



Working | paper

The EL-CSID project is coordinated by the Institute for European Studies (IES)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693799.

Towards the Private Provision of a Public Good: Exploring the role of Higher Education as an instrument of European cultural and science diplomacy with reference to Africa

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Issue 2018/17 • May 2018

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Executive Summary

The European Union's (EU) universities and their provision of higher education (HE) to international students remains one of its most powerful, global cultural assets. They play an important and growing role in EU cultural and science diplomacy. This is due not only to the quality of EU HE but also to its role as a generator of export income and as a provider of a global public good—both of which are powerful indicators of prestige and international influence.

Until now, the World Bank has been the leading supporter of HE in Africa, closely followed by the EU. The EU has developed a sophisticated and wide-ranging set of strategies to assist Africa in enhancing the quality and quantity of provision of its HE. These strategies are discussed in this study. The EU and its member states, through their interactions with Africa, have an established track record of supporting advancements in education. The 10th European Development Fund allocated €45 million to support the Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme for some 250 individuals per year and, since 2009, students and higher education institutions across the continent have benefited from the *Erasmus Mundus* Program. African higher education (HE) has recorded the highest growth rates of all the regions of the world since 2000. Universities in many African countries are experiencing a surge in their enrolments. Between 2000 and 2010, **higher education enrolments more than doubled**, increasing from 2.3 million to 5.2 million¹. But an 8% average enrolment rate (2014) across all sub-Saharan African nations is still much lower than the average of 20-40% for all other developing regions, including North Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, an ongoing brain drain and reduction in public financing for HE institutions in Africa continues to adversely impact quality. Resources have failed to match higher enrolment figures and public universities are under increasing pressure to deliver more with less. Currently, only one percent of total African GDP is spent on higher education.

More must be done, yet public resources are not infinite. Africa will not grow its graduate labour force by relying solely on its public universities and/or public support from international bodies like the EU. An examination of the EU's strategy towards HE in Africa shows little evidence of any serious attempts to-date by the Commission to understand or to engage the private sector to help grow the percentage of Africans undertaking tertiary study.

The Commission also does not appear to have fully recognised the beneficial effects on quality enhancement that accompanies the entrance of quality *international* (as distinct from local) **private provision** into national African HE markets. There has been no effort to learn from the success of international private provision in Asia. The time is right for these lessons to be imparted to the appropriate agencies of the Commission. This gap in European policy thinking provides a major opportunity to shape the evolution of future European strategy. This study identifies these benefits and opportunities and proposes a set of next steps and recommendations as part of a targeted 'strategy of engagement' for greater international private involvement in higher education in Africa.

The essence of the strategy is simple. It is to overcome the information deficit in the appropriate agencies of the European Commission on the utility of public cooperation with international private provision with a view to the Commission: (i) seeing the negative opportunity costs of not encouraging the growth of private provision and (ii) subsequently, pro-actively recognising the benefits to be had by supporting and facilitating private provision.

¹ The Africa-America Institute (2015), *State of Education in Africa Report 2015*, <http://www.aaionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AAI-SOE-report-2015-final.pdf>

1. Introduction

Economic growth, substantial in some countries, has returned to Africa in the last decade. Its sustainability requires many things, but one indispensable requirement is progress towards a knowledge-driven economy. A larger, tertiary educated workforce is a key human resource for building Africa's development. It must make the best use of limited resources to prepare its citizens for the increasingly knowledge-based economy of the 21st Century. The demand for graduate educators, managers, technologists and scientists is currently unmet. Although improving, Africa's gross enrolment ratios remain low in comparison with the rest of the developing world. Like all nations of the developing world, national higher education (HE) sectors in Africa will need to produce graduates both with generic skills but also increasingly with specific skills, especially in the fields of management, business, science and technology.

Yet, much of Africa's higher education sector is underfinanced, understaffed and operating with little or poor pedagogical infrastructure (especially technology). Educational delivery is poor and locally trained graduates can, and often do, lack basic skills. Curricula are often outdated, difficult to reform and at times subject to intrusion on political and/or religious grounds. Moreover, the widely held assumption across the policy spectrum that quality is poor, is accompanied by an equally widely held view that it has gone on a downward trajectory in recent years.

The only way African states can hope to meet their aspirations to reduce poverty, sustain growth and compete globally is to create a better skilled and educated workforce. To do this, they need to: (i) improve the currently poor use of existing resources in their HE sectors; (ii) generate more resources for the sector; (iii) determine the appropriate pedagogies to be adopted; and (iv) determine and **implement** policies and regulations to allow higher education to enhance national development and well-being. In this context, there are two broad strategies that African states need to develop:

- (i) They need to work regionally and inter-regionally with other countries to secure collaborative economies of scale and an appropriate division of labour in the education of the future Africa-wide workforce.
- (ii) They need to work increasingly with appropriate (and I stress appropriate) private providers, and especially international private providers (IPPs) to access the additional provision that will be essential if they are to have any hope of fulfilling the increasingly unmet demand for higher education.

