FINANCING HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO AND A SELECTION OF OTHER SADC COUNTRIES

Spirit B. Tlali and Innocent Hapazari

Faculty of Science and Technology, National University of Lesotho, P.O. Roma 180, Lesotho, Southern Africa. Email: sb.tlali@nul.ls

Abstract

In practice, Lesotho's Higher Education funding model is similar to most of her SADC counterparts, especially the few that have been elucidated upon in this document – namely Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. The national governments are the major sponsors for their respective education systems and for higher education in particular. The sponsorship is generally in the form of direct government subvention to institutions and student support grants and/or loans, usually administered by some government body, such as the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) in the case of Lesotho. The government subvention is negotiated according to the institutional budgetary needs vis-viz the national government's budgetary priorities and constraints for the given year. Comparatively, Lesotho has been observed to offer the lowest per capita support to its learners and, particularly to her Higher Education (HE) learners.

Introduction

The fact that HE plays a central role in driving socio-economic development and competitiveness of a country can never be over emphasized. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) categorized the contributions of HE to socio-economic development into four major domains, namely: the formation of human capital (primarily through teaching and learning), the building of knowledge bases (primarily through research and knowledge development), the dissemination and use of knowledge (primarily through interactions with knowledge users) and the maintenance of knowledge (through inter-generational storage and transmission of knowledge). Further, the contribution of HE can also never be over-emphasized in this age whereby knowledge and technology have emerged as key drivers of our national economies. The demand for HE, as well as its quality, can only increase. In its 2008 publication, *Accelerating Catch Up—Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa,* the World Bank strongly urged for more knowledge-intensive growth in Africa and highlighted HE as the critical parameter in the socio-economic development of the region. Concomitantly, with regard to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and particularly, within SADC of which Lesotho is part, the institution pointed out that, just a one-year increase in average tertiary education levels would raise annual GDP growth of the region by 0.39 percentage points and increase the long-run steady-state level of African GDP per capita by 12 percent. The institution premised its predictions on the assumption that, as is the case elsewhere in the world, by raising the level of HE and its quality, countries in SSA may be able to, among other things, stimulate innovation, promote the diversification of products and services and maximize returns from capital assets through more efficient allocation and management. Further, the World Bank argued that neglecting HE could seriously jeopardize long-term growth prospects of SSA countries, while slowing progress toward the MDGs, many of which require tertiary-level training to implement (World Bank, 2008).

In a subsequent publication, two years later, *Financing Higher Education in Africa (2010),* the World Bank stressed that, sustainable growth in Africa depends on the capacity of states to diversify their economies and thus train the human capital that will help to carry out and support this transformation. To that end, HE plays the key role:

- in training qualified individuals, capable of implementing new technologies and using innovative methods to establish more efficient enterprises and institutions and thus allocate resources more effectively.
- through research and increased knowledge to address the challenges arising from the population growth, limited arable land, endemic diseases, urbanization, energy costs, and climate change.

The World Bank further emphasized that in order for Africa, and SSA in particular, to reap full benefits of their investment in human capital, higher education institutions (HEIs) must have sufficient finances to provide quality training and sound professional prospects to their students (World Bank, 2010). Suffice to say, it is generally acknowledged that a well-educated and skilled workforce is more productive compared to an uneducated and unskilled one. It is therefore crucial that adequate funding is provided for the HE sector to ensure that HEIs achieve their traditional mandates, which can be summarised as teaching and learning, research and scholarship as well as community engagement and consultancy.

As is the case in most other countries globally, provision of HE in Lesotho is enshrined in the country's Constitution which commits the State to ensuring that "… HE is made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education …". In addition, the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) stipulates that, enhancement of the skills base, technology adoption and foundation for innovation are some of the strategic goals whose attainment will ensure that sustained progress is made towards achieving the Lesotho National Vision 2020 goals. In this paper, we present a brief analysis of HE financing models in Lesotho and a selection of other SADC countries, namely, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland - and subsequently make a few recommendations for the case of Lesotho in particular.

