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# **Integrating Governance Education into University Education in Africa: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons**

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**South African Institute of International Affairs**

African perspectives. Global insights.

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education in many African countries continues to be characterised by a crisis of overcrowding, inadequate staff, deteriorating standards, decaying physical infrastructure, insufficient equipment and declining budgetary and policy support from government. At the same time, however, demands are being made on the tertiary-education sector to produce quality graduates and cutting-edge research in support of national and continental development. Although recognition is growing that this sector is central to the continent's ability to meet the objectives of initiatives such as the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, policy and institutional reforms in many countries tend to focus on the economic impact of higher education, neglecting the governance dimension. On the other hand, the vision guiding developmental objectives at national, continental and international levels emphasises the central role played by good governance as a precondition for achieving these goals.

This paper presents highlights of the findings of a scoping study of governance-related programmes and university educators in eight anglophone African universities undertaken in the last quarter of 2008, and a workshop with academics from these institutions held in Johannesburg on 20–21 May 2009. The findings indicate that African universities continue to face the challenges of increasing demands for their services against diminishing or stagnant infrastructure, personnel and other resources. Universities are grappling with the task of reinventing themselves to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, this paper presents the argument for integrating governance teaching into university education, based on, firstly, the integral role that universities play in national development, and, secondly, the centrality of improving governance as a precondition for development. This conclusion is based on both the findings of the research and SAIIA's experience from its work on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) since 2002. The latter has indicated that there is a specific need to integrate governance education into higher education, and to do this from a broader-than-national perspective in order to support national and continental development initiatives.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tšoeu Petlane is a researcher in the APRM Programme at SAIIA. A political scientist by training, he holds an MA from Carleton University (Ottawa) and a BA (Honours) degree in History and Political Science from Trent University (Peterborough). He joined SAIIA in August 2008 after teaching in the departments of Development Studies and Political and Administrative Studies at the National University of Lesotho (NUL). Before that, he worked briefly for the Lesotho Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His last position at NUL was as research fellow in the Institute of Southern African Studies (ISAS), where he was also head of the Research Division and research co-ordinator under the ISAS-LIPAM (Lesotho Institute of Public Administration and Management) Research Consortium that undertook the Lesotho's APRM self-assessment research in 2007–08. He has published several research articles and chapters in edited research volumes.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISAS	Institute of Southern African Studies
LIPAM	Lesotho Institute of Public Administration and Management
MDGs	UN Millennium Development Goals
Nepad	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NUL	National University of Lesotho
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs
UB	University of Botswana
UBLS	University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland
UDar:	University of Dar es Salaam
UFS	University of the Free State
UNIMA	University of Malawi
UNISA	University of South Africa
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

## INTRODUCTION

In the words of Kofi Annan:<sup>1</sup>

The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop Africa's expertise; they can enhance the analysis of Africa's problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights; and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.

Despite the hopes raised by decolonisation, ambitious post-independence programmes and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) to kick-start Africa's economic recovery following the disastrous policies of the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of African countries continue to face serious challenges in promoting democratic governance and advancing the economic and social development of their citizens.

Notwithstanding increased recognition by government and the donor community that tertiary education plays a crucial role in economic development, in general this sector continues to carry low-priority status in Africa in terms of policy and funding. According to Bloom, Canning and Chan:<sup>2</sup>

Signs of progress for higher education are appearing in sub-Saharan Africa. The international development community has begun to recognise the importance of advanced schooling, while some African countries have introduced innovative policies to strengthen tertiary-education systems ... [although] this progress is small in comparison with the progress of other world regions, perhaps partly as a result of insufficient understanding of the positive effects that higher education can have on economic development.

But discussions of this subject tend to focus on the broad sweep of education in general, dealing with policies (including governments' prioritisation of primary — and, more recently to a lesser extent, secondary — education), institutional arrangements and funding on the one hand, and the effects of these on nations' economies on the other.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the benefits and impacts identified tend to focus on 'technical' or scientific training, with the argument that tertiary education can help economies keep up or catch up with more technologically advanced societies, lead to easier adaptation and use of new technologies, stimulate development of new tools and skills and generate entrepreneurship.<sup>4</sup>

In a study of the relationship between higher education and development in five regions across the world (Asia; Latin America; sub-Saharan Africa; countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD];<sup>5</sup> and the Middle East/North African region), Tilak found that<sup>6</sup>

investment in higher education yields positive rates of return to the individual and also to the society at large; in several countries social rates of return are high, above 10%, which can be considered as an alternative rate of return; and rates of return seem to be increasing over the years in some countries.

Specifically, he shows that the rates of return in Africa are higher than world averages for both society and individuals (at 11.3% and 27.8% respectively — against world averages of 10.3% and 19%). This is against lower university enrolment rates in sub-Saharan Africa compared with other regions.<sup>7</sup>

Though the benefits of higher education may seem obvious, it is worth outlining them in order to fully appreciate the contribution of this sector to individual, societal and national life. The direct benefits of higher education are that it produces educated personnel capable of developing innovations that help society move forward, and who contribute to higher family and state revenues through their higher earnings and taxes. Educated mothers raise healthier children than uneducated ones, thus reducing the burden on the health system and ensuring productive future citizens.

The indirect benefits of higher education are identified as, among others, the production of better-trained teachers who then contribute to a stronger education system; health workers who contribute to better health and, therefore, higher productivity; and ‘... nurturing governance and leadership skills, [higher education] can provide countries with the talented individuals needed to establish a policy environment favourable to growth [and] setting up robust and fair legal and political institutions and making them part of a country’s fabric’.<sup>8</sup> It has further been argued that<sup>9</sup>

the social purpose [that] higher education serves, the nation-building role it performs, the public-good nature and the human-right nature of higher education — all these are very closely related and they need to be considered as fundamental and non-compromisable principles in formulation of any public policies relating to higher education.

The argument for higher education as part of a strategy for national development, therefore, is strong, and the perception of university education as an expensive privilege for the few that does not directly contribute to socio-economic transformation is increasingly being challenged. But what of education — and specifically tertiary education — targeted at governance?

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

It is no revelation that the failure of Africa to fulfil the promises of independence — particularly those relating to national development and the extraction of its people from poverty, disease and other forms of deprivation — stems from a failure of governance, among other factors. Although external forces have frequently been blamed (often correctly) for underdevelopment — slavery, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, the Cold War, globalisation etc. — in the last decade, internal leadership and governance deficits have also been recognised as important factors. This makes the issue of how African countries and their societies deal with governance a priority if progress is to be achieved. Despite this, analyses of, and policy recommendations on, higher education tend to ignore governance.

A first trend is to concentrate almost exclusively on the so-called tangibles of technical higher education, namely the transfer of technical skills and knowledge that enable graduates to be productive — skills that will help Africa to ‘catch up with’ advanced

societies and create jobs. This approach has led many governments to prioritise within education the production of scientific/technical knowledge and the training of scientists.

A second trend incorporates the above, but adds the secondary, indirect (or ‘ripple’) effects of tertiary education, such as improving governance and addressing environmental problems. The present study is primarily concerned with the latter.

The quest to improve governance (and, specifically, to promote good governance<sup>10</sup>) has been recognised by various stakeholders, including African governments, civil society, international organisations, academics and citizens. Good governance has become a central topic in development, and many initiatives have been developed to measure, assess and promote it.<sup>11</sup> However, the two approaches to understanding higher education and locating it within the quest for national development continue to de-emphasise and de-prioritise governance.