Strategy (i) is the stuff of African rhetoric². This is not to say it is unimportant. Rather, one should question whether collaborative continental or even region-wide activities in the provision of HE will prove any more successful than many other post-colonial endeavours of inter-state cooperation. This concern is, however, not the focus of this project.

Strategy (ii) is the focus of this study. Its aim is to provide an initial, and concise, analysis of the potential role for the international private provision (IPP) in Africa's HE future. The two basic questions for consideration here are:

- (i) Is there a market for the international private provision of higher education in Africa?

² African Union (2006), *Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa*, <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/AU%20SECOND%20DECADE%20ON%20EDUCTION%202006-2015.pdf>

In simple numerical terms, the answer is yes. The provision of fee paying international higher education (IHE) in Africa is in an infant stage. We should expect it to become one of the continent's biggest service industries over the next 50 years.

- (ii) How does an IPP deliver its offerings into the markets of specifically chosen African countries?

This is the more difficult question to both address and answer. The report will focus on this question. Specifically, it will:

- (i) Identify the constraints on, and risks for IPP of HE in Africa and the strategies available to mitigate such constraints and risks.
- (ii) Identify the comparative advantages to be gained from IPP in terms of curricula flexibility and its ability to lead the technological delivery of modern higher education when compared with the vast majority of both public and private providers currently operating traditional pedagogues in sub-Saharan Africa.

The study will also examine and make recommendations on the manner in which the developing states of Africa might cooperate with IPPs to maximise the public-private provision of higher education and specifically the role the for-profit *international* providers might play. In contrast to developments in HE in East Asia in the last decade, HE sector reform in most African countries has yet to achieve an institutional framework that allows for a mixed model in which the international private sector can also be incorporated into the provision of HE. Without moving in this direction, African development aspirations are unlikely to be met.

2. The Problem of African Higher Education in Context

To undertake a study such as this, it is necessary to have some initial understanding of the magnitude of the problem at hand. Indeed, it is easier to start by saying how Africa's demand for high-quality, relevant tertiary education will not be met. It is not going to happen by sending hundreds of thousands of Africans overseas to study; the opportunities, and funds (scholarships or private support) simply are not, nor will be, available. Increasing African fertility rates over the past two decades and the accompanying growth in primary and secondary education have generated expectations of access to higher education that are not being met.

Fifty percent of all Africans are under the age of 15³. Its 15-25 year age group has quadrupled in 50 years. By 2010, at 19% of total, this age group was in excess of 230 million. Even so, enrolments in tertiary education are still the lowest in the world. In 2010, it was estimated that just 5% of this age group (10 million) were in tertiary study across the African continent. It was expected, although fully representative data is not available, that this figure would grow to 18-20 million by 2015. The number of students in HE was even anticipated to triple in some countries (for example, Tanzania, Senegal, Ethiopia)⁴. However, these figures still stand in stark contrast to the case of Asia where similar numbers were reached some 40 years ago.

Solutions have to be found on African soil. But, the African HE sector, as currently constituted, is not equipped to make the necessary provisions. Free public tertiary education is still the norm in Africa. Ostensibly, most African nations claim to be pursuing both efficiency and equity through

³ The Africa-America Institute (2015), *State of Education in Africa Report 2015*, <http://www.aaionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AAI-SOE-report-2015-final.pdf>

⁴ This is 2010 World Bank data.

these institutions. However, such rhetoric has been undermined by government failure that has instead led to a politicised higher education environment and limited and inequitable access. Free higher education as a public good is a chimera in the 21st century. Paying for HE is, and will continue to be, a fact of life for most people. State subsidy and merit-based scholarship will only ever represent a small proportion of total global provision.

The public HE sector cannot currently meet the growth in demand (16% annually in the decade to 2006) that far outstripped the growth in public funding (6% annually) in the same period. According to the World Bank, for the 27 sub-Saharan countries to meet the growing demands for domestic HE, the growth in expenditure on publicly funded HE would need to be 75% higher than current levels. This figure does not include infrastructure. In addition, securing appropriately qualified instructors poses further problems with the World Bank anticipating the need for at least a further 566,000 instructors between 2006 and 2015 if a standard student staff ratio of 20:1 is to be maintained.

In short, even if such targets were to be met, the dominant model is both financially and pedagogically unsustainable. Moreover, the evidence now suggests that a publicly funded model does not offer the gains of efficiency and equity that have for so long underpinned both its economic and moral rationale. The standard economic 'public good' argument will be shown to be empirically unsupportable.

Private higher education will need to provide the alternative and, for the vast majority of Africans, only route to higher education. At the moment, government promotion of private providers in higher education and the growth of private higher education are much more significant in Asia than in other regions of the developing world. But if demand in Africa is to be met, African governments need to create an environment in which private provision can flourish. It needs to emulate some, although not all, of the East Asian experiences in creating a mix of public and private provision.

Meeting the demand for HE, from both consumers and users, will depend on a combination of:

- (i) Improved government policy and funding;
- (ii) Reform of, and expansion of, the public HE sector;
- (iii) Massive growth in international private provision;
- (iv) Leadership and innovation from the international sector.