In the context of this discussion, the terms HE and tertiary education (TE) are used inter-changeably and refer to all education that requires the minimum entry level of senior secondary education. It includes certificate/diploma, degree and other advanced courses offered by the various institutions.

Higher Education Funding Models For Lesotho And A Selection Of SADC Countries – Botswana, Namibia And Swaziland.

Botswana

Botswana has a population of about 2.2 million and a GDP of ≈ 15.8 billion US dollars. By World Bank standards, Botswana is an upper middle income country (World Bank Database, 2014). On the HE front, Botwana was reported to have ten (10) public institutions and five (5) private institutions by 2008 (SARUA, 2008). However, Molutsi (2009) reported that the country had thirty-one (31) HEIs with a total enrolment of over 47 000 learners in 2009. The single the main provider of tertiary education programmes in the country remains the University of Botswana (UB), which was established in 1982 as an offshoot of the former University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS).

With regard to financial support, the Botswana Government is reported to generally dedicate 25 per cent of her annual national budget to education and training, and this is one of the highest educational budgets by international standards (Molutsi, 2009). SARUA (2008) pegged Botswana's expenditure on HE at 9% of the country's GDP in 2005/06 and acknowledged the figure to be relatively high in terms of both middle income and developing countries. In fact, the country's budget for 2015/16 is P36.70 billion (i.e.≈M50.84 billion), with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development being allocated P10.31 billion (i.e.≈M14.3 billion), which actually amounts to 28.1% of the total budget (Botswana, Min. of Finance & Dev. Planning, 2015).

HE Funding Model for Botswana

Direct financial support for public HEIs

The government is the main sponsor for all public institutions of HE. At least 80% of the institution's operational budgets are funded by the government, with the rest coming from other sources the main one of which is tuition fees. The direct financial support is in the form government subvention, which is negotiated on the basis of the institution's proposed budgetary needs and government capacity. For instance, the government subvention for UB was P463 million ≈ 640 million for the year 2009/2010 (UB, 2010); while for the year 2004/2005 the figure was P316 million ≈ M440 million. The total enrolment in the year 2004/2005 stood at 15,725 (UB, 2005); by 2011/2012 the enrolment was reported to be 18,588 (BCTE, 2013).

Financial support for students in HE

Prior to 1990, HE had been largely free in Botswana, at least in practice. All the learners in the institutions of higher learning were provided with government bursaries. On the basis of the recommendation of The Presidential Commission of 1990 on the Revised National Policy on Incomes, Employment, Prices and Profits, the country's bursary system was re-organised into a *loan/grant system* in 1995. This remains the practice to date. Under the system, the government provides sufficient tuition and maintenance financial support to every citizen who qualifies to go to university to study for a course of his or her choice. The amounts payable towards support of individual learners and the applicable loan/grant ratios are determined by the programme of study. The loan/grant ratio applicable to each area of study is determined by the country's priority areas, with the scale being tilted in favour of those subject areas that are deemed to be in short supply, with some areas being effectively awarded as much as 100% grants. The *loans versus grants ratio* is based on the human resources needs of the different sectors of the economy and aims to give students an incentive to follow the areas that are considered scarce while also providing for cost recovery from higher education. On the other hand, the levels of support to individual learners is based on the fact that other programmes are more expensive to run than others, hence their tuition has to be paid at a higher scale. Some programmes tend to be relatively more financially demanding on the student side in terms of additional resources that the learners may have to buy in order to facilitate their smooth learning. For example, the science & technology programmes generally demand more money from both the institution and the students compared to Arts and/or Humanities programmes).

For purposes of determining the *loans versus grants ratio and the cost recovery option*, the country defines ***five (5)*** categories of human resources needs with various financial regimes attached to each category:

- ***Category 1*** comprises those areas experiencing a critical shortage of human resources. These include medicine, dentistry, engineering, professional accounting, actuarial sciences as well as certain science and technology areas.
- ***Category 2*** comprises areas of human resources shortage because programmes were unattractive to students in the past. These included subjects such as Economics, Statistics, Town Planning, Chemistry and Agricultural science.
- **Category *3*** includes those subjects needed to satisfy the market or balance demand and supply. These are Law, Public Administration, Journalism, Social Work and Psychology.
- ***Category 4*** applies to programmes that benefit the economy and society but are less of a priority. These include Sociology, Philosophy, Museum Studies, Physical Education and Archaeology.
- ***Category 5*** is for programmes that are considered to have low social benefits. These include Hairdressing, Cosmetology, Photography, Modelling, Interior Design and Performing Arts.