This study seeks to reconceptualise and reposition governance education at tertiary level in the current debates about the relationship between higher education and development. This reorientation is based on the following premises:

- Firstly, a fundamental misunderstanding of the place and role of higher education in fostering national development appears to have characterised policy formulation in many countries until recently, although this is changing slowly. Higher education has previously been seen as expensive and inefficient, primarily benefiting the rich and privileged. In a continent with limited resources, higher education has tended to fare badly in the competition for resource allocation and policy prioritisation, with governments and donors alike emphasising basic and vocational education. This amounts to a general neglect of universities and other institutions of higher education and a focus on expanding primary education.
- Secondly, with increasing globalisation, the commodification of knowledge<sup>12</sup> and the ascendancy of information and communication technology (ICT) as a major driver in the world economy, it is increasingly acknowledged that higher education has a significant role to play in development. Moreover, emerging from decades of neglect — or at best de-prioritisation — the higher-education sector in many developing countries is undergoing a resurgence. This is evidenced by national institutional reforms in South Africa (since 1994); the expansion of the higher-education sector in Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania and Botswana in the 2000s; and the recent emergence of transnational universities (in Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Lesotho). Of course, the impetus for these reforms comes from many quarters, including the need for efficiency, relevance and sustainability and from the challenges posed by new developments in the creation, transmission and use of knowledge. Many African countries have joined the invocation to revive and reform higher education, given the recognition that higher education makes a necessary contribution to the success of national efforts to boost productivity, competitiveness and economic growth. Viewed from this perspective, higher education ceases to compete with primary and secondary education for policy attention. Instead, it becomes an essential component of educational efforts at all levels and of national initiatives to boost innovation and performance across economic sectors.
- Finally, all current reform debates posit (most without articulating it) a fundamental relationship between good governance on the one hand and economic growth

and development on the other. Indeed, these debates posit a relationship between governance in general and development, often explaining the failure of development in terms of failures in governance, but they seldom advocate that good governance should be fundamental to economic development.

These developments are central to a fundamental reappraisal and reconceptualisation of the place and role of higher education in general, and governance education in particular, in national development. They highlight the long-neglected argument that good governance — which correlates with economic growth and social development — cannot take place without the appropriate skills, thinking and culture required to govern well. In short, we cannot have economic growth and development (even with the best technocrats, technicians and scientists) if we have not created an environment that enables governance, and this will only be possible if the governors possess the appropriate skills and knowledge to govern. Higher education has a significant role to play in the development of a cadre of systematically skilled governors (policymakers, bureaucrats, managers and politicians).

The contribution of higher education to good governance is conceptualised in the following manner, similarly to how it has been seen in relation to economic growth:

- Firstly, higher education contributes to economic growth through the production of knowledge. This largely takes place within the major universities through faculty members' and their advanced students' research and creative activities. Knowledge and understanding of governance principles, systems and processes are produced this way.
- Secondly, colleges and universities contribute to national growth through the diffusion of knowledge, which is the result of the community-service activities of their faculties, staff and students (including consultancies and policy advice). These activities contribute directly to the shaping of governance policies.
- Thirdly, higher-education institutions contribute to the transmission of knowledge through their extensive and varied teaching activities and publications. Thus the next wave of governance practitioners are nurtured.

In short, tertiary education is central to economic and political development; and it is vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalising knowledge society. In the case of Africa, tertiary education plays critical capacity-building and professional-training roles in support of the MDGs.<sup>13</sup>

However, there has been a significant gap in the drive for improved governance in Africa and in the capacity to comprehend the dynamics of governance; to measure, assess, monitor and analyse governance; to develop plans and strategies for the improvement of governance; and to implement plans for the promotion of good governance. This implies an ongoing need for capacity development in governance and, specifically, the need to integrate an understanding and appreciation of the centrality of governance into national, institutional and human capacity-building systems and strategies. This may include, among others, the introduction of civics as a subject in the core national school and university curricula. In short, governance education has been missing from the initiatives so far undertaken by and for Africa to entrench and promote good governance.

Some of the main factors that have contributed to this neglect of governance education in Africa are as follows:

- Civic education, a crucial component of governance education, has been directed almost exclusively at two areas, namely nation building, or the creation of one national identity out of disparate, localised (tribal) identities in order to conform to the imperatives of the post-colonial nation-state, and, in more recent times, voter education. This has largely been to the neglect of inculcating values of proper management and accountability and understanding the relationship between governance and development for the citizen.
- Governance education is often not viewed as a developmental subject and not given priority in terms of resource allocation by African countries.<sup>14</sup>
- The field (especially the academic subject of political science) has often been seen in Africa as hostile or a threat to government. Many post-independence states have viewed with suspicion university departments that teach politics — and many continue to do so. The attitude, inherited from colonial reactions to pro-independence agitation, has been that these departments would teach and brew opposition and, among others, defeat the nation-building agenda that sought to meld these new states into coherent (and monolithic) nations.<sup>15</sup>
- The teaching of governance has been truncated among disciplinary fields at most African universities, with no concerted effort to instil in graduates the need to understand how each of these subjects contribute to governance as a human and national endeavour. Granted, the governance theme cuts across such disciplines as political science, development studies, economics, law, public administration and management (including business management), which makes holistic, integrated study and teaching more difficult.
- African universities have not been good examples themselves of good governance: they have often been characterised by the same management ills that have plagued national administration and other sectors of society. These have included the inability to contribute directly to policymaking and the development of a national vision, and to produce ‘usable’ output (whether in the form of research, knowledge generation or graduates); as well as corruption, patronage systems and power struggles.
- Where they have contributed to national governance, African universities have often limited their role to the production of functionaries who have little comprehension of their role as drivers of change and instruments of the common good, leaving both the projection and defence of these ideals to political operators.

## RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

If we understand that the role of universities in society is to generate, communicate and transfer the knowledge, culture and skills necessary for contributing to national development (including both personal advancement and the production of positive and active citizenship), then the above overview should sound a note of worry for these institutions.

The study, therefore, sought to collect and analyse the perspectives and perceptions of African academics working in governance-related disciplines (primarily political science, public administration, law, sociology, economics and development studies) about the conditions within their institutions and countries, with the focus on:

- Whether and to what degree the African university has succeeded or failed to meet its mandate of producing the ‘product’ (i.e. research output, policy input and graduates) that builds on this mandate, with particular reference to the quest for good governance. In short, has the African university succeeded in fulfilling its role as a responsible and productive ‘citizen’, producing research that directly addresses national problems and graduates able to function in the various sectors of state and non-state organisations?
- How African universities and academics can come together to assist one another to improve on this delivery.

These two questions highlight the centrality of governance education in the process of African development and the need for governance education in order to promote good governance.

As a scoping exercise, the study sought to establish the general conditions within which academics working in governance operate. This provides a general context and lays the ground for further investigation into leveraging the work of these academics and their institutions to support, specifically, but not exclusively, the strengthening of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) governance objectives. The following seven areas were specifically covered by the study:

- The general working conditions in each institution, including teaching loads; the time allocated to preparation, course development, teaching and personal research; and departmental establishments (i.e. staff numbers and qualifications).
- The emphasis on governance within courses offered (broadly defined as comprising civic knowledge, civic culture and specific skills).
- The coverage of specific topics related to governance within departmental courses.
- The processes of curriculum development (courses and programmes) and revision (including recent changes).
- Perspectives on access to teaching and research material for academics and students.
- Relations with major stakeholders, particularly government, in terms of their use of academics’ research output (policy research and planning).
- The needs of the departments and suggestions for capacity-building and networking support with other institutions across the continent.

