

Global and National Factors Informing Unrest in Kenya's Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper examines global factors that have been mainly liable for unrest that has been seen in Kenya's higher learning for the last two decades. It analyses five cases of actual student riots in two public universities, two constituent colleges and one campus. It highlights how flawed policy compounded by sharp demand for higher education led to a rapid decline of standards largely associated with the unrest. It demonstrates that the emergence of the World Bank as an important financier of higher education brought with it the perception that unlike basic education, proceeds on investment in higher learning are much inferior therefore, the emphasis of investment on the former. The human capital theory based on rate of return analysis was largely responsible for this argument and Kenya, like other African Countries, drastically cut down its expenditure on higher education, resulting in a acute shortages and deterioration of standards the core subject of the unrest. Nationally, the struggle for democracy and the re-introduction of multi-party policies brought with it negative ethnicity. This has cascaded to universities, where voting patterns during student elections have reflected the national voting ones, often degenerating to violence.

Key words: Higher Education, Students' Unrest, Teaching, Learning and Welfare Facilities

INTRODUCTION

While several studies have focused on a myriad of factors at the institutional level associated with poor management and a highly intolerant student population, this paper focuses on policy dynamics both at the global and national levels that have rendered the management of Universities at the institutional level helpless. As such, universities are deprived of critical resources, leading to acute shortages of both human and material necessary in the delivery of its mandate, which has been at the core of the unrest.

This paper argues that global dynamics with equally radical policy adaptations at the national level have been mainly accountable for the brandish of uprising in Kenya's higher education. This position is achieved by examining the actual strike incidents recorded in one of the public universities in order to unearth the underlying factors, associated with these global and national policies that have informed the uprising. The focus is on Moi University, the second oldest and largest in Kenya that for close to its four decades of existence has witnessed persistent unrest at varying magnitudes. Literature confirms students' unrest as a persistent phenomenon in Africa's similar to Kenya's higher education.

Research on higher learning in developing countries generally and Africa in particular largely concur with the fact that unrest has been a common feature/characteristic of higher education and that unlike in developed countries this has been largely associated with declining economic standards and a drastic reduction of expenditure per student. First generation of African Nationalists traced Student uprising in Africa to manners linked to the initial struggle against the activities of colonial governments (Nkinyangi, 1999). Student uprising became prevalent in the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties. These protests

revolved less around internal educational matters but more around wider global concerns, such as foreign policy, politics of the cold war and the South African question (ibid). Colonial power configurations emerged as another factor that sparked student protests. In Kenya, for example, the new government of President Jomo Kenyatta that came into power in 1963 was deeply suspicious of any autonomous activity outside state power. Kenyatta appointed trusted friends to manage the university. Any form of dissent was dealt with severely as in the case of students protested for this first time in 1969 (Amutabi, 2002; Nkinyangi, 1991; Klopp & Orina 2002).

There was a stable reduction in social and economic situation in the form of decline of trade, a increasing burden of debt, extensive corruption, a reduction in development aid, increased oil prices, dubious national policies; and human rights abuses in nineteen eighties (Amutabi, 2002; Atteh, 1996; Nkinyangi, 1991). In this period African countries encountered a fast population growth rate – the highest in the World –leading in a quick need for higher education. Studies also have pointed out that while this has been the case, the problem has been confounded by African countries budgetary allocations to higher education which has been dismal (Atteh, 1996).

Enrolment in higher learning in most of the African countries increased by fifty percent during nineteen eighty and nineteen eighty three, expenses on learning for the same period in these countries fell from ten billion US dollars and nine billion US dollars (Atteh, 1996). In nineteen eighty three Nigeria, Malawi and Somalia individually used less than ten percent of their budgetary allocations on education. Subsequently, the financing of education gradually became the responsibility of parents, private organizations and foreign donors (ibid). Many other studies have attributed unrest to a wide variety of issues, such as struggle for academic freedom (Zezeza, 2004) and a fight for social identity and defence of individual and class interests (Amutabi, 2002). Matemba (2011), in his study of unrest enumerates sixteen factors that he attributes to unrest, which are: Alienation; disillusion with higher education; rising cost; lack of involvement in decision making or denial of freedom of speech; concern with international problems; poor prospects of employment upon graduation; lack of older and experienced leadership; lack of factual information about relevant issues; poor living conditions; sympathy for lecturers plight; inadequate facilities; external political interference and student politics' influence of late adolescence; drug and peer pressure and examination nervousness.