Table 1. Funding and re-payment plan for Categories 1 to 5.

Category	Funded items & grant-loan proportions				Re-payment plan
	Tuition		Maintenance		
	% grant	% loan	% grant	% loan	
1	100	0	100	0	• Employment in the country for a specified duration.
2	100	0	50	50	• Employment in the country for a specified duration. • Repayment of loan
3	50	50	0	100	• As in *category 2*
4	50	50	0	100	• As in *category 2*
5	0	100	0	100	• As in *category 2*

- The loans are interest free and loan beneficiaries are required to pay back the loans within a stipulated period after training (Botswana Ministry of Education, Department of Student Placement and Welfare, 2006).

Challenges

SARUA (2008) observed that the loan/grant scheme has not been successful in several aspects, including:

- Increasing enrolments and outputs of students in priority areas. For example, out of a total number of 28 672 learners who enrolled for HE and received sponsorship (80% of whom enrolled at the University of Botswana) between 1997 and 2005, only 17.5% were in Category 1, while 50.9% were in Category 2
- The cost of the scheme is prohibitive when the proportion of students studying outside the country is taken into account. In 2007, 15% of the sponsored students were studying in other countries. For example, the cost of studying in the UK is about 20 to 30 times as much as the one for studying at a private tertiary education institution in Botswana. This brings to the fore the issue of long-term sustainability of the scheme.
- At least up to 2008, there have been very meek efforts at recovering the costs of the loans to the effect that in practice students were given grants in a fully subsidised system.
- More effective alignment to the country’s human resources needs enforcement of loan agreements, recovery of loans from beneficiaries and implementation of effective administration and management of the scheme.
- Low loan repayment rates mainly due to poor information on graduates: The Ministry of Education Department of Student Placement and Welfare has inadequate capacity and resources to trace or track the beneficiaries once they complete their studies.
- A major problem with this financing model so far has been the lack of cost recovery.

- There is lack of information on the demand of the labour market and no national human resources database.

Namibia

Namibia has a population of about 2.4 million and has a GDP of 13.0 billion US dollars ≈ M195 billion (World Bank, 2014) and a national budget of M60.3 billion for the financial year 2014/15 (Namibian Government, 2014). It is one of the few countries in SADC that devote a huge share of their annual budgets to education. For instance, in the financial year 2014/15 the education sector was allocated M13.1 billion, accounting for 22% of the total government expenditure. This was the highest allocation for a single sector (Namibian Government, 2014). In the HE front, the country was reportedly comprised of seven (7) public institutions and about ten (10) private institutions by 2008. Government funding towards the HE sub-sector accounts for at least 15 % of the total budget allocation for the whole education sector. Of the total amount that goes towards HE, slightly over 10% goes to student support and this translated into M48 million in the year 2003/04 while about 90% goes directly towards the HEIs' operational and capital budgets. The student support funds are administered under the Student Financial Assistance Scheme (SARAU 2008). The country was reported to spend M38 000 per university student and M51 000 per vocational training student in a year (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 2008).

While it is not clear what criteria determined one's eligibility to the student support fund and the quantum of direct government support to respective HEIs, some researchers raised some concerns regarding the country's HE funding model, including the fact that:

- Only a few students benefited from the Financial Assistance Scheme – for instance, in 2002, only 40% of University of Namibia students received some kind of financial support (Marope, 2005).
- In the 2003/2004 financial year, two institutions, the university and the polytechnic, received almost 60% of the total allocation compared to teacher training and vocational education and training institutions, suggesting some kind of lack of equitable distribution of government resources in the HE sub-sector (Marope, 2005).
- The overall public spending on education and training in the country is substantially skewed in favour of the rich, with about 80% of the population receiving only 40% of government subsidies (SARAU, 2008).