## Methodology

The study relied on four main modes of data collection, namely desk research; interviews with selected academics; an online survey; and insights gleaned at a workshop in May 2009 with African academics from eight countries.<sup>16</sup>

The first phase, desk research, concentrated on identifying three main issues:

- current trends in higher education in Africa, including understanding the place and function of higher education in the past two decades, and challenges facing African universities in terms of policy support, resources and institutional dynamics;
- the input of academia in recent policy debates and research on governance and governance reform; and
- the scope, coverage and content of governance-related subjects in African universities.

Because the Governance and APRM Programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) was designed to lend support to actors within the mechanism, the focus of the study sought to understand the dynamics of higher education (and governance education) within countries involved in the programme as a step towards the strengthening of the APRM. The seven areas mentioned above were then used to develop a 20-question, self-administered, web-based questionnaire that was sent to 157 academics in 14 English-speaking countries, 10 of which are at different stages of the APRM process.

Telephone interviews were arranged with 40 academics in the 14 countries. These covered the same issues as the survey, but also included institutional profiles and further in-depth discussions of the issues. In addition, personal interviews, where possible, were carried out. In total, 12 academics were interviewed, both by telephone and in person, in six countries (Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia). The initial findings of the research were presented at the above-mentioned workshop,<sup>17</sup> at which 20 academics — many of whom were part of the online survey and some of whom had participated in the extensive interviews — were present. This served, among other things, to discuss and validate the output of the study.

Though the coverage of the survey (and, indeed, of the study in general) was limited, the pattern of responses and flavour of the details obtained tend to tally with global and continental findings from studies undertaken by, among others, the World Bank and the Association of African Universities. Because of the nature of the research, only tentative conclusions can be offered at this stage; a more comprehensive investigation might be needed in order to establish authoritative conclusions.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### Introduction

The presentation of the research findings that follows summarises some of the major trends in governance education in African universities, distilled from the surveys of courses, course material and university educators, as well as interviews. Responses from the online survey provide most of the detailed quantitative results presented, whereas interviews with academics, and comments and presentations from the May 2009 workshop provide the qualitative material discussed.

In general, the research indicates that African universities have been in constant decline over the past three to four decades. Faced with the challenges of increasing demands for their services (particularly the extremely large increases in student enrolment) against diminishing or stagnant infrastructure, personnel and other resources, universities around

the continent have grappled with the task of reinventing themselves to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sawyer<sup>18</sup> discusses *inter alia* these challenges, identified in broad terms as: quality and relevance (i.e. the standards of education in higher education institutions, and the relevance of their products to the needs of both national development and the international context); capacity and demand (increasing demand for higher education in the face of limited human, infrastructural and financial resources); institutional management (rigid, cumbersome and often unaccountable internal governance systems that hinder change and a swift response to change); and system diversification, including the emergence of competition in the form of private universities and new modes of delivering higher education, such as electronic and distance learning.

This has come in the last decade with the renewal of interest in higher education and its place in national development from governments and international development agencies working in Africa (and other parts of the developing world). Hence the growth in studies on the state of higher education on the continent, spearheaded by organisations such as the World Bank and the Association of African Universities.<sup>19</sup>

Efforts at reform and/or transformation have also been initiated at the institutional level in many universities, covering structural, operational policy and curriculum issues. However, the impetus has come from different quarters, necessitating diverse responses and strategies.<sup>20</sup> Most universities have sought to address the challenges of relevance, resources and survival in the face of increased competition for attention from both the ‘market’ (i.e. the demand for higher education as the effects of increased primary and secondary enrolment are felt) and the state (in terms of policy and resource prioritisation — for example, versus universal primary education), and what has been seen as the threat of stagnation and irrelevance. The institutions that have embarked on whole-scale reform include the University of Addis Ababa (AAU), the University of Botswana (UB), the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the University of Dar es Salaam (UDar) and the public universities in South Africa and Ghana.

The importance of these developments is that they coincided with new developments on the governance front, both nationally in many African countries, and on the continent. The wave of democratisation that swept the continent in the past two decades, coupled with the emergence of continental initiatives like Nepad and the APRM — together with the preceding reform and transformation of the Organisation for African Unity into the African Union (AU) — have all given impetus to look at governance again as a major theme.

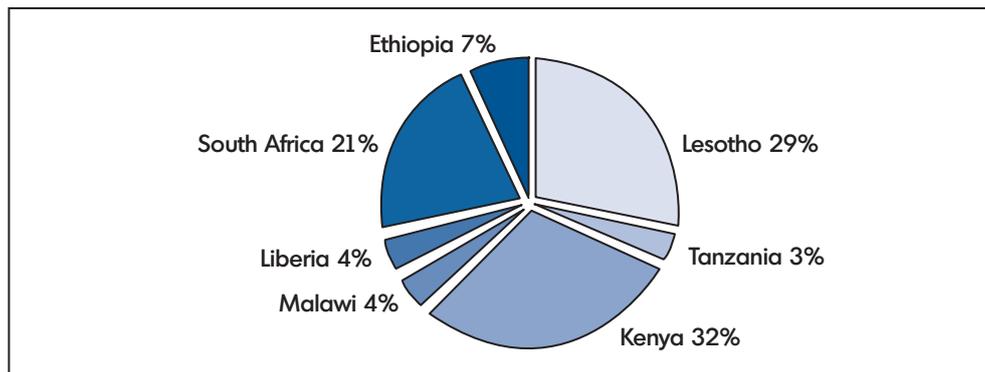
African universities have taken this challenge head-on, both in terms of debates (research and teaching) and in practice (transformation and institutional reforms). Therefore, the re-emergence of governance in higher education can be understood in terms of these two dimensions. It is, however, more with the former that the study was concerned.

### **Online survey response rates**

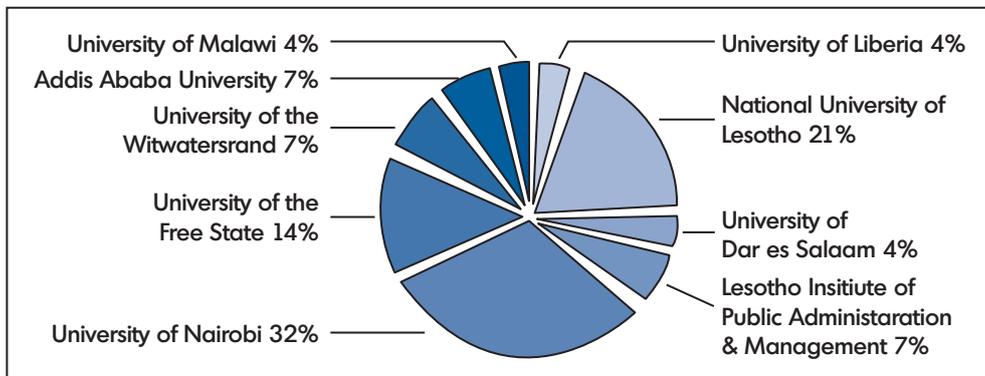
An initial survey instrument was developed to cover the main questions for investigation, and sent to more than 150 academics in African universities on the available SAIIA database (roughly 10 academics per country in 15 countries). Of these, 43 academics from seven countries responded to the survey. Respondents were from AAU; UDar; the Lesotho

