which reduced dependence on state funding, as well as state control of institutional governance and management. Based on IIEP-sponsored studies carried out in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, this paper explores how these reforms have changed the way that the higher education system is governed and how institutions are managed on the continent.

The author

Professor **N.V. Varghese** is currently Director of the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), at the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi, India. Previously, he was Head of Governance and Management in Education (2008–2013), Higher Education and Specialized Training (2006–2008), and Head of Training and Education Programmes (2001–2006) at IIEP-UNESCO. Prior to joining IIEP he was Head of Educational Planning at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi. He has published many books and several articles in the areas of educational planning, financing of education, quality of primary education, and higher education.