



# Challenges and Prospects in Tanzanian Higher Education

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**Abstract.** This short paper briefly discusses some of the challenges facing higher education in Tanzania and the panaceas that government and other institutions are implementing to address the challenges. The paper uses secondary data obtained from the country's Ministry of Education and Vocation Training and from selected higher education institutions in the country. The challenges are identified as occurring mainly in the areas of funding, quality assurance, relevance, ICT, equity and internationalization. The following strategies for addressing these challenges are reported: matching rising enrolments with public facility enhancement; encouraging the establishment of private universities; cost-sharing; affirmative action; and distance education.

**Keywords:** Innovation and reform; Quality assurance; Funding.

## 1 Introduction

In an attempt to address development challenges, Tanzania came up with its "Development Vision 2025" which among other things envisages "a well-educated and learning society"- a nation that produces the quantity and quality of educated people, sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to solve the society's problems, to meet the challenges of development and to attain competitiveness at national, regional and global levels. This is considered critical after realizing that the insufficient quality of the nation's workforce is a serious constraint to national development efforts.

Higher education in Tanzania, as elsewhere in Africa, is expected to be pivotal to national socio - economic development. To achieve this, it has to train high level technical and managerial cadres needed in leadership positions outside education. Further, it has to generate knowledge, creativity and the innovations required for national and international sustainable growth and development. Above all, it has to offer its recipients with analytical skills to add to social and economic progress. Efforts by the Tanzanian government to put in

place mechanisms to enhance access, accessibility and capacity enhancement in the higher education system and operational effectiveness, several challenges are widely alleged to be rife in the crucial areas of quality control, sustainable funding, expansion and accessibility, gender impartiality, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and human resource competence – negatively impacting higher education market viability in the largest East African nation.

This Paper highlights and explains the nature of each challenge and then argues out efforts by the Government of Tanzania to entrench deliberate strategies as interventions for the claimed paucity.

## **2 Quality**

According to Asmal (2014), quality is vital for respect and status. Hence, one of the main ways higher education qualities are evaluated is through the quality of graduates, whose performance is defined by their relevance to the society, when they render desired service while playing their essential roles of being contingently creative and innovative. In East Africa, quality assurance concern has come to the forefront and gained prominence in the past two decades because of massification and increased enrolment of students in higher education. For example, the Uganda's Quality Assurance Framework as enshrined in the National Council for Higher Education (2006) compels higher education institutions (HEIs) to establish Quality Assurance mechanisms to coordinate quality issues confronting them. There is evidence that HEIs in this country have put in place QA structures. However, there are persistent complaints about the quality of teaching, research, community engagement as well as governance of (HEIs) in Uganda (Kasozi, 2003; Mamdani, 2007). Building the capacity of leaders and managers in HEIs to initiate, implement and monitor QA processes at institutional level, remained imperative thus.

In Tanzania's private and public universities quality assurance is primarily guaranteed through: university entry requirements that are set at a minimum of two Advanced Level passes in public examinations; minimum qualification of a Masters degree to the university academic staff; engagement of external examiners; peer and student evaluation; and the triennial review of every university by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). In addition, vice chancellors of all public and private universities are members of the NCHE, a body responsible for quality assurance in university education, which means that they become responsible for quality assurance in their own institutions (TCU, 2013).

However the high social and private demand for higher education in Tanzania which has led to its current expansion and improved accessibility

country-wide, has brought some challenges on quality measurement and assurance in general. There have been significant allegations among members of the public that the quality of education is steadily declining (Ndalichako, 2011). Unfortunately the allegations have not pointed out the outstanding ramifications that call for strategic interventions. Nevertheless, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has since the late 1990s responded variously:

- The Ministry of Education and Vocation Training established the National Accreditation Council for Technical Education (NACTE - 1997) and the Universities Act No.7 (2005) established the Tanzania Commission for Universities; both to oversee coherent management and quality assurance for the technical and University education, respectively.
- Hitherto, government encourages entrenchment of international benchmarking for improved quality assurance under; deliberate academic staff/student exchange programmes; research proficiency (Ndibalema, 2010).
- In Tanzania, like in many countries, the accreditation system is revisited every four years after which institutions carry out self-assessment and apply to the Higher Education Accreditation Council for re-accreditation. Besides, the Council members also visit institutions between the accreditation periods.

### **3 Funding**

Insufficient funding for Higher Education and research is a general problem in higher education institutions worldwide. However, sub – Saharan developing countries, such as the United Republic of Tanzania, are hit worst. This pitied situation is aggravated by endemic challenges of unstable partnerships and the unpredictable hand-outs from the Western relationships (Banya, 2011). By this very fact, the funding of public universities and other higher learning institutions in Tanzania largely depends on Government grants which in most cases, regrettably, are inadequate. Thus, issues of funding and affordability of higher education costs are unprecedented on the education development agenda in the country. The problem seems to stem from the fact that education was free in Tanzania until 1990s (URT, 2005). However, with the increase of population and number of students completing advanced secondary education, it is now a burden for the government to provide free quality education, and hence the introduction of cost-sharing with the beneficiaries; the student and, or the household (URT, 1999).

Unfortunately, it is apparent that the costs to the poor households are increasingly becoming prohibitive! However with the emergency of private

universities, well to do parents are willing to pay for university education of their children. This is also true for the students in public universities under private sponsorship. This has caused complaints from the public on grounds that it is only the children from the rich families with access to university and higher education, thereby leaving the best brains from poor families.