Institute of Public Administration and Management (LIPAM); NUL; the University of Liberia; the University of the Free State (UFS); the University of Malawi (UNIMA), the University of Nairobi; and the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS). They included senior academics (senior lecturers and professors); junior academics (lecturers and assistants); and other university employees (academic administrators and other support staff). The distribution of respondents by country, institution and academic position is presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

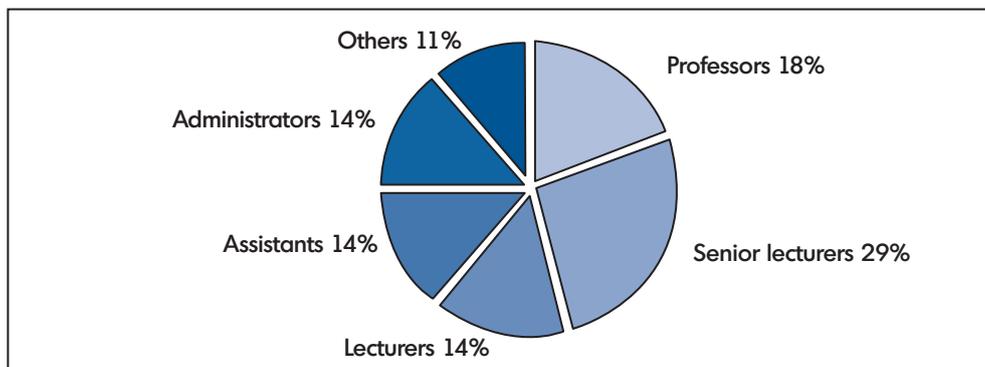
**Figure 1: Distribution of online survey respondents by country**



**Figure 2: Distribution of online survey respondents by institution**



**Figure 3: Distribution of online survey respondents by position**



### Working conditions

One of the main questions investigated in the online survey and discussions with educators related to the general working conditions in each institution. These include teaching loads; time allocation dedicated to preparation, course development, teaching and personal research; and departmental conditions (staff numbers and qualifications). Investigation of these issues was intended to establish the overall environment of higher education in particular institutions and countries. The findings indicate the following pattern:

- Massification, or the increase in student numbers, appears to be a consistent and growing trend in most universities, putting pressure on physical, financial and personnel resources. In institutions such as the University of Zambia, NUL and AAU, interview respondents estimated that class sizes have increased by more than 50% since 2006/07, mostly as a result of attempts by university management to become more relevant by increasing student intake as part of new strategic plans.
- Capacity challenges are highlighted as among the most important constraints to university teaching in general. These consist of two trends: the weakness of current faculties in terms of qualifications and experience on the one hand, and a high turnover of staff ('brain drain') on the other. These are caused by, among other things, the heavy teaching loads of academics, combined with dwindling training, research funding and the attraction of greener pastures in external markets — nationally (in the private sector or government), in other African countries and internationally. Succession plans appear absent in many universities, and so-called 'academic incest'<sup>21</sup> dominates.
- Weak management systems and limited scope for reform. Here, the general trend appears to be that of outmoded and rigid systems of university administration and management, including bureaucratic processes involved in curriculum reform, access to resources (for research), career advancement and quality control. Most universities appear to be run through highly centralised bureaucracies that do not encourage or allow initiative and tend to undervalue research and publication in favour of teaching. Since 2003, at least three of the universities surveyed (Lesotho, Botswana and Addis Ababa) have attempted whole-scale institutional reform, with varying results.
- Resource challenges. The most prominent condition of work in African universities appears to be the unavailability of teaching material, particularly access to the most current published material. Libraries in the universities of Zambia and Addis Ababa appear the weakest in this respect, whereas the universities of Botswana and South Africa have the most recent material. This is perhaps a reflection of the economies of African countries. In terms of current material and other teaching resources, access to the Internet and other electronic media and material appears to be one of the most urgent challenges faced by African universities. As the world moves forward in the electronic-communication and information-technology era, African universities appear to be lagging further behind, with outdated hardware, slow and expensive Internet access and obsolete software.
- Relations with government. Most of the universities studied are either the only or main institution of higher education in the country. Consequently, they occupy a particularly 'politicised' position in terms of national priorities and relations with government. The

overall pattern is that, on the one hand, governments have interfered with the running and vision of universities (in the name of national interest), but have failed to support the institutions (in the form of resources and consistent funding) on the other.

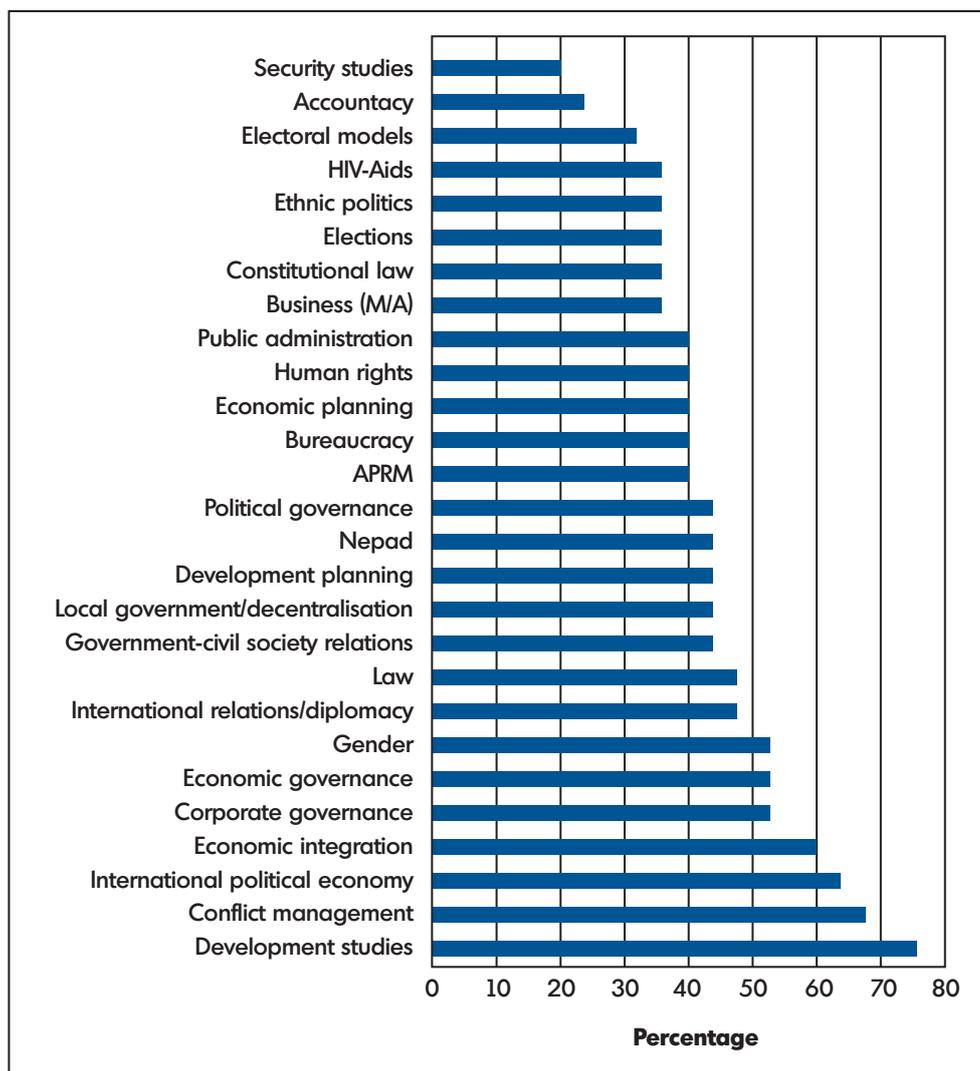
In terms of politics, both in the broad sense and in party-political terms, a significant number of participants in the study pointed to difficult relations with government and political parties. First, a number of departments of political science have only emerged as serious centres of analysis of national developments in the past 10 years, and appear to be quite critical of government. This has not endeared them to the establishment and they are often viewed as anti-government breeding-grounds — for example, in Malawi and Lesotho. More importantly, at NUL an old law still forbids active party-political activity on university campuses, and both academics and students are discouraged from expressing their political allegiances.