Local provision (public and private), acting alone, is not up to the challenge.

In 2009, there were around 200 public universities and 468 private higher education institutions on the African continent. By comparison, there are as many as 1700 public universities and nearly 2500 private universities in the U.S.⁵, most of these private institutions having been established since the turn of the century. According to one estimate, if this growth rate continues, by 2020, private provision of HE will account for close to half of the total.

The private delivery of HE in Africa comes in many shapes and sizes. None of Africa's private universities are world standard. Very few conduct research. The vast majority of private provision is profit-driven (although there are some net for profit (NFP) institutions). They concentrate principally on low cost, market-focused subjects, with high tuition fees and are of variable quality.

⁵ The Africa-America Institute (2015), *State of Education in Africa Report 2015*, <http://www.aaionline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AAI-SOE-report-2015-final.pdf>

Indeed, many are of extremely low quality. Quality assurance is sporadic. Registration and regulation are rarely transparent.

The definition of a private African university requires much flexibility of thought. Somalia, for example has in excess of 50 private universities listed on Wikipedia alone. Attempts to access the websites of many of them can be both challenging and revealing. And the activities of private African universities are at best a mixed blessing. Rather than support their national public systems, many sit in direct competition with the public sector and, in some cases, directly undermine it.

Of course, this is not the case in all circumstances. In South Africa, by 2016, there were 94 registered private higher education institutions⁶. Ghana (with 5) and Nigeria (with 34), both having strong national accrediting bodies, make a considerable difference. Private institutions such as the Lagos Business School, Daystar University in Kenya and Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale in Yaoundé, appear to provide students with value for money. Other recent initiatives such as the University of Lancaster/Ghana also hold out promise.

3. Growing International Private Provision of Higher Education in Africa

The preceding contextualisation of the problem, especially the identification of the unmet demand for needed graduates if Africa's developmental aspirations are to be met, suggests that reform and innovation is required in the African HE sector. In particular, the private sector needs to play a much more prominent role. This will continue to be difficult but, with innovation and leadership, not impossible. The issue is where this innovation and leadership will come from.

Exogenous innovation into the African HE sector by international private providers will be essential if improvements are to be made. The current situation offers major opportunities for an established, quality-driven IPP to enter into this market and make a considerable impact. If this were to occur, it would make a positive difference to the African predicament. Not only can good international private providers offer quality education, they would also save students from wasting money in private institutions of variable and (often) sub-optimal quality. They can also play an important role in the development process.

With the provision of state of the art pedagogical technologies and up-to-date curricula in subject areas that target skills demanded by both private and public sector employees, international private providers would help set quality benchmarks for pre-existing public and private providers. An IPP with online, web-based and digital learning expertise will also have a major comparative advantage in a rapidly evolving African HE market. It will also have the opportunity to help Africa create an educated workforce to support its development aspirations.

Private education provision in East Asia has brought many benefits, notably expanded quality access. But it has also created some policy challenges where quality, and a state's ability to control that quality, has not been all that it should be. On the basis of the Asian learning model, the insertion of experienced IPPs can be expected to bring rapid, major benefit to African HE. If an IPP operated at the levels of quality that it has achieved in Asia in recent years this would help dramatically enhance quality provision in Africa. At the same time, the policy trick for African governments will be to facilitate public-private provision by emulating the successful strategies

⁶ Department of Higher Education and Training of the Republic of South Africa (2016), **Register of Private Higher Education Institutions**, <http://www.savisas.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/RegisterOfPrivateHigherEducationInstitutions.pdf>

from those Asian countries where quality assurance and accreditation frameworks have been introduced without choking incentives for private provider entry to the market.

These are not merely academic issues. They cast massive policy shadows with major implications for the prospects of enhanced private African HE provision. The direction of the higher education policy regimes that develop in African countries over the next few years and how they will condition the opportunities for the type, rate and size of growth of future private sector activity in HE in Africa are pertinent issues. A knowledge of these trends will provide essential policy understandings so as to develop a strategy for investment in HE provision in Africa over the near term and set parameters for longer term investment.

In addition to the business benefits that an astute private provider can expect to accrue, taking a wider innovative role offers the opportunity at the same time for them to assist African governments in the mutually beneficial development of **regulation as facilitation** as opposed to **regulation as control**. IPPs in Africa may need to support the creation of a quality regulatory environment, rather than simply respond to it, if they are to overcome institutional rigidities and inertia.

The first moves by private providers in Asia focused on low-cost, high-margin activities such as Pathway provision, English language training and academic disciplines such as commerce, management, accounting and education. These would equally represent obvious early mover advantages in Africa too where there is high volume demand in these sectors of the HE market.