In response to the various concerns Namibia came up with a more formula-based funding model for her HEIs. While the model was adopted in 2013, apparently its application is still at its infancy or is yet to start - highlighting the fact that the more technically elaborate the model is, the more laborious it takes to implement due to the a large number of input variables required to compute the desired outcomes. The new funding framework or model is based on four components to determine how much government subsidies an institution gets. These are:

- Academic funds: The funds cover recurrent operational costs of HEIs. The major determinants are the number of programmes offered by an institution, expressed in terms of standardized credit units. The credit units are also weighted considering of field of learning and the mode of course offering, namely, full-time, part-time, distance, research, and level (Undergraduate, Masters, etc).

- Performance-related funds: This component serves as a motivation for institutions to align themselves with the national development goals, to take in disadvantaged students and dropouts and to improve the employability of students, among other considerations.
- Capital funds: This component is provided for financing the construction of facilities and other non-recurrent developments at public HEIs. It is evaluated in the light of development objectives, appropriation of investments as well as priorities of the national objectives assigned to institutions.
- Competitive funding: Funds for which the institutions compete on the basis of peer reviewed project proposals (Kahiurika, 2015).

Swaziland

Swaziland has a population of about 1.3 million people and a GDP of ≈ 4.4 billion US dollars. It classified as a lower middle income country (World Bank Database, 2014). The country dedicates 6.2% of its GDP to education. This figure translates into 19.5% of the total government expenditure (i.e. government budget). Expenditure on higher education generally accounts for over 20% of the total expenditure on education. For example the HE expenditure was 22% of the total expenditure on education in 2007 (SARUA, 2008). The budget allocation for the education sector for the country's financial year 2015/2016 was E2.9 billion (i.e. ≈ R2.9 billion) of which over 20% (i.e over R 600 million) went towards HE (Government of Swaziland, 2015). While the situation on the ground could have changed by now, there were six (6) public funded institutions of HE in the country by 2007, with the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) being the heavily dominant one in terms of enrolment numbers and apportioning of the HE education budget. UNISWA concomitantly accounts for over 60% of the government expenditure on HE (SARUA, 2008).

HE Funding Model for Swaziland

Direct financial support for public HEIs

The government is the main sponsor for all public institutions of HE. At least 80% of the institution's operational budgets are funded by government, with the rest coming from other sources chiefly tuition fees. Notably, the government support towards respective HE institutions is not based on any established (or permanent) formula. Rather, it is actually negotiated annually between the respective institutions' management and the government. In the case of the UNISWA, the institution's annual budget is directly funded by the government to the tune of ~80%, with such support being in the form of subvention (SARUA, 2008). For example, the government subvention to UNISWA in the academic years 2012/13 and 2013/14 was R242 million and R239 million respectively (UNISWA, 2014).

Financial support for students in HE

The government provides financial support (scholarship) to all students admitted in the country's public institutions of HE in the form of grants and loans. Effectively, almost all students (95%) receive government scholarships to cover their tuition and other university fees. Scholarship administration is undertaken by the Scholarship Secretariat in the Ministry of Education. Graduates are required to pay back the loan component of the scholarship upon completion of their studies, at an interest rate of 5%. A limited number of scholarships are also provided for Swazi nationals to study outside the country in priority fields (SARUA, 2008).

Note: From the sources reviewed, the Swaziland HE student funding scheme is not as elaborate as the Botswana one. For example,

- It could not be established whether learners are assisted by government in anyway with regard to their upkeep (maintenance costs); one may assume that they do not get any government support apart from tuition costs.
- The grant/loan proportions could not be established either.

Challenges

- Inadequate funds from government to provide scholarships to higher education students.
- Discontinuation of capital budgeting by government, the decline in the value of grants and donor fatigue (SARUA, 2008).