Kenya's higher education sector has also experienced exponential expansion in the context of dwindling resources. Some policy adaptations have also been witnessed which have resulted in some gains. For example, increased access to higher education has been witnessed through the Privately Sponsored Students Programme while the revolving fund through the creation of the Higher Education Loans Board has been a success story in the financing of higher education (Nafukho, 2004). Nevertheless unrest has persisted. In 1999 for example, a total of 15 serious student riots were recorded in the various campuses of Nairobi, Moi, Kenyatta and Maseno Universities between February and November; a period of only 10 months. At Moi University, a total of 25 cases of student riots were recorded between 1985 and 2009, averaging one incident per year. Quite a large proportion of the riots seem to be associated with the policy adaptations such as the introduction of tuition fees, withdrawal of student allowances and the reduction of government financial support.

This paper sees universities through the Systems Theory which posit that as organizations, universities operate within a wider socio-political and economic environment that has a

direct behaviour on their every day operations. This wider socio-political and economic environment has a direct bearing on their daily operations (Hoy&Miskel,1982). Within this wider environment in which these universities operate, there are a growing large number of players that for different reasons are becoming more actively involved in higher learning. For example, there are traditional Government Departments (relevant ministries), International agencies, International Organizations, Inter-governmental organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, regional and inter-regional university associations, international co-operation organizations, treaties and many other providers of higher learning.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a case study strategy to examine an in-depth analysis of the complex phenomenon of students 'unrest. While this is the case, the paper also draws examples of unrest from other public universities in Kenya. Moi University is the second public University to be laid foundation in Kenya.

A comprehensive literature review, document analyses and interviews were used to collect data. For purpose of this paper, the literature review focuses on global and national factors that have had an impact, directly, or otherwise in the management of university education. Document analysis focused on the primary data, which included minutes of the relevant university senate meetings, reports of senate standing and security intelligence reports, Ad-hoc committee reports, minutes of the students' disciplinary committee of senate, Students Governing Council (SGC) meetings and various correspondences and memos between the student leaders and the university administration.

FINDINGS

Significant Global Developments

Several economic and political developments in the 1960s through 80s to early 90s have had far reaching consequences in the development of Africa's education generally and in Kenya higher education in particular (Ng'ethe *et al.*, 2003).

Economic

Emergence of the World Bank

The emergence of the World Bank as a significant player in the world economy and in education specifically during the 60s through to the 80s is one single economic occurrence that radically affected higher education in developing countries; Kenya included (Jones, 2007). Initially, the bank (The International Bank for Reconstruction of Europe) was meant to finance the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War. During the 60s however, attention of the bank shifted to the former European colonies but even then its focus was not on education (Samoff & Carrol, 2003).

It is however, during the advancement of arguments postulated by the Human Capital theory that investment in education became feasible for the bank. As such, the bank shifted its attention to financing education as well as research focusing on the analysis of the viability of funded projects that relied heavily on the rate of return analysis Sammoff&carrol,2003.

The bank's lending also adopted "a policy-based lending, that is loans intended to support particular policy objectives, commonly associated with macro-economic goals" (Samoff & Carrol, 2003). It is the adoption of this approach whereby the World Bank has replaced the former colonial powers in co-opting the former colonies into the emerging global economy – but not on an equal footing with developed countries (Jones, 2006). This significant economic development at the global level was to have far reaching consequences on Kenya's higher education, generally and on Moi University, particular, in the following years. This is because lending of the bank was based on compliance with a certain set of conditions which were meant to achieve market liberalization. Additionally, due to the notion that higher education was associated with less returns, the conditions came with the demand for reduced expenditure for this particular item.