In addition, in learning from trends in Asia, there is the opportunity to initiate provision in Africa farther up the technological educational chain than had been the case in the initial stages in Asia. While the introduction of standardised, high volume, cost-efficient, online delivery is the first phase, there is also the opportunity to customise learning at the level of the individual student quite early on. The emergence of sophisticated platforms for adaptive learning with software which guides a student-targeted material dependent on their prior knowledge (suppressing some content and privileging other bits according to their progress) means offerings can be customised in a manner which would assist in catering to demand expectations in Africa.

Being precise about the **ingredients** of a degree does not imply, as it did in pre-online delivery days, labour-intensive delivery. The crucial issue is getting the balance between standardisation and customisation right. If standardisation is built on best practice in contemporary educational provision, then actual customisation for the individual student needs be only a small component of overall delivery for the value enhancement to the student experience to outweigh the volume of customisation.

(i) Pedagogical Issues in the Internationalisation of HE in Africa

Few students in Africa are going to have the 'traditional university experience'; that is, 3+ years on a campus. The number that can go overseas is, and will continue to be, limited. Thus, meeting the demand for tertiary qualification depends on innovation in the technological provision of HE, the ability to provide it will be the key to meeting that demand. It is where the IPP will have comparative advantage. This advantage, or rather the ability to make use of it, poses a major question, the answer to which can only be theoretical at this stage: Can Africa, with the help of IPPs, skip a stage in the technology-led pedagogical revolution in higher education? ***Can African countries absorb the modern techno-pedagogical innovations in higher education that the IPP could introduce?***

Developments in information and communication technology are making the world's best resources available to the less-developed world. These have slowly been blending with, and in some cases overturning, traditional pedagogic models to create a new educational paradigm that

reflects the characteristics of a modern global value chain. The effects of such innovations are significant. Mass standardisation and customisation increasingly co-exist as digital technologies offer consumers direct involvement in the customisation of products on a mass scale in a range of sectors.

It is only a matter of time before this is also the case in HE. Given the low base from which Africa is starting, the introduction of these technologies into HE could indeed facilitate a leap-frogging of the stage that much of East Asia went through in the last several decades. As yet, there is no one set mode of practice for the delivery of international higher education. Activity has been developed in mixed models both by individual universities and through partnerships with private sector actors and with both offshore and onshore provision. In all forms of provision, advanced (and sometimes not so advanced) technologies play an increasingly central role.

Advanced technologies and online delivery of courses will increase in the African region. While MOOCs are currently thought to be unlikely to replace other methods of online delivery, providers (both public and private), instructors and administrations will need to adapt. In addition to their academic content, MOOCs will soon be accompanied by platforms that will allow universities not only to teach the courses themselves but also to assess student progress. At the moment, MOOCs are more a branding and recruiting device rather than a sustainable way of offering courses for the, mostly elite, institutions developing them. The role of IPPs is, and will continue to be, different. If the road can be cleared, IPPs can offer their core product to Africa—a quality recognised educational credential—more efficiently, more cost effectively, and in greater quantities than is currently on offer, and their reception in Africa should be positive.

The technological edge that IPPs have should give them considerable leverage as potential partners entering into joint ventures with existing, respectable African institutions. Some universities are already in strategic relationships with private providers and have developed divisions of labour between recruiting, administrative and pedagogic activities. But this is only the beginning of what will be a major activity in the next coming decades. There is no historical model for contemporary Africa to cling to. The vestiges of the colonial system are in need of drastic reform. Opportunities for cooperation are substantial.

(ii) The Environment for HE: Economics, Politics and Regulation

Section (i) is contextual and descriptive of the business environment for private provision of HE in Africa, especially for the African countries selected. Section (ii) will be focused specifically on the opportunities for, and the manner of provision of, internationalised higher education. Section (iii) will identify what 'good' regulatory environments would look like. It will identify the specific regulatory issues to be addressed to facilitate innovative educational partnerships between the public and private sectors in the promotion of private participation in chosen African countries.

African governments need to first understand and formulate national policy positions on several macro-level issues:

- (i) How to balance the allocation of their available resources to the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors respectively?
- (ii) How to ensure and fund a balanced differentiation of institutional missions (research and teaching) within a coordinated tertiary system?
- (iii) How to balance the demand for access to higher education with the need to ensure/enhance quality of output?
- (iv) How to determine how, and by whom, the costs of higher education will be borne and how to develop an appetite for a more user-pays focused approach to HE amongst the aspirant community of African states?

The shift in common expectations from free to cost-sharing models of HE is indeed happening in Africa—albeit slowly at the moment. Incentive structures will likely be hard to develop while foot-dragging in the public universities continues, and while there is little input into the reform process from the private sector, or indeed families and students. But the process needs to be, and can be, nurtured to make it more inclusive in its formulation. This has to be the case if African HE systems are going to adjust to the demands of the 21st century African labour market. Private providers should engage in discussions over these issues with governments, but they are not, indeed cannot be, the final arbiters of these questions.

The radical shift that is required in African HE will challenge the political *status quo* and threaten what economists call the economic ‘rents’ that were largely the preserve of the traditional public sector elite. A major task therefore will be to build political support for, or at least lessen political opposition to, reform. Fees will create a more variegated system and change the dynamic between providers and consumers. This should create greater and mutual accountability amongst all parties.