A further concern has been voiced about the management of universities, namely their internal governance. In many cases, administrative inefficiencies have been highlighted as part of the weakness that programmes of reform sought to address (in Addis Ababa, Lesotho and Nairobi, for example). Concerns in this area include the processes of appointing institutional leaders (vice chancellors), who are seen as politicised and dominated by government; consistent budgetary over-expenditure; and weak or non-transparent decision-making processes. Added to these have been debates on whether academics should be allowed to unionise.

The findings of the study indicate that most academics are unable to successfully balance their time commitments among the various tasks they have to perform. This is mainly the result of an overload of teaching, marking and preparation, leaving little time for research and publication in departments that are often understaffed and under-resourced. Therefore, innovation and the development of new ideas (including course content) are often difficult, and academics seldom revise their course material. In this connection, participants at the SAIIA workshop in May 2009 presented some interesting anecdotes, including the use of lecture notes that are more than 10 years old. This has serious implications for both the quality and currency of the material taught. On the other hand, some reported that they essentially end up teaching theory, with few case studies or current examples being presented, in an effort to ensure that the basics are covered in big classes. In the same manner, some elective courses that cover contemporary issues and encourage independent student research (such as research studies, ‘selected topics’ or ‘emerging issues’) are sometimes for a standard programme menu of basic courses in many disciplines.

### **Governance content and emphasis of university subjects**

A core question in the study focused on the content of courses. The survey listed a range of governance-related subjects, asking respondents to indicate the presence of these in their course content. The idea was to identify lacunae and indicate possible areas where courses and programmes could be strengthened. Figure 4 on page 16 presents the responses from the survey to this question: it gives the percentage of respondent institutions that offer the topics shown.

**Figure 4: Online survey – presence of topics in course content**

Of the 27 topics listed as closely related to governance in the study, the three most frequently taught were development studies, conflict management and international political economy, with response frequencies of 76%, 68% and 64% respectively. Part of the explanation could be that most universities have a department of development studies, therefore the subject is well known and part of the established curriculum. The same goes for international political economy, which is a central topic in political science, international relations and development studies courses. Interesting is the significance ascribed to conflict management, which is a relatively recent addition to political science and development studies. Given the emergence of regional conflicts on the continent in the past decade and the international focus on developments in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and the Horn of Africa, it is not surprising that the topic has gained currency in higher-education circles.

At the other end of the scale, the least frequently taught topics include security studies, accountancy and electoral models (at 20%, 24% and 32% respectively). As for accountancy,

the most plausible explanation is that the number of academics working in management science (business administration and management) was relatively small in the sample. Therefore, this figure may not represent the true state of affairs in many universities. Indeed, in all the universities represented in the survey, accounting or accountancy was taught as one of the core courses, including within law departments. Security studies, or related subjects, appears to be viewed as a specialised discipline that higher education is yet to delve into, despite the widespread acknowledgement of human insecurity on the continent. One of the factors influencing this situation could be that elements of this topic are addressed in conflict management/resolution. Nevertheless, this is a significant gap that universities may need to address as part of making their governance courses more relevant.

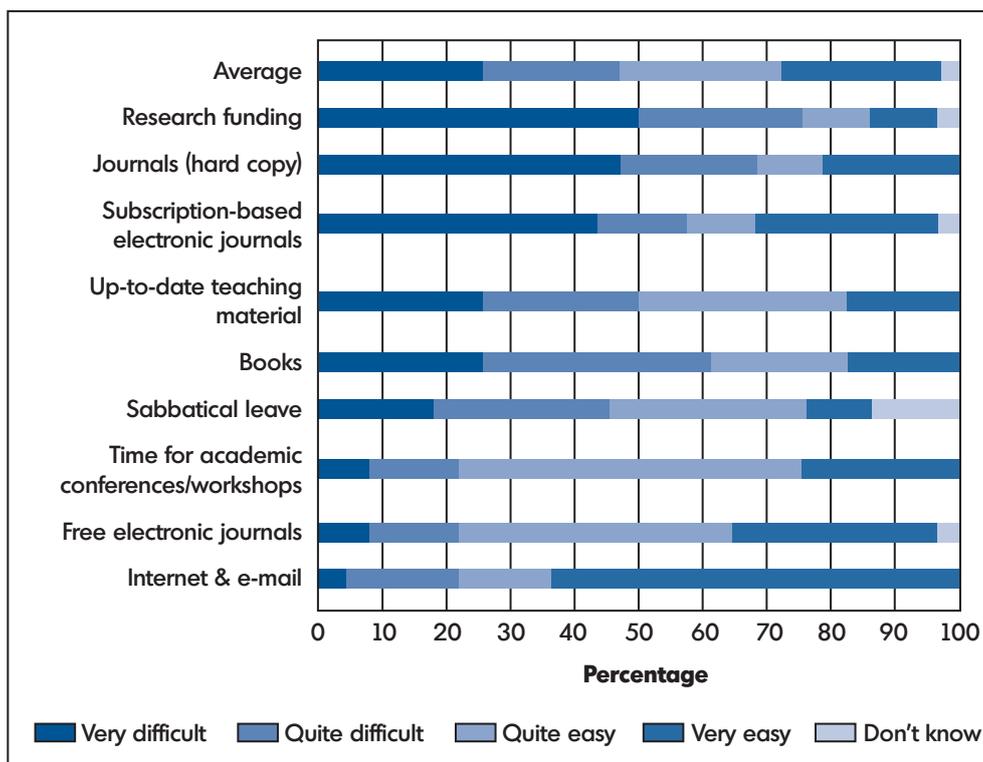
Given the significance of events in African politics in the past two decades, it is surprising that elections and electoral models are as infrequently taught as reported (37%). The understanding and analysis of these issues are among the main occupations of statesmen and governments — and yet the continent's institutions of higher learning are not teaching them. The reasons for this may need further exploration, but one of the possible explanations may be the controversy with which elections are treated in many countries. Therefore, the topic needs to be brought into the mainstream of university teaching in Africa.

The presentation above only highlights the extremities of the research findings, namely the most and least frequently taught topics. The indication in general is that although some of the topics considered important, relevant and current in understanding the dynamics of governance on the continent may be under-addressed, they are, however, being taught. Therefore, the agenda for further work would be to look at how to improve on the situation — to strengthen institutions where there are weaknesses, and support and enhance ongoing initiatives.