Political; Collapse of Communism and End of Apartheid

Politically at the worldwide level, two major developments were to shape Kenya's political landscape and impact on the operations of main institutions including, and particularly, higher education (Hornsby, 2012). The initial was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breaking down of the Berlin wall which successfully ended the cold war and disconnected the US government's apparent danger of communism in Africa. The second was the end of apartheid which was the other worry of the US in Africa after communism collapsed and paved the way for democratic governance. The results of these developments for Africa were the instant demand for a democratic liberty. Protests took place in numerous countries in Africa, leading to reform and the restoration of a multiparty democracy. They began to appreciate the fact that democratization would lead to economic independence (Hornsby, 2012).

For Kenya, the results of these two global developments were double. The first was the instant demand for a democratic liberty and, secondly Kenya, which was profoundly reliant on Western foreign aid in its financial programmes, was the decision by the donors to attach conditions for any support especially from the US (Hornsby, 2012). America's moral, military and economic superiority was boosted by the collapse of both communism and apartheid. Subsequently, any financial aid from the US came with a demand for upholding "American values", which included change in terms of open democracy or pluralism and economic liberalization.

The two historical developments, therefore, created a scenario in which politicians, the clergy and civil society pressurized the Kenya African National Union (KANU) government to open up democratic space by allowing competitive multiparty politics. This was compounded by the deaths of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ouko, and the fiery Anglican Archbishop, Alexander Muge, in 1990 and 1991, respectively, in circumstances that raised a suspicion of government involvement (Hornsby, 2012). Meanwhile the international funding agencies were giving the KANU government a set of stringent conditions to be met before benefitting from the much needed funding for its fiscal operations.

National Dynamics

Political

The growing discontent amongst a section of Kenyans and global developments provoked a sequence of demonstrations, protests and riots in 1990-91 which culminated in the repeal of section 2(a) of Kenya's constitution, ushering in multiparty democracy and the holding of the first general elections under this arrangement in 1992 (Hornsby, 2012).

During the initial multiparty election of 1992, Kenya African National Union (KANU) which had been ruling since independence managed to retain power. Preceding the elections and after election the reform agenda, degenerated into a struggle by the multitude of parties to ascend to power. Their strategy, which has dominated Kenyan politics since, was to appeal for tribal support (Wanjala 1996). Not only was the ethnic equation – referred to by Wanjala – to influence Kenyan politics and voting patterns at a national level, its effects have been felt in every facet of Kenyans' lives, including at the university where the voting patterns in student elections is a deep reflection of it.

Economic

Economically, Kenya was doing well in the 1980s; nevertheless, the country was deeply dependent on Western aid which, at the same time, was pressurizing the government to free the economy (Horsby, 2012). The reliance on donors who were stipulating conditions for aid was critical in the management of public affairs in Kenya, a condition that was to impact on its higher education (Bräutigam, 2000). In 1990, for example, Denmark froze aid to Kenya, while the Paris Club meeting for Kenya on 25 and 26 November 1991 suspended the balance of payments for non-humanitarian support for Kenya (Muriuki, 2000).

Social

Socially, the main development that had a bearing on the operations of higher learning was the swift increase in Kenya's population (Frank & McNicoll, 1987). Kenya's population growth since independence had been at a rate of four point one percent and by nineteen eighty nine, Kenya's population was approximately twenty one million (Hornsby, 2012). This increased a heavy pressure on social amenities and during the 1980s the demand for higher education increased sharply.

In the education sector Kenya adopted a new system of education in 1984-5, that is, the 8-4-4 with 8 years of primary education, and 4 years each for Secondary and University education (Eisemon, 2014). The older system of 7 years of primary education, 4 of secondary education, 2 years of high school and 3 years for university was discarded (Eisemon, 2014). The consequence of this adjustment was that 2 cohorts of students qualified to join university in 1990 – the opening group being the last cohort of the old system while the second was the first cohort of the new system. Early on students of Nairobi University supported an attempt to overthrow the government by the Kenya Air force in August of 1982 which forced the end of the university for more than a year and formed a backlog of students who qualified annually for admission (Mutua, 2004). The outcome was a double intake in 1987 to clear the backlog and, consequently, public universities in Kenya had to deal with a double intake in 1987 and a double intake in 1990, occasioning sharp unprecedented rise in student enrolment (Mutua, 2004).