Lesotho

Overview Of Lesotho's Higher Education Sub-Sector

Currently there are fourteen (14) HEIs, which are recognized by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Eight (8) of them are public while six (6) are privately owned. According to the CHE report 2010/11-2011/12, the National University of Lesotho (NUL), Lerotholi Polytechnic (LP) and Lesotho College of Education (LCE) are regarded as the main providers of higher education. This rating is in terms of student population and staff and the range of programmes offered. NUL is the only public university and it offers degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels in diverse fields of study.

The HE subsector experienced two distinct phases. The first phase relates to the period prior to 2009/10 when almost all students who were admitted into the higher education institutions were sponsored by government through the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) irrespective of the area of study at the only public university (NUL), LCE and LP. A small number of students were also sponsored to study at higher education institutions outside the country, especially in academic disciplines that were not offered by the local institutions. Areas of specialization included graduate studies, engineering, medicine and other professional disciplines.

During this period, the government opened up the higher education sector by allowing residential multinational private institutions to operate in Lesotho and by extending scholarships to the locals who were admitted and eligible for government funding to these private institutions. Among these private institutions are Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUST) which first opened its campus in Lesotho in 2008, and Botho University which opened in 2015.

The second phase is the period which started in 2009/10. The main feature of this period is the decision by NMDS to introduce a quota system whereby the department puts a limit to the maximum number of new students that it is prepared to fund in each higher education institution in the subsequent academic year. At NUL, the NMDS quota was about 60% of the admission quota for the University. This development generally resulted in enrolments reduction in higher education institutions because of the inability of those students who did not get NMDS funding to pay for themselves.

Access To Higher Education

The Higher Education policy of 2013 (Chapter 8, p30-37) stipulates the national goal chiefly as "to improve access to HE in Lesotho". Higher education institutions are required to put in place admission policies which are non-discriminatory in terms of race, gender, religion and political affiliation. These policies must articulate, among other things, issues such as, equity, inclusiveness, admission standards, admission criteria and admission quota indicating the number of local and international students. Understandably, the HEIs are currently in the process of aligning their enrolment criteria with the national policy. Currently the admission criteria are merit-based and do not take into account social determinants such as gender and socio-economic status, according to the policy requirement.

In general, access to higher education has improved significantly in recent years. For example, the enrolment increased from about 15000 in 2007/08 to over 25000 in 2012/13. This number is expected to further increase significantly, given the additional number of new private institutions into the higher education landscape. However, the total number of new students who were enrolled in Higher education institutions for the academic year 2011/2012 was a little over 7 000. Although it could not be established as to how many students sat for LGCSE in that particular year, it is reasonable to assume that the number could not have been much lower than 15, 217, which is the number of students who sat for LGCSE in 2015. This scenario raises some serious question such as: where do the over 50% of high school leavers go if they are apparently not accounted for in the HE system? This is food for thought. However, according to anecdotal evidence, substantial differentiation in the quality of primary and secondary schools in Lesotho determines access to better quality secondary education and eventually to better access to higher education. This means that, invariably, students from more affluent households are able to access the best schools situated mostly in urban and peri-urban areas. They have a better chance of access to higher education.

As is the case elsewhere in Africa, higher education in Lesotho faces considerable and complex challenges as it endeavours to expand access while concurrently struggling to maintain quality. In reality, improving education quality and expanding access do not lie on the same trajectories owing largely to the dynamics of resources. It is, to a large extent, because of financial resource constraints that enrolment rates in higher education have not kept pace with the concomitant demand. This is a sad reality that we need to holistically confront and possibly address as a nation.

HE Education Funding Model for Lesotho

Direct financial support for public HEIs

All public HEIs receive direct funding from the government in the form of government subvention. Currently, there is no formula that is applied to determine the quantum of the subvention and the situation varies on a yearly basis. Ideally the public HEIs negotiate the level of subvention that they require from government by submitting their budget forecasts to the government through the Ministry of Education & Training. However, it may be argued that in real terms the government seems to allocate whatever amounts it can afford and/or deems sufficient without any semblance of having duly considered the HEIs' budgetary submissions. Notably, in recent years the government has progressively reduced the subvention figures, especially in the case of NUL, notwithstanding the increase in student enrolment numbers. For instance NUL received a subvention of M132 million for the year 2008/09 and M106 million for the year 2014/15. Considering the subvention alone, the government's per capita expenditure per NUL student currently stands at just about M9 750 and when one factors in the student loans awarded to individual students to cater for tuition and maintenance costs, the per capita support is approximately M30 000 per student. This is significantly lower than all the other countries reviewed in this discussion.