As mitigation measures, in 2004 the Government enacted a law to establish the Higher Education Students Loan Board (HESLB) (URT Act No. 9, 2004) to manage a students' loan scheme, primarily to facilitate access to higher education by students whose parents cannot afford to pay for them. Under this scheme, all university students, including those from the private universities are eligible for loan. However, given the small size of the fund, loans are provided based on the applicants' academic performance (HESLB, 2006).

Further, in regard to the question of giving more opportunity for qualified candidates the government has advised higher learning institutions to create conducive environments that will attract the private sector to do business with them by providing loan with lower interest. The government is also proposing to borrow money from the World Bank and other development partners so as to enhance its budgetary allocation on education (URT, 2013).

#### **4 Expansion and Accessibility**

Opportunities and access to higher education in most developing countries are fairly recent and are occasioned by limitations. In Tanzania, the provision of higher education is located around 1961, where only the University of Dar es Salaam was established. Although there has been a significant increase in enrolments in the higher education institutions, the demand for higher education is far from being met, nonetheless. Higher education access and participation in Tanzania is influenced by socio-economic status, culture, religion and gender. The major ethnic groups that had the initial advantage of getting Christian missionary education continue to dominate higher education institutions in the country (Ishengoma, 2011).

To remedy this bog, since 2003, hitherto, the Government of Tanzania has put more emphasis on national primary and secondary schooling, via deliberate expansion programmes: Primary Education Development Program (PEDP, 2003-2008) and the Secondary education Development Program (SEDP, 2005-2010). The outcome of the PEDP and SEDP was/is to provide a pool of students that can join the Universities and other higher learning institutions in the country and thereby improving Tanzania's participation rate. The government has also embarked on provision of higher education opportunities through distance learning for people in remote areas, who missed earlier chances in their lifetime of pursuing higher education.

## 5 Gender Gap

Gender impartiality, commonly referred to as gender equity/equality, is recognized today as one of the major issues on international human rights. Its mandate is derived from the United Nations policy and program activities in the 1997 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Gender equity was defined by ECOSOC as the process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs in all areas at all levels". This was based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Elifas, 2013). Most countries have responded positively toward these declarations thus education institutions have been taking steps to improve female participation, but the problem stems from deep-rooted cultural and psychological factors especially in Africa where education for girls is not given the first priority (Adeyemi, 2011).

In Tanzania, the government adopted the proceeding of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and, henceforth, became obliged to implement it at national level through promulgation of gender policies and strategies, (URT 2008). Conversely, gender equity in higher and technical education is a serious constraint in Tanzania, more so, in science and technology related academic programs. This is a result of the fact that the pool from which female students qualifying for higher education is too small.

Because of this ungainly observable fact, Tanzanian government took introduced special pre-entry program for female students in 2003. Pre-entry programs mounted annually to help female candidates make up for any deficiencies they ought to have had. At the end of the 8-week program, they are given an examination. Since then the total undergraduate enrolment of female students has been growing. For example, it jumped from 19% in 2010 to 39% in 2013 (BEST, 2014). Notwithstanding all these, cases of open hostility and vulgarity between male and female students used to occur frequently at some campuses. The situation has improved significantly since the implementation of gender sensitization campaigns, (Hawes, 2014).

## 6 ICT

Globally, information and communication technologies (ICT) continue to impact on all aspects of contemporary education, requiring higher education institutions and stakeholders to be linked to each other through an advanced network that is connected to the rest of the world, for relevancy. The African Action Plan Report emphasizes information and communication technologies, besides developing research and higher education capacity (Ishengoma, 2011). This is ideally so because ICT has capability of unifying humanity and

transforming it into a global fraternity. Generally the advent of ICT has brought with it advantages that are too good to go unnoticed. In Tanzania, the application of ICT in the institutions of higher learning has a strategic place in enhancing their operational efficiency and advancement. This ranges from distance learning delivery modes, connectivity between institutions, ministries and stakeholders and thus making the availability of ICT service much more cost-effective. However, Msolwa (2012) observes that the level of ICT application in the higher education in the country is still inadequate facing a number of bottlenecks due to limitation of ICT infrastructure and specific competent workforce.

However, The Ministry of Higher Education, with the assistance of Development partners has established the Tanzania Education Network (TENET) which, to a greater extent, is expected to enhanced connectivity between institutions of higher learning, ministries and other stakeholders (MHEST, 2014).

## **7 Human Resources**

The world is undergoing a transformation whereby successful economies are dependent on knowledge possession, particularly scientific knowledge which is critical to the wealth of a nation (Knight, 2010). To continue growing, the Tanzanian economy must have the human capital that can operate in the world where methods of production are changing fast. Rapid advances in science, communication and information technologies are giving countries opportunities to leap forward at the speeds they never dreamed of (Galabawa, 2011).

Currently, Tanzania is facing challenges of acute shortages of well qualified workforce including teachers at all levels, doctors, nurses, engineers, technicians etc. as it has been observed by Carr-Hill, (2013). However, the government has realized that the noble dream on sustainable development cannot be attained, if the country is not taking appropriate measures by identifying skills gap and addressing them, (URT, 2015).

To overcome this quandary, besides expanding the undergraduate enrolments, the Ministry responsible for higher education has started calculated graduate programs at Sokoine and Mzumbe Universities to produce a cadre of graduates with the necessary skills to man the key sectors of the economy including the mining industry, tourism and hotel management, industry, Universities and other higher learning institutions. More so, to produce a critical mass of human capital competent to meet the diverse needs of national development goals.

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