Local Implications; Students Unrest

The global and national socio-political dynamics significantly examined in the foregoing section and which translated into policy in higher education has manifested locally in the perpetual strikes that have been the bane of Kenya's higher education. Examples of unrest associated with these policies include the following: (i) Strike by all public universities in Kenya in June 1991 to protest against a raft of radical changes in financing university education, (ii) Protest against acute shortage of teaching and welfare facilities following drastic expenditure cuts in higher education at Chepkoilel Campus of Moi University 1993, Maseno University College 1994 and the twin riots of the Moi University Main Campus in October and November 1999, (iii) Riots associated with tribal alignments during student elections at the then Western University College of Science and Technology.(Kiboiy,2013)

Protests against the Implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme

Kenya was the first country in Sub – Saharan Africa to receive Structural Adjustment loans (Mosley & Smith, 1989). These loans came with conditions aimed at imposing a free market policy in developing countries in order to create a conducive climate for foreign investment (Chacha, 2004 and Sammoff& Carrol, 2004). The conditions included “ eliminating trade and investment regulations, boosting foreign exchange earnings by promoting exports and reducing government deficits through cuts in spending” (Chacha, 2004). Public spending on health, education and food subsidies were targeted in the cuts.

In 1990 the government of Kenya approached the World Bank for a loan to finance its universities that were facing acute shortage in teaching, learning and welfare facilities which had been caused by sharp increases in enrolments (Sifuna, 1998). This was rejected, but in its place the Bank suggested the option of the Universities Investment Project (UIP). The project was part of a larger education sector credit that came with stringent conditions affecting the management of higher education in terms of finance and expansion (Sammof & Carrol, 2004). Specifically, the World Bank offered financial support on condition of “introducing charges for tuition, capping enrolment and reforming the student loan scheme” (Sammof & Carrol, 2004).

The government was, therefore, left with no option but to accept the conditions which were announced officially at the end of June 1991. The changes that were to affect university students were referred to as the cost sharing programme which encompassed the issues for the students' riots: (i) That not all university students would automatically benefit from the government loans, but rather that each student would have to demonstrate their level of need in order to be considered for the loan award; (ii) That students would have to pay directly for tuition; (iii) That students would have to pay for all other services, such as accommodation, and also that they would have to purchase their meals and all required books and stationery from the university outlets; and (iv) That the out-of-pocket allowances for students which amounted to Kshs 5040/= per semester would be discontinued. At Moi University, like in all the rest of the public universities students demanded the immediate withdrawal, by government of the policy changes that had been announced. This was not forthcoming and this led to violent protests on 30th June 1991 during which property was extensively damaged. Attempts by police to quell the riots were unsuccessful but in the confrontation, one student was fatally shot and died while being taken to hospital. There was widespread destruction of property that led to the immediate closure of the university (Security Report, July 1991).

Inadequate Funding, Severe Shortages; Chepkoilel Campus and Maseno University College

Chepkoilel was one of the campuses established by Moi University in response to the sharp increase in student enrolment (Report from the Senior Security Officer, 2007). In 1993 the campus was rocked by a series of protests that involved all its undergraduate students and which lasted for close to two months beginning in early May and subsiding towards the end of June (Report from the Senior Security Officer, 2007). The main issues raised by the students included congestion in the dining hall; a lack of books and stationery in the campus book shop; an impassable access road from the old to the new site; a lack of road bumps on the Eldoret-Kitale highway adjacent to the campus; overcrowding in hostels; unfairness in the awarding of bursaries; and the expulsion of student for non-payment of fees (Report from the Senior Security Officer, 2007)..

The following year the recently established constituent college of Moi University, Maseno University College, also experienced a sequence of prolonged student riot that had a striking similarity with that seen on the Chepkoilel campus in 1993 (Moi University Admissions Office, 2010). Characteristically, the grievances reflect an institution that was struggling to make do with an acute scarcity of facilities and services which resulted from a sharp increase in student' enrolment against a backdrop of diminishing financial support from central government (Moi University Admissions Office, 2010).

There was also an acute shortage of laboratory equipment and a case cited was that of the chemistry laboratory where students alleged that there were only two microscopes available for a class of 120 students. In the halls of residence, students complained about the appalling state of hygiene and recurrent blackouts (Moi University Admissions Office, 2010). Deprived diet and indecent meals were reported in the catering section while in the university medical centre students complained of being forced to purchase medical equipment (Moi University Admissions Office, 2010).