### **Access to resources**

One of the perennial complaints of African academics has been about access to teaching material. Deteriorating budgets for literature acquisition have left a majority of university libraries housing more archival than contemporary material.<sup>22</sup> Other areas of university operation have not been spared this fate, and amid the crumbling infrastructure and facilities, student numbers and demands on higher education are increasing.

Another challenge in this area is the fast pace of change in ICT. Although ICT provides possible opportunities for Africa to catch up with the rest of the world and to circumvent some of the resource constraints that have bedevilled the continent (such as the circulation of paper-based literature), the weakness of ICT facilities in many universities has become a point of concern. The study sought, therefore, to gather information from respondents about access to teaching and research material for both academics and students—including access to ICT-based materials. Besides current material, a number of other resources were identified as important to teaching at university. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of difficulty or ease with which they (and their students) were able to get access to these resources. They included journals, research funding and specific ICT facilities. Figure 5 on page 18 presents the findings.

**Figure 5: Access to resources (lecturers)**

On average, respondents reported having relatively easy access to resources. Those who found access 'quite easy' and 'very easy' accounted for 50% of the responses (25% in each category), as opposed to 47%, who found access difficult (22% found access 'quite difficult' and 25% found it 'very difficult'). Only 3% could not give an assessment.

The items assessed included access to research funding; hard-copy journals; subscription-based electronic journals; current teaching material; books; free electronic journals; and Internet/e-mail. Other facilities covered related to the ability to do research — mainly access to research funding, sabbatical leave and time off work to attend academic conferences and workshops.

Access to research funding seems to be the most problematic, with 75% of respondents reporting it to be difficult (50% 'very difficult' and 25% 'quite difficult'), whereas only 22% reported it to be easy (11% 'quite easy' and 'very easy' respectively). Only 3% had no observation concerning this issue.

Next in terms of difficulty of accessibility were hard-copy journals and books. Journals were reported as difficult to acquire by 67% of respondents (with 46% and 21% reporting this to be 'very difficult' and 'quite difficult' respectively). The remaining 33% reported them easy to acquire (11% 'quite easy' and 21% 'very easy'). Books were found to be difficult to acquire by 61% of respondents (25% found this 'very difficult' and 36% 'quite difficult').

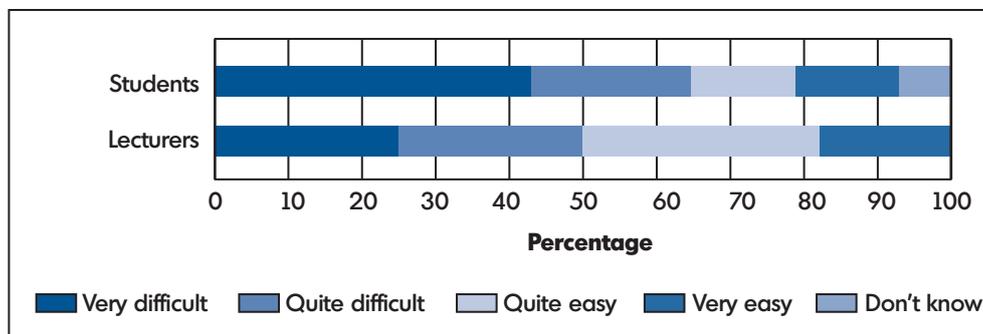
In terms of access to current teaching material, respondents were divided equally: 50% reported access to be difficult (25% each for 'very difficult' and 'quite difficult'); and 50% reported it to be easy (32% 'quite easy' and 18% 'very easy').

Resources and facilities reported as relatively easy to acquire were sabbatical leave; time off for attending academic forums; free electronic journals; and access to Internet and e-mail. Time off to attend academic seminars and workshops was the easiest to acquire at 79% (54% ‘quite easy’ and 25% ‘very easy’). This was followed by access to the Internet and e-mail at 78% (14% found access ‘quite easy’ and 64% ‘very easy’). Free electronic journals were reported by 75% of respondents as easily accessible (43% ‘quite easy’ and 32% ‘very easy’). However, some academics from Malawi, for example, complained about the slowness and cost of Internet use at UNIMA.

These findings broadly confirm the view that access to some of the current teaching aids and facilities is difficult for African academics. However, they also point to possibilities or entry points for improvement. The relatively easy access to conference time and to the Internet and e-mail may be used to network and establish useful contacts with colleagues across the continent and globally. CD-ROM technology is also a relatively economic and simple way to collect readings for wide distribution, particularly in slow and costly Internet environments.

Respondents in the survey were also asked about access to resources for students. These included the same facilities identified for lecturers, with the exception of those categories that apply only to academics (sabbatical leave, research funding and conference attendance). Figure 6 presents a comparison of the survey responses covering ease of access to six resources and facilities by lecturers and students.

**Figure 6: Access to up-to-date material (comparison of students and lecturers)**



Note: ‘Material’ refers to teaching material for lecturers and reading material for students.

Overall, it appears that students’ access to various resources is more difficult than lecturers’. Whereas access for lecturers is reported to be split 50:50 between difficult and easy, students’ access is reported to be more difficult at 57% (36% ‘very difficult’ and 21% ‘quite difficult’). Almost 40% reported students’ access to be easy (20% ‘quite easy’ and 19% ‘very easy’); and 4% reported ‘don’t know’.

Access to resources, therefore, appears to be a very serious concern, affecting both academics and students — though students have more of a problem with this issue than their lecturers. Of course, the study targeted lecturers, and it is possible that responses from students would give a different picture.

## Departmental and institutional needs

A further area of investigation in the study included needs of the respondents' departments and institutions, and suggestions for capacity-building and networking support with other institutions across the continent. Here, the most widely reported needs of institutions, evidenced in both the survey responses and the interviews with academics, were library facilities, human capacity and research facilities. These are discussed briefly in the following sections.

### Library facilities

Libraries in many African universities have been challenged in the past two decades, particularly with reference to their ability to acquire up-to-date material. This was highlighted in both the survey and interview findings of the study, with almost all respondents listing 'access to recent books'; 'outdated library materials — need for improved library facilities'; and 'access to new journals in our university library' among their main concerns. The causes of the weakness of university libraries are varied, but appear to revolve round reduced funding — in tandem with overall funding challenges that universities face — on the one hand, and increasing demands for the services of these facilities, especially in the form of increased student numbers, on the other. Limited automation and lagging behind in installing and making use of ICT have also been noted as weaknesses in many university libraries. Because of cuts in budgets and spiralling book costs, many libraries have tended to reduce their book-acquisition and journal-subscription budgets, with the result that, in many cases

the lists of requests that lecturers bring to the librarian are more or less wish lists, and the library ends up having to prioritise, and only subscribes to a handful of journals that we have asked them to. As for new books, we will normally only get those provided by donors.<sup>23</sup>

The result of this situation is that lecturers develop strategies for ensuring students' access to reading material. One such strategy has been to prepare reading packs that contain the basic minimum core reading for their courses and either make them available in the reserve section of the library or sell them to students in their courses.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes the reading packs are sold to students for a nominal fee (normally enough to cover the costs of photocopying the material). This arrangement has the advantage that it enables students, whose book budgets are often not sufficient to buy the books from the university bookshops, to get access to the core literature, and may supplement departments' often limited photocopying budgets.

