

Policy Brief

The Quest for Sound Funding Policy Reform in Madagascar's Public Higher Education Sector during the Post-Crisis Years

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General Context

Five years after the coup which plunged the country into an unprecedented political and economic crisis, Madagascar is at a watershed in its history with the coming into power of a democratically elected president in February 2014. This is also a time when the country's public higher education system is ineluctably taking a downward direction due to chronic financial strife.

The withdrawal of donors and international partners shortly after the outbreak of the political crisis in 2009 led to the disruption of major higher education reform projects that were spearheaded by the World Bank's Madagascar Education Sector Development in the late 1990's, and furthered within the framework of the Madagascar Action Plan or (MAP) of Marc Ravalomanana's regime. (2005).

With the demise of the MAP came the collapse of the shift to a seven year basic education cycle, while reforms plans of post-basic education, including higher education, went awry as they drifted away from the policy recommendations compiled in the World Bank-mandated document "Developing the workforce, shaping the future: transformation of Madagascar's post-basic education". (2008).

Limited scope of action of the transition regime of Andry Rajoelina and pressurized funding capacities of the Higher Education Ministry strangled public universities around the country for five years.

Again, following the levy of sanctions by the international community in March 2014, recently announced development and cooperation programs with a number of aid agencies, have ostensibly marginalized or even excluded higher education from the scope of their actions.

Deeply felt malaise is, time and again, voiced by the university community through recurrent strikes, demonstrations, and road barricades, often ending in clashes with the

military and causing material damages and casualties.



Street Barricade by Students on Strike, May 2014

The Higher education sector is thus in dire need for policy attention. This policy brief seeks therefore to contribute to the shaping of policy priorities in the higher education sector, by advocating national stakeholders' commitment to funding reforms of the public university system, strengthened institutional partnerships and international donors' financial support to vital reform.

Key Points

- ❖ To ease the current untenable and explosive situation, there is an urgent need to re-open the debate on the funding policy reform of Malagasy public universities.
- ❖ High commitment of public authorities to higher education funding policy reform is paramount to rescuing a system at risk.
- ❖ Strengthened partnerships and collaborative network with regional and international agencies and institutions is crucial to ensure revitalization of the higher education sector.

There is a need for the funding of a "Second Chance Higher Education Reform Project" by the World Bank and other donor agencies to redeem a public university system in peril and thereby pave the way to the country's sustainable development.

The Root Causes of the Funding Crisis

- Evidence highlights that unreformed funding policies and patterns for over six decades are at the heart of the public university system's chaotic financial state.
- Traditional centralized funding system and provision of tuition-free higher education in these institutions result in a heavy reliance on the state coffers. Low internal and external efficiency is exacerbated by high social costs occasioned by a democratic student scholarship policy and teachers' entitlement to bulging complementary hours paid on top of their regular salary.
- Cost-recovery schemes are deficient due to the inability of successive governments to enforce politically difficult and sensitive reform measures with regard to unruly occupation of student dormitories. The same applies to the squandering of free utilities on campus, which has caused an accumulation of exorbitant back payment to the electricity company, JIRAMA, for decades.
- Gradual cost-sharing initiatives introduced at establishment and department levels through increased registration fees and new tuition-paid programs meet with ambivalence and veiled disapproval of the public authorities for fear of political implications.
- During the lean years of the crisis, shrinking public transfer to the 6 public universities and 12 new regional centers was far from being commensurate with constantly rising student enrolment (see Table 1), despite the mushrooming of private tertiary institutions.

Table 1. Enrolment growth in public and private institutions of higher learning (2009–2012)

Types of higher learning institutions	2009	2010	2011	2012
Public universities	44361	47917	52081	53856
Technology institutes	1108	1241	1349	1698
Distance learning center	7777	7987	10914	13428
Private tertiary institutions	15214	17433	21199	21253
TOTAL	68460	74578	85543	90235

Source: Author's analysis of data from the Ministry of Higher Education, www.mesupres.mg 2013.

- Acute fund deficit resulted in frequent disruption of academic activities ensued, leading to an enduring climate of instability fomented by recurrent strikes and unrests of the university interest groups. Both the severe fund stringency and the troublesome agitations it entails, regained in proportion and intensity during the first semester of the year 2014 in the public university sphere.

Low priority accorded to the sector and absence of political will to cure the ills are likely to undermine the public higher education system further. The alarming situation decried by the University Teachers' Union during a two-day demonstration in Antananarivo in May 2014 seemed to be a mere cry in the desert, and the banner reading: "Public universities are ailing" was seen as an object of ridicule by many.