Survival Strategies and New Battle Fronts; Moi University Main Campus 1999

Following the governments' compliance with the World Bank conditions, funding for higher education continued to dwindle forcing universities to develop a raft of income generating activities as a means of financing its operations. Among these was the introduction of module two programmes, also referred to as Privately Sponsored Students Programme (PSSP) (Moi University Admissions Office, 2009). These students did not benefit from government subsidy and/or loans and paid for all services in full or at a higher rate (Moi University Admissions Office, 2009). Students also developed coping strategies which included preparing their own meals in hostels that were not designed for such as well as engaging in small businesses to supplement the meagre parental support (Mwinzi, 2000). These developments created several collision fronts between the university administration and students and among students themselves as is demonstrated in the twin riots of Moi University in 1999. (Moi University Admissions Office, 2010)

In the final analysis it emerges that the implementation of the World Bank imposed policies opened up several battle fronts at the university. The first, was the reaction of students to the introduction of a cost-sharing policy which came in the form of the payment for tuition fees and other services as well as the withdrawal of out-of-pocket allowances (Moi University Admissions Office, 2009).

The second, was the deterioration of both academic and welfare standards which manifested in the acute shortage of teaching and learning facilities as well as the deplorable state of accommodation facilities. Students engaged in protests during this period to complain of the situation

The third aspect, demonstrated in these riots, is that the government, the university and the students developed strategies to adapt to the harsh economic conditions that were associated with these policies, both at the personal and institutional level. These adaptations put the university administration and the students on a collision course that often degenerated into full-blown riots (Moi University Admissions Office, 2009).

At an institutional level, the university introduced the Privately Sponsored Students Programme (PSSP), primarily as a means of raising funds to supplement dwindling financial support from the government (Moi University Admissions Office, 2009). While this was an effective means of raising funds needed to supplement government support and a justifiable means of providing alternative access to higher education, it became a bone of contention between the university administration and the government sponsored students. Students raised issues of equity and protested against the congestion that was partly blamed on these admissions.

Cascading National Politics; Ethnic Hostility at the University

Findings indicate that several incidents of unrest at the university is a result of the playing out of national politics at the institutional level. The clamour for multiparty politics in Kenya soon degenerated into tribal alignment and competition to gain control of political power. Tribal animosities have been experienced during the national election, the worst being the 2008 clashes following dispute of the outcome of the general elections (Republic of Kenya, 2000). Tribal alignments during elections at the university have reflected striking similarity. Students make alliances and voting blocks along tribal lines with matching or even worse hostility. The first evidence of this trend was witnessed in the 2000 student elections of Moi University where two major camps emerged; the “western.com” and the “eastern block”. During the tallying there was contestation for the position of chairman and because of the tension based on ethnic alignment, the position remained unfilled as none of the two factions were willing to give in. Similar ethnic tensions were experienced at the then Western University College of Science Technology in 2006 and in 2014 at the same institutions, this time as a fully-fledged Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. In this second incident, students from the local Luhya community disrupted the counting of votes while singing circumcision songs upon sensing defeat by candidates from other communities (Security Report, 2006, 2014).

The findings indicate that tribalism is most profound during campaigns and elections where candidates whip up ethnic emotions and form voting blocs based on tribe as a way of obtaining votes and beating their opponents (Republic of Kenya, 2000). Responses in several interviews, as well as reports accessed in the study, confirm that tribalism is rife in most public institutions in Kenya, (Western University College Report, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While varying explanations have been advanced regarding the phenomenon of unrest in Kenya’s higher education, this paper concludes that flawed policy brought about by interplay of global and national forces has had a significant contribution. Global interests

have prevailed upon a vulnerable government into adopting policy that has not taken into consideration the needs and realities at the local and institutional level. These interests have downplayed the immense benefits that accrue from investing in higher education hence the marginal financial attention that has been the subject of unrest. Further, national political dynamics, which in the Kenyan context mean competition along tribal lines have cascaded and sharply been reflected at the institutional level. Tribal animosity, often leading to violent clashes, is an emerging threat to the peaceful pursuance of academic programmes in the contemporary university set up in Kenya. This issue needs to be urgently addressed by policy makers.

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