

## Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

### *Background*

For Africa to progressively close the development gap with the rest of the world it will need higher levels of growth, productivity and job creation. This, in turn, will require countries to invest more strategically in the key drivers of growth – higher education being one of them.

Between 1999 and 2004, enrollments in tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) grew at 9.5 percent a year, much faster than the corresponding world average of 6.6 percent a year. But tertiary enrollments grew from a low starting point. Even with a rapid rate of progress, only 5 percent of the relevant age group in SSA is enrolled in tertiary institutions today, compared to the world average of about 25 percent.

The World Bank has long championed education and continues to view rapid progress toward the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education as a necessary objective for developing countries. However, for the reasons spelled out above, and in light of recent trends in technology, neglecting tertiary education (and post-primary education in general) could seriously jeopardize the longer term growth prospects of countries in SSA.

### *Key Issues*

The key challenges in higher education in Africa are:

- limited access and rising demand;
- enrollments in public institutions growing faster than their budgets, implying falling resources per student and declining quality of teaching and learning;
- a serious staffing crisis, reflecting the combined influence of limited postgraduate output, brain drain, weak staff recruitment and inadequate retention incentives;
- generally ineffective regulatory frameworks for accreditation and quality assurance, hindering private institutions' ability to compete with public institutions;
- a severe mismatch between the content, structure and teaching methods of programs and the skills required by prospective employers; and
- poor governance and inflexible management of public tertiary institutions which hamper innovation and reform.

There is also great concern about the effect of the recent global financial crisis on funding for tertiary education.

### *World Bank Program*

World Bank support to tertiary education in Africa has been on the rise during the current decade and is projected to rise even further as demand for support from countries increases. Support is mainly through the lending program to countries or group of countries (regional projects). The Bank's financial support for tertiary education includes IDA-financed projects in **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania**. Ten other projects have components that support tertiary education. Two new projects with significant tertiary education components (**Mozambique** Higher Education Science and Technology – HEST; and **Madagascar** Education for Growth – MEG project) are under preparation and several others are under discussion.

However, the Bank also provides considerable non-lending support through sponsoring and providing technical assistance for analytical work and policy dialogue, as well as support for convening different stakeholders (e.g. government(s), institutions, employers, development partners, NGOs) to address a common need. The World Bank has completed **studies** on quality assurance; tertiary education for economic growth and competitiveness; agricultural education and training; information and communication technologies (ICTs) in tertiary education systems; cost and financing; and science and technology (S&T) education. In FY09, work was completed on differentiation and articulation in tertiary education; and on legal constraints to university autonomy. A study on financing of higher education in Africa has also just been published.

**Technical assistance** was provided to **Burundi, Benin, Burkina Faso, Madagascar Mali, Mozambique and Sudan** in designing policy reforms to improve higher education.

The flagship study on **Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Africa** was launched and presented to African Ministers of Finance during FY09 Annual Meetings and framed the setting for the development of the Medium **Term Regional Program in Tertiary Education (MTP-TEIA)** covering FY08-10, which provides a framework to better and more systematically assist our country partners to develop reforms in tertiary education for economic growth. The program commits to providing technical assistance, capacity building, partnerships coordination, and learning activities to improve the quality and relevance of tertiary education systems and institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The **New Economy Skills for Africa Program (NESAP)**- ICT was started to help countries build capacity to compete in today's changing economy, to improve education delivery as well as to create jobs and boost exports of IT and IT-enabled services.

### *Partnership*

Under MTP-TEIA, the Bank has forged partnerships with various institutions to advance policy dialogue, among them the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), the African Union (AU), the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and UNESCO.

With these partners, we have collaborated on analytical studies and joint sponsorship of dissemination events, on the launching of the Africa Quality Assurance Network, and on the mobilization of the African Diaspora in support of tertiary education in SSA.