A worrying aspect of this practice, however, is that the arrangement to sell study packs is often initiated and executed by individual lecturers. In situations where there are no systems to control and monitor the usage of the money collected, corruption may result. Another is the tendency for '... students [to be] limited in what they read, and [only] use the packs as textbooks, not venturing to read anything else'.<sup>25</sup> This has implications for the quality of learning at university.

Another strategy has been for lecturers to lend reading material to students from their own personal collections acquired on international research and conference trips, as some literature may be either prohibitively expensive or unavailable locally. This material,

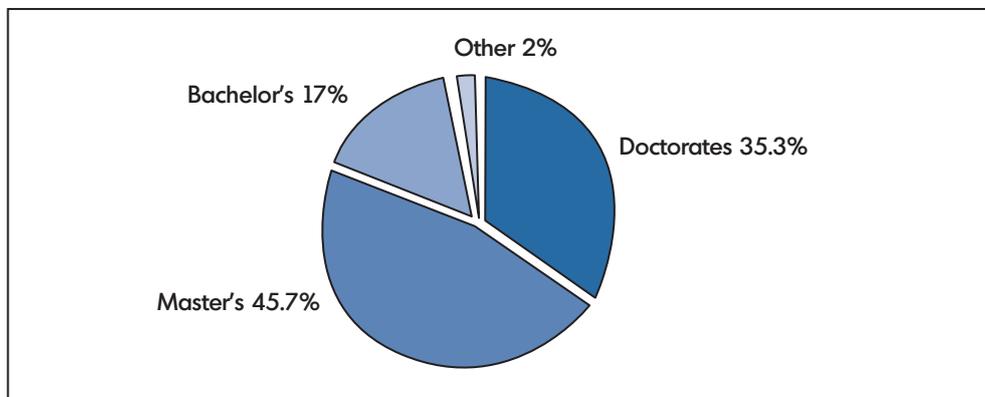
according to one lecturer, is sometimes ‘... far superior and [more] current than what is available in the university library’.<sup>26</sup> However, arrangements like this depend on trust and the personal relationships of those concerned, and lecturers are often reluctant to lend out material in an environment where book shortages lead to the non-return and theft of library material.

**Human capacity and staffing**

‘Highly educated staff, preferably PhDs, are urgently needed to drive the programmes [offered in the department]’ was one of the survey respondents’ responses to the question of current human-capacity needs. Human capacity and staffing concerns are the second-biggest issue for many African universities. This includes staff numbers in departments where the full complement of available posts is rarely filled; the level of training and experience — a problem where few departments have more than one full-time professor (and sometimes none); and the subject specialisation of current staff, a problem for many departments that have a limited number of specialists in the subjects that make up particular disciplines.

As Figure 7 shows, most departments in the universities studied are dominated by junior- to mid-level academics. It presents the average staff complement in the departments of respondents in the survey portion of the research by academic qualification.

**Figure 7: Average academic qualifications of staff in departments surveyed (from online survey responses)**



The issue of the quality of teaching staff has been one of the long-standing challenges for African universities, and despite various capacity-building programmes (also known as staff-development initiatives), universities have consistently failed to bring the standard of their staff to a level that would support quality education. In many of the institutions studied, at least a quarter of the permanent staff were on development leave during the research. While most were pursuing their doctoral studies, some (as in the case of NUL) were also studying for Master's degrees. A consistent threat arising from this is that some staff-development fellows do not return to the university upon completion of their studies, often finding more lucrative employment — both in Africa and elsewhere. This ‘brain

drain' phenomenon creates a vacuum of qualified, specialised and experienced academics, leaving many departments thin on the ground. And it further erodes both the range and coverage of courses departments are able to offer students, as well as the ability of those on the ground to devote time to research and publishing.

### **Research and publication facilities**

Although teaching overload and student numbers constitute a sizeable hurdle to academics' ability to carry out independent research and engage in publication activities, an even more serious concern highlighted in both the survey responses and interviews with subjects in the research has been the availability of research funding and support from their home institutions.

At NUL, it has been reported that a significant portion of the research funding available to academics often goes unused, mainly because of lecturers' reluctance to apply for and use it. Following discussions with lecturers at NUL and other universities, a different picture emerges:

- The allocated individual and team funds are often not sufficient to support proposed research studies, therefore leaving applicants with a shortfall and prospects of not completing their research. In an environment where equipment is either outdated or non-existent, the acquisition of new equipment is often not supported by university-provided funds, thus discouraging applications that require equipment or even university transport facilities.
- The processes of reviewing and approving applications for research funding are often inordinately time-consuming and non-transparent, leading to delays that undermine proposed research and often clash with departmental schedules.
- Recently, the direct 'utility' value of research has been used as a criterion for approving proposals, thereby discouraging pure knowledge-generating or reflective research.
- Time taken off for sabbaticals often necessitates hiring replacement staff for absent academics. Because of the dearth of capacity in many institutions, successful sabbatical application often depends on the institution (or department) being able to engage a replacement academic. This, together with limited resources, places a limitation on the ability of staff to do research.

These are only some of the limits to research and producing publications indicated by participants in the research. The responses, however, indicate a serious problem of knowledge development, academic refreshment and advancement in many universities on the continent. The lack of economic incentives, difficult procedures and time involved in acquiring research grants have without doubt contributed to a weakness in knowledge-generation in African universities. Of course, there are exceptions to these patterns, both at the individual and institutional level. However, the limitations appear to be a common trend in those studied.

One of the ways in which academics have been able to bypass these hurdles is to engage in research consultancies — often commissioned by non-governmental organisations and international organisations — for specified periods. The main attraction of these for academics is financial, since these assignments often come with substantial rewards for short-term tasks and are paid quickly. There is, however, also a further reward in

that consultancy work provides academics with an opportunity to develop and refine their reports into publishable formats. This may be limited, though, by, for instance, the contract terms under which the research is undertaken and the quality of the data and analysis needed.

Research consultancy work has also become a significant channel of gaining resources for many African academics. During the research it emerged that some consultant academics use the opportunity to acquire equipment that they, and sometimes their departments and universities, need. Examples included laptops (often, universities only provide desktop computers, which are often not regularly upgraded) and software. This practice may, of course, motivate academics to prioritise ‘moonlighting’ consultancy work at the expense of their core teaching duties.

### Summary of findings

In the view of observers and participants, higher education in general and governance teaching in particular in African universities is under extreme pressure. According to the findings presented here, the pattern of diminishing resources (physical, human and political), increasing demands and a fight for a place in the national setting is common to many institutions on the continent. These challenges come at a time when the need to analyse, understand and integrate governance into the mainstream of national political and development policies is paramount, as reflected in initiatives such as Nepad and APRM.

The working conditions under which African academics operate continue to be increasingly difficult, although innovations and opportunities do exist. These conditions include rapidly increasing student numbers, making it difficult to devote time to teaching loads and to balance these with other — particularly research — activities; weak departmental and institutional academic capacity in terms of numbers and the quality, experience and range of specialisation of faculty members; weak management, resulting in cumbersome and inflexible systems that are resistant to change and innovation, particularly in terms of curriculum reform and addressing current topics; difficult relations between academia (especially some of the disciplines at the heart of governance training and analysis) and major stakeholders, particularly governments in Africa; and weak institutional governance within universities, which are often prone to internal instability, corruption and inefficiency.