But there are several issues that would need to be mutually agreed between hosts and international providers, particularly concerning the key economic issues facing international private providers. Notably:

- (i) How to nudge African governments towards a system of higher education that privileges economic issues of enhancing competitiveness and wealth generation rather than their long-standing tendency to ensure the continuity of a post-colonial political and administrative elite.
- (ii) Introducing a curriculum delivered with cutting edge technological pedagogies that meets modern labour market demands; or at least minimises the mismatch between the curricula and the needs of the economy. International private providers can be massively innovative here. Their curricula are up-to-date and innovatively delivered when contrasted with the often rigid, little-reformed programmes from the colonial era in many, still centrally state-controlled, public universities.
- (iii) How should private providers cooperate with African governments to determine the mixing and matching of their respective financial resources notwithstanding their different missions, logics and business models?
- (iv) How do private providers support national governments in meeting three categories of need in the labour market:
 - a. Good quality instructional staff to deliver tertiary education. Where to find them will be a key issue. It will be necessary not only to train new instructors but also to be innovative in tapping a reserve pool of foreign educated university teachers.
 - b. Primary and secondary teachers to equip students for the needs of the country, including entry to higher education.
 - c. High-level scientific, technical and managerial/administrative personnel required by industry, business and government.
- (v) How do African governments, in conjunction with IPPs ensure a *facilitating* regulatory environment rather than a *controlling* one? Specifically, how do they confront:
 - a. Confused or unclear national policies concerning the role of the private sector in the education system and the inconsistent application of existing rules.
 - b. Cumbersome and complex HE registration processes which are less transparent and explicit than they might be.
 - c. Unclear and subjective criteria and standards to qualify for registration; especially where officials in the accrediting body have too much unaccountable discretion in

assessing applications for registration, thus leaving scope for arbitrary (possibly corrupt) decision-making.

- d. Ensuring the regulatory framework is system wide, not simply applied to the private sector with the regulators drawn primarily from the public universities; again leaving scope for arbitrary decision-making.

Getting the regulatory balance right has been no easy matter for providers in East Asia in the last two decades. It will need even more care and attention in Africa in the next two decades. There is no one universal approach. Just as the presence of a food inspection system does not guarantee the provision of good food, educational inspection does not guarantee good education. Recognising that balance is everything, the definition of a 'good policy environment' is taken to mean one that, at one and the same time: (i) respects, and indeed supports, state sovereignty and the development of sound national educational strategies, but also (ii) provides the maximum appropriate autonomy and incentive structures to allow an IPP to secure the most positive inputs from, and relationships between, them and the public authorities.

There are some general principles of best practice (and examples of bad practice) that have been learned and that lend themselves to cross-national and cross-sector policy learning and policy transfer.

Finally, there is a key politico-security issue facing international private providers that cannot be left unaddressed. While they are not decisively prohibitive of a strategy for growing the internationalisation of higher education provision in Africa, the contemporary politico-security environment cannot be ignored. Rather it should be put into perspective. What appear to be the current civilisational fault lines in parts of Africa are not new. Indeed, they have existed for well over 1300 years. But violent radical groups are now a fact of life in the 21st century, notably in Northern Nigeria and certain parts of East Africa.

But grand narratives of a coming 'clash of civilisations' oversimplify the often more multi-textured and complicated reality. Politico-security issues impact on any strategy of engagement and need to be understood at both a continent wide and country specific level. Innovators always have and will continue to work round these kinds of constraints. There are always risks in any new and innovative venture. Acknowledging that civilisational fault lines can be at their most delicate within the realms of education any recommendations given will be sensitive to the level of business security that needs to be guaranteed to an IPP to make the prospect of delivering international higher education to a range of African countries attractive.

Responses to the trends and answers to the questions identified in this section of the study effectively dictate the strategic opportunities in higher education in the African region over the next decade. For their part, African governments faced with huge unmet demand and an inability to fund this demand have a major task in the coming years. If the imperative for African governments is to develop their HE systems in order to support economic growth, then a key issue in any analysis of the HE value chain for them is to determine to what extent they might develop an HE system tailor made in terms of curricula and delivery for a mass market, beyond their increasingly limited and unsustainable public systems. Governments in Africa need to formulate and implement policies to support and guide substantial private provision in their higher education sectors in as efficient a way as possible while at the same time also ensuring and enhancing as equitable an access policy as possible.

This is not simply an either or process: with government on the one hand or a private, market process on the other. There has to be a joint relationship of government and private sector working in partnership. To do this requires learning. Governments must understand the key opportunities,

characteristics and imperatives of private provision in higher education while at the same time private providers must come to terms with the realities of working in Africa.

4. The European Union and Higher Education

This section of the study describes current EU policy and practice. ***It highlights precisely what the EU does not do and where the opportunities for innovation are to be found.*** It draws upon information gathered during interviews conducted in Brussels which highlighted the current parameters of EU policy, and showed that it does not pay due consideration to international private provision.