Demonstration of University Teachers' Union, May 2014

- What is deeply worrying at this juncture is the sheer neglect of the implementation and monitoring of the shift to the international Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system, owing to the non-provision of earmarked funds initially designed to finance the reforms. Thus, public universities were deprived of the financial, human, physical and pedagogical means required to ward off cosmetic changes of curricula and methodology.

In sum, complex and intricate issues surrounding obsolete and inefficient funding mechanisms clearly jeopardize the capacity of public universities to function normally, let alone to compete globally in the twenty first century. It is undoubtedly high time to redress failing funding policies of Malagasy public institutions of higher education.

“Africa’s competitiveness and employment depends on its having a healthy and skilled workforce. Building on the success with primary education access, countries need to concentrate on improving education quality overallThis shift... requires that the skills be oriented towards the knowledge economy ... Higher education institutions and centers of excellence need to be supported to fulfill this mandate.” (World Bank 2011).

Trends of Current Policy Options

The new regime in place has inherited from a catastrophic socio-economic situation, but it has already earned the recognition of the international community and foreign aid agencies have started to come back in force and pour cooperation programs and financial loans into their priority sectors.

Commitment of the international community to support the re-construction of Madagascar’s economy during the post-crisis years was officially announced on June 4, 2014 by the “Strategic Dialogue Group” composed of major technical and financial foreign partners. It is certainly comforting to hear that education, environment and infrastructures were singled out as the priority sectors of the UNO’s systems and partners.

Nevertheless, knowing the harsh competition for policy attention and funds within the subsectors of the education system, and the prevailing policy discourses which often downplay higher education, it is most likely that basic education will win the lion’s share again. As yet, the Ministry of National Education has launched a joint UNESCO and UNICEF-financed project for the reintegration of 500 000 children in Malagasy primary and secondary schools by October 2014. Post crisis priority policy of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research remains, however, rather blurred for the moment. This is where policy recommendations have to be formulated to guide national and international policy makers in their strategic education policy choices to produce a positive and sustainable impact on the Malagasy higher education sector.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are made for pertinent short-term and long-term actions to redress higher education, more specifically the public university system, in Madagascar.

Actions for Local Authorities

Keeping in mind that the central government is not likely to sustain the mobilization of public expenditures to sponsor free higher education for long, it is paramount to:

- Undertake far-reaching sensitization campaigns and consultations to prepare the ground for deep structure funding reform of the sector, in order to secure the commitment of national stakeholders and overcome huge socio-political obstacles in store.
- Take tangible steps toward legalization of burgeoning cost-sharing initiatives in public universities to foster gradual increase of household participation and ease the strain on the state coffers.
- Grant more autonomy to these institutions with regard to their proper financial resources management to boost their capacity to upgrade teaching resources, infrastructure and academic performances.
- Introduce daring student housing and scholarship reform measures to dismantle the traditional costly entitlements.
- Reform teaching staff’s remuneration policy to limit squandering of financial resources on compensations.
- Put the financing of public higher education funding policy reforms high on the agenda of the government.
- Allocate funds commensurate to support the system-wide LMD reforms, to ensure alignment of Malagasy universities with internationally-recognized standards.

Actions for International Partners

In the hope of influencing higher education cooperation agendas of regional and international partner institutions, organizations and donors, the following key recommendations are made.

- Strengthened regional and international partnerships by means of increased inter-university cooperation projects;
- Assistance to Malagasy universities in the implementation of their institutional strategic plans, following the example of the Belgian project sponsored by the University Development Commission (CUD); it encompasses key areas in human and material capacity building of the partners in the South;
- Application of a differentiated treatment to Malagasy public higher education institutions in capacity building cooperation projects for Africa, like NORHED;
- Inclusion of Madagascar in the list of beneficiaries of future higher education cooperation projects financed by UNESCO, within the framework of its support to higher education quality and relevance in French-speaking African countries;
- Allocation of a substantial part of the education sector funds disbursed by international donors to support the funding reforms of the public higher education system in Madagascar;
- Appeal for a complete re-structuring of the entire education system in Madagascar; and
- Genuine commitment and concerted actions of all foreign partners and local actors are essential to extirpate chronic funding crisis from Malagasy public universities. This is indispensable if they are expected to cater for the qualified human capital requirements of the country, and thereby contribute effectively to Madagascar's sustainable development.

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