Financial support for students in HE

Currently, students in all HEIs get funding from the government through a student-loan scheme administered by the NMDS to cater for their tuition and maintenance costs. While in the past those students admitted into any HEI would access such funding, the current policy introduced a quota system limiting the number of students eligible for government sponsorship per institution. For instance, the NUL quota presently stands at 60%. The loan re-payment plan is as follows. For those:

- employed by public sector, only 50 percent of the loan must be repaid.

- employed by the private sector, 65 percent of the loan must be repaid.
- working outside Lesotho, 100 percent of the loan must be repaid.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the financing of higher education in the SADC region, paying special attention to the three countries, namely Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland in order to compare it with the funding situation in Lesotho. It is observed that in the four countries studied the responsibility to fund HE lies squarely on the government. The way in which HE is handled and financed varies from country to country depending on the financial situations and social peculiarities. However, it is apparent that funding of HE in Lesotho is smaller than that in the other countries and that it has not been enough. This has slowed down funding of activities and infrastructure needed by HEIs.

If HE is to play a central role in driving socio-economic development and competitiveness of the country, a new policy on financing higher education has to be drawn. This is the mandate that CHE has been charged with in order to advise the Minister responsible for t HE.

Clearly, the issue of HE funding is a paradox. This is why it requires a holistic and conscientious approach, preferably a national dialogue, in order to establish some kind of a national consensus on it. The authors of this paper are compelled to reach this cautionary conclusion having observed that even in those countries that apparently commit well-above average global resources towards their HE, the systems are not spared the scourge of HE education funding controversies and counter-productive confrontations. A case in point is the recent South African nation-wide University students' strikes and accompanying violent demonstrations, sparked by issues of funding. It would be self-deceiving for Lesotho to conveniently assume that the citizens, and students in particular, by and large hold a totally different view from that of their immediate neighbors with whom they inter-act on a daily basis or from the general SADC citizenry for that matter.

Recommendations

This paper has looked at different models of funding higher education in three different countries, namely, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland in the SADC region, and compared those models with what obtains in Lesotho. It is observed that Lesotho is falling behind the three countries in terms of higher education public spending. Although not presented in this paper, global trends were also considered and they show that there is a growing trend of diversifying resources for higher education beyond the public subventions. Cost sharing is the most common approach of diversifying resources. This means distributing the cost of HE across potential beneficiaries who include students, parents, employers and the public. In addition, there is a general consensus that funding public higher education institutions should be based on clear criteria of performance and products delivered and not just according to historical trends or political influence (Johnstone & Teferra, 2004).

It is proposed that any cost sharing funding model for higher education should incorporate the following elements of the total subvention package:

1. **Teaching and learning grant:** this grant should be based on the total number of students, taking into account the cost of training and learning in each discipline and national priorities
2. **Research grant:** This grant should include both basic research funding, which is transferred directly to HEI's, and an applied research grant which is competitive in nature and is administered by some national research body such as CHE.
3. **Capital Projects/Development grant:** Allocation of this grant should be based on agreed and negotiated development plans.
4. **Performance Incentive grant:** This grant should be based on policy direction of the national government priorities. It should take into account students' progression rates, completion rates and research output as well as institutional accountability.

In return, higher education institutions should be encouraged to explore possible ways of augmenting their income revenue through the third income stream, using contract research, consultancy, short courses, programme internationalization, entrepreneurial activities, alumni associations, renting facilities, fundraising events and financial trusts.

It is also proposed that a study be instituted to investigate why beneficiaries of students' loans are not keen to repay their loans. It has been observed that in almost all countries, Lesotho included, where government runs students' loan scheme the loan repayment is a challenge.

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