Indeed, there was a lack of awareness more generally of the prospects for innovation in the HE sector in Africa that can be gained from an examination of contemporary international private provision elsewhere and especially East Asia. In many instances, the European Commission officers interviewed understood private provision as simply ***local*** provision, often of low quality and not amenable to regulation or easy quality enhancement. There was little comprehension of the scale and quality of contemporary ***international*** provision of the kind offered by some private providers in East Asia. Similarly, the degree to which provision was usually achieved through partnerships with major international universities was also not widely appreciated. Once explained, Commission officers were quick to see the possibilities of IPP.

(i) The Context: The EU and African Higher Education

Upon closer inspection the importance of growing and strengthening HE in Africa is a central component of a greater number of the Directorates General of the European Union than might at first be expected. The enhancement of HE also features prominently as one of the bigger policy issues in the ***Joint EU-Africa Strategy***⁷, ***the Africa Partnership***⁸, and in a range of specific Directorate General portfolios; notably but not exclusively:

- (i) The Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG/EAC), and especially the Education, Audio Visual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA) that runs the Erasmus+ programmes
- (ii) The Directorate General for Development (DEVCO), and especially in its Education and Development unit and its geographically specific Africa units.
- (iii) The Directorate General for Research and Innovation (RTD), and especially the ***Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program*** and its Science, Technology and Innovation units.
- (iv) The European External Action Service (EEAS) through its Foreign Policy Instruments Unit (FPI).

⁷ European Commission (2018), ***Joint EU-Africa Strategy***, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/africa/continental-cooperation/joint-africa-eu-strategy_en

⁸ The Africa-EU Partnership (2018), ***Human Development***, <https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/priority-areas/human-development>.

The RTD and EEAS especially in their Partnership Instruments (PI) saw major opportunities to enhance the EU's influence in the domains of science and cultural diplomacy. Yet, while all those interviewed talked about their openness to private sector initiative, especially with regards to international cooperation to enhance African HE, none of their current activities actually addressed the role of international private provision, public private partnerships, nor indeed spoke more directly as to how they might grow higher education enrolments in Africa⁹. The avenues of support arising from these Actions are discussed in Section 3.

For the EU, while it should be stressed that policy is genuinely geared towards assisting African development, it is equally interested in the benefits its current policy, and the accompanying spendings, brings to the EU. Unsurprisingly, policy is not purely disinterested. However, the EU's wider international interests—especially as set out under the *EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement* and reflected in the interests of the relevant Directorates General—are clearly served by the expansion of HE provision in Africa. The principle drivers and benefits for Africa are:

- (i) The degree to which it increases the human capital base and job growth necessary for national development,
- (ii) The degree to which it enhances intergenerational mobility, entrepreneurship and innovation,
- (iii) The degree to which it strengthens civil society and better governance.

The benefits for Europe of supporting African HE are spelt out in detail later. Generally, they can be categorised into a number of broad areas.

- (i) As an instrument of development and especially the degree to which HE, in all its facets (scholarships, teaching exchanges, research cooperation) and in its strategies in the areas of support for development, sustainability, societal stability, offers value for money (VFM).
- (ii) As an Instrument of external relations and especially the degree to which support for HE as part of EU cultural and scientific diplomacy enhances EU external relations more generally. This is seen as an increasingly important dimension of the EU's external relations. Science and cultural diplomacy (of which higher education is seen as an integral part) in the words of the Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Carlos Moedas, must be '[...] embedded in the EU's external relations with its international partners'¹⁰. This is a priority also stressed by the EEAS and especially its Partnership Instruments Unit (PIU).

With a focus on 'national ownership' actions, policy is developed, articulated and conducted via a close relationship with the relevant regional and national organisations on the ground in Africa; notably the African Union Commission (AUC), the Intra-ACP Secretariat (ACP–African Caribbean and Pacific States) and individual governments.

HE has been a priority in the policy dialogues between the EC and the African members of the ACP since 2008 and HE is identified by the AUC as a priority area for future development and regional integration in Africa and for its relationships with the EU. But there is in effect a shopping list of priorities for African states to choose from and only three countries have ranked *higher* education,

⁹ See for example http://ec.europa.eu/education/international-cooperation/africa_en.htm

¹⁰ *Investing in European Success: EU-Africa Cooperation in Technology and Innovation*, Brussels, EC: DG Research and Innovation, 2015, https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/success-story-files/ki0115049enc_002.pdf.

as opposed to education more generally, as number 1. The three states are South Africa, Angola and Mauritius.

Support, while substantial has not, in practical terms at least, matched the rhetoric. Support from the EC in the current expenditure period (2014-2020) comes primarily from DEVCO and to a lesser extent from DG/EAC (often supplemented by DEVCO funds). The Commission supports a range of HE programmes, notably:

- Erasmus +.
- The Pan African Programme¹¹. In turn, the Pan African Programme supports:
 - The Nyerere Intra-African Academic Mobility Schemes;
 - The 'Tuning Programme' for the Harmonisation of Higher Education¹²;
 - The Pan African University; and
 - The Pan African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation (PAMCIT).

What the Commission does, it does well. The Commission officials are dedicated public servants with a commitment to education, development and bettering the African condition. In addition, value for money and the subsequent accountability for funds disbursed is a much higher priority than critics of the Commission would have us believe. The key issue is what EU policy and practice (as opposed to rhetoric) *does not do*. Simply asserted, it does not engage the private sector to help grow both quality and quantity of HE provision in Africa.

(ii) Why Private Provision is needed and why it should appeal to the EU

A recognition that the training of a significantly greater number of Africans at the tertiary level in their own countries will only come about with a growth of the private sector has not been strongly embedded in the Commission. Current EU policy addresses this issue in only a marginal way. Commission agencies emphasise quality (to be applauded of course). In this regard, its emphasis on scientific cooperation and its emphasis on scholarships (for only the best) might raise the quality of learning and research but only for the very few. Moreover, there is amongst African leadership communities a strong desire for elite education and status-driven projects that reinforces this tendency.

This approach does little to open up opportunities to HE for that wider group of appropriately aged and qualified African students who do not secure access to African publicly supported higher education but who would nevertheless benefit from tertiary education at basic degree and associate degree level. This is not to deny the importance of excellence. Rather, it is to recognise that Africa also needs large cohorts of students educated in those subjects such as teacher training, administration, business and management to meet the high demand for them to support Africa's developmental aspirations (see Appendix 4 for an elaboration).

No one in discussions and interviews at the Commission raised the utility, let alone potential importance of the private sector's role in the provision of HE. Nor can any identification of the potential utility of international private delivery be found in the voluminous amount of documentation on EU HE policy reviewed for this study, and this is notwithstanding the frequent rhetorical nod in the direction of private sector involvement in EU activities. There are probably four factors, working in combination, that account for this lacuna in innovation:

¹¹ EC (2018), *Pan-African Programme*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/africa/continental-cooperation/pan-african-programme_en

¹² EC (2017), *Harmonisation of Higher Education, Tuning and Erasmus +*, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/4_harmonisation_and_erasmus_plus_en.pdf

- (i) There has clearly been a tradition of not wanting private sector involvement in HE. Many of those who work in the Commission (not unlike those who work in public universities) have long assumed that higher education is a public good that should be provided (mostly for free) by the state. As is now much better understood, while there are major and much needed elements of 'publicness' in HE, it is in fact much more of a 'club good', rather than a public good, with the major beneficiaries being those who have received it.
- (ii) There has been no thought given to how private provision might operate. Assumptions are that it is either an elite 'not for profit' model of the US Ivy league variety at one end of the quality/prestige spectrum and/or a 'non-elite/low quality profit-driven' model at the other end of the spectrum.
- (iii) Knowledge of the experience of international provision in Asia is either not known, underappreciated or discounted as not relevant in the Commission.
- (iv) This lag in understanding of the role of private provision is also perhaps a reflection of the inevitable organisational culture of a body such as the European Commission. As is well understood in the academic literature, there is often little or no incentive to be 'forward leaning' in engaging the private sector. Risk is not rewarded.

These points are not evidence of an innate hostility to international private provision, but rather a reflection of a knowledge gap and an uncertainty as to how to do it and indeed, at the most basic level, which organisations in the private sector educational community are serious players. International private provision of quality HE developed by a provider in a relationship with reputable universities of the kind that developed in Asia was/is simply not well understood at the Commission.

Yet, once the potential of private sector involvement was articulated to Commission officers, it was quite clear that its merits were positively met and that a desire to engage does in fact exist. **But engagement will need to be offered. It is unlikely to be sought out.** Work pressures, staff shortages, and risk aversion in some cases, will impede outreach from the Commission.

The key buttons to be pushed with the Commission that would bring about a positive response are simple and obvious, and the general benefits to be derived from the entry of international private provision into selected African countries for the Commission can be specified in the seven ways:

- (i) It reflects the core interests of the various Commission agencies of growing quality HE provision in Africa; especially in areas of labour market priority such as management, accounting, finance and teacher education. Adopting a priority for 'good governance, also means that public administration and public policy is also in high demand in Africa.
- (ii) In addition to growing HE, IPP involvement with local providers in Africa, will also enhance the technological delivery of the curriculum and, if mediated through a major international university partner, the regulation of the quality of provision in Africa too.
- (iii) International private provision is **complementary** to existing policy and strategy not competitive with it. It is an exercise in **additionality** not substitution for existing public sector tertiary provision.
- (iv) To the extent that IPP offers opportunities to grow European HE business in Africa it can be couched in terms of market innovation. This is a major driver of all EU activity nowadays. Anything that enhances EU competitiveness will secure support, and quickly so, at the highest and more overtly political levels in the EU.

- (v) IPP is supportive of wider EU foreign policy goals; especially advancing its scientific and cultural diplomacy as a counter weight to other growing influences in Africa (from the US and also now especially, the Chinese).
- (vi) As with the international private provision of higher education in Asia, Africans educated at home are more likely to stay at home. A major problem that the Commission has with many of its programmes, and especially its Erasmus mobility and scholarship schemes is getting students to return home afterwards. In this context, HE provision that keeps more Africans at home rather than going overseas to study appeared extremely attractive to Commission officers; although this attraction was expressed *sotto voce* in conversations.
- (vii) In a similar vein, and most importantly in the current politico-strategic environment, the key policy issues for the EU are terrorism, refugees and migration. The **Valletta Summit on Refugees and Migration** recognised that only by addressing education and employment needs mostly *in* Africa can a stable future be provided and the challenges of migration be, if not contained, then at least mitigated¹³. One Summit proposal was to offer aid for Africans to stay at home (INYT, November 12, 2015) and the Commission has even been exploring further incentive schemes to persuade students to return to their countries of origin. Hence once again, educating Africans in Africa would almost certainly find material support once it was on the policy agenda.

Conclusion

Education offers perhaps one of the most effective ways in which science and cultural diplomacy can enhance the EU's international standing on the African continent. Education is also one of the best avenues for successful inter-cultural dialogue. To-date, European involvement has been principally publicly funded. For obvious reasons, this will have to change.

From an African perspective, support for, and the provision of, education at all levels will be the major driver of its development. A larger, tertiary educated workforce is the key human resource for development. But Africa's demand for graduate educators, managers, scientists and technologists remains unmet. As the study has shown, both the need and the demand for a tertiary educated work force in Africa far outstrips supply and the demand and will not be met by the existing public university system in Africa nor the education of Africans overseas alone.

East Asia began to deal with a similar problem in the previous quarter century through the growth of internationalised private provision in the HE sector. This study has attempted to identify what will surely be the next stage in support for education in Africa—the growth of private provision of tertiary education to supplement a public sector incapable of dealing with the demand placed upon it. The study has looked at the opportunities and constraints of a greater European involvement in private provision and its implications for the enhancement of Europe's relationship with the continent.

This is *not* a proposal for the privatisation of higher education in Africa as a replacement for the existing public sector in Africa. Nor is it trying to suggest that the EU and member states should cease the provision of scholarships and support to Africa. Where possible such assistance should be increased. Rather, it is to recognise that without additional provision, provision that can only

¹³ European Council (2015), *Valetta Summit Action Plan*, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21839/action_plan_en.pdf

come from international private providers, the demand for skilled graduates will not be met and Africa's recent positive improvement to development will almost certainly stall.

The only way to tackle the issue of under-provision of a tertiary educated African workforce is by the growth of private provision delivered in a blended way by international providers. To work, this strategy would need to take advantage of advances in digital technologies, especially mobile phone and tablet technology, coupled with quality assured and appropriately regulated private providers operating in partnerships with local in-country providers. This is not fanciful. There is a model. It is the model of private provision in East Asia in the last two decades. While not without its problems, the opportunities it offers for European HE providers to export European education to Africa are extensive. Similarly, the opportunities it offers to consolidate an EU presence in a way that meets with support rather than resistance could lead it to become a major arm of EU science and cultural diplomacy in the coming decades.

Appendix 1: Methodology/ Modus Operandi of the study

The approach adopted in the preparation of this study has been twofold. It has entailed:

- (i) An extensive desk-based search of the activities and remits of all appropriate directorates general; particularly to the extent that their various Unit activities covered the cross-cutting themes of higher education and Africa. This involved the searching and reading of some 100 plus documents. Some of the most important of these are identified in the report and listed at:
- (ii) A series of discussions and semi-structured interviews on the themes of African Higher education. It has not been possible to interview all relevant stakeholders. Most evidently, it has not been possible to interview potential stakeholders in Africa.

The purpose of the interviews was to:

- (i) Identify the level of understanding of the nature of the international provision of HE in the relevant units in the Commission.
- (ii) Ascertain the key activities of the various agencies with a view to judging their potential receptivity to international private provider initiatives.

Appendix 2. List of Commission Officials interviewed—restricted

Appendix 3: List of Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific States
AfDB	African Development Bank
ADEA	Association for the Advancement of Education in Africa
AU	African Union
AUC	African Universities Council
CBPs	Capacity Building Projects
DEVCO	Development Cooperation (DG)
DG	Directorate General
EAC	Education and Culture (DG)
EACEA	Education, Audi Visual and Cultural Executive
EEAS	European External Action Service
EC	European Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Commission for West African States
EIB	European Investment Bank
EL-CSID	European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy
ERC	European Research Council
EU	European Union
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IPP	International Private Provision
PAMCIT	Pan African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation
PAU	Pan African University
STI	Science Technology and Innovation (Unit in DEVCO)
PI	Partnerships Instruments (Unit in EEAS)
RTD	Research and Innovation (DG)
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

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The EL-CSID project
is coordinated
by the
Institute for European Studies (IES)
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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693799.