These conditions impose serious restrictions to innovation and the introduction of new ideas and ways of doing things. Though institutional reform has been initiated in a number of institutions, it is still early to assess properly the effects of these developments on the ability of African universities to reinvent themselves as major drivers of innovation in general, and governance innovation in particular, that is relevant to their communities. Indications from Lesotho (NUL) and Ethiopia (AAU) suggest that, for example, student intake increases have begun to overwhelm limited infrastructure and teaching resources.<sup>27</sup>

The range of governance-related topics covered in courses offered in many universities studied in the research indicates that the majority are, indeed, being taught — but at what level and depth is difficult to ascertain. The emphasis seems to continue to be on ‘traditional’ subjects and topics, with current themes, such as elections and electoral models, security studies and HIV/Aids, being limited. Development, conflict management

and international political economy are reported to be among the most frequently taught and prioritised topics. On the other hand, it is encouraging to note that some of the topics that are current in national and continental governance dialogues, such as Nepad and APRM (e.g. gender and human rights), are beginning to emerge as taught topics.<sup>28</sup> However, the extent to which these and other current topics are being integrated and formalised as part of university education is still unclear.

An operational concern that has long hindered development in Africa's higher-education sector, and which appears to have worsened in the last two decades, is access to resources and facilities. On average, the findings confirm this pattern, but also indicate windows of opportunity. Library facilities, cheap photocopies, research and publishing opportunities and funding appear to be the most difficult resources to acquire. Coupled with weak departmental human capacity, these would seem to create a vicious circle that undermines quality and innovation. However, the relative ease with which academics (and students not very far behind) are able to get access to ICT facilities may provide an opportunity — particularly with the advent of freeware and other free facilities on the Internet. However, this possibility is still hamstrung by the need for subscription fees in some areas, as well as the quality of ICT (e.g. connectivity speeds) in many countries.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: LESSONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

From the years immediately following the attainment of political independence, the typically young and small university sector was invested with high national aspirations and supported through public resources. Today, the situation is a great deal more problematic, with reduced levels of public funding for a hugely expanded and considerably diversified sector; the advent of private universities; increased student mobility; and a questioning of the mission, mandate, character and proper place of the sector, its institutions and products in society.

With this pattern of challenges and obstacles in terms of the current state of teaching in African universities, what future agenda may be developed in order to address some of the difficulties? How can academics in the area of governance education meet the challenge of bringing the African university to play the national (and continental) role of producing societally-relevant output, to support reform in governance and to catch up with current technological and social development?

The social, political and economic issues requiring educational institutions to adapt the content, orientation and quality of their courses and programmes have been outlined. The question appears to be the identification and development of strategies to address these challenges. A possible agenda cannot but be grounded in the need to be relevant in content; constructive in orientation; internationally competitive and compatible in quality; and effective and efficient in implementation.

The massive increases in student numbers have not been met with commensurate expansions in the teaching facilities, personnel and programmes offered at many universities. This has led to declining standards of education and increased the burden of teaching, leaving many academics with little time to prepare for class and to balance teaching with research.

One possible solution is the expansion of distance education, for which students' physical residence on campus is not required. This model has been traditionally pioneered by universities such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) and is being implemented in open universities in various countries, including Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Although this current research did not specifically explore how these universities function, several of their strategies have been adopted by other 'traditional' universities (such as the University of Stellenbosch, particularly in graduate and research programmes). These include:

- shortened, intensive residential sessions followed by Internet-based periods of independent study;
- the development and packaging of course material into stand-alone study modules that can be taken both as independent components and serialised parts of a complete programme;
- the use of Internet broadcasting to deliver lectures; and
- the use of portable formats of material delivery, such as CD-ROM technology.

The adaptation and adoption of these strategies and tools may go towards alleviating the physical space challenges that many universities face, but will depend on the efficiency of systems put in place to ensure quality and standards.

The declining ability of universities and departments to develop the skill and content capacity of academics has led to both 'academic incest' and attempts to rationalise the use of scarce resources. Training of lecturers at better-resourced universities within the continent has been one of the strategies adopted. This has involved sending academics for further training, for example, to universities in South Africa from countries in the Southern African region. Universities such as WITS, UFS, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape in South Africa have come to play an increasing role in training staff in various disciplines for NUL, UB, the University of Swaziland and UNIMA, and others, in the past decade. They also attract many students from other African countries.

This trend needs to be systematised, with the possibility of institutional arrangements geared towards staff-development agreements, specialised thematic training and research and teaching exchanges. These types of institutional arrangements would include the following benefits:

- the release of staff from regional universities for the purpose of study and upgrading based on departmental and institutional plans, which would themselves be based on identified needs for specialisation, further education and postdoctoral development;
- the circulation and cross-fertilisation of knowledge on a wider (regional) scale, and the standardisation of skills and course material;
- the development of supportive academic networks that would include external examinerships and collaborative (including comparative) research undertakings without the need to expend additional resources; and
- a broadening of the coverage of regional and continental subject issues directly related to the needs of societies in the region (such as the dynamics of regional integration; the Southern African Customs Union; the Southern African Development Community [SADC]; Nepal; AU; and APRM), and a deepening of expertise in these areas.<sup>29</sup>

A further component of this type of regional arrangement may include student facilities, such as research exchanges. The long history of regional service and inter-university arrangements reflected in the evolution of the universities of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland could be re-examined in this light, as could the post-1994 reform and consolidation of universities within South Africa.

The universities of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland emerged in the pre-independence period as a single University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland (UBLS) to serve the then three High Commission territories. This continued into the post-independence period, but collapsed in the 1970s with the withdrawal of Lesotho and the establishment of NUL. The two remaining institutions later decoupled into independent national entities. Although the earlier format (UBLS) may not necessarily be resuscitated, the rational sharing of resources among universities on a regional basis may be a model worth considering.

The advantages of global inter-university consortia would include the standardisation of remuneration packages and advancement (i.e. promotion and scaling) criteria for academics, thus avoiding the 'brain drain' problem that has undermined the efforts of countries like Lesotho and Swaziland in building the capacity of their university faculties. Of course, cross-country co-ordination of this kind would also bring with it many challenges, as the integration of various universities in South Africa has demonstrated. In addition, the dissolution of UBLS may need to be re-examined in order to identify the factors that led to the separation of the three institutions. Another model that may be worth exploring for smaller universities is that of the University of the West Indies,<sup>30</sup> which has maintained the multinational configuration inherited from independence.

The most prominent organisation championing intra-African institutional co-operation on the continent is the Association of African Universities. This organisation could be mobilised to support and strengthen the regional — and eventually continental — arrangement of universities.

Universities in general tend to be rigid and conservative in approaching administrative and programme reform. Indeed, although it is often recognised that there is a need to innovate and move beyond the traditional, it is frequently either an external stimulus or critical institutional crisis that provides the impetus for reform. AAU, NUL and South Africa's universities have undergone reform in the past decade mainly as a result of these types of push factors.<sup>31</sup> The alignment of universities to national priorities, particularly in Africa, is a serious challenge; effective strategies may not yet be in place to address this challenge.

Given the resource weaknesses of these institutions and the slow-changing attitudes of governments (and society in general) on the one hand, and the commitment of many governments to the objectives of regional integration and cross-national development in an increasingly integrated world on the other, there is the potential for universities to refresh their mandate of national development and relevance by focusing on the African agenda. This proposal is premised on the following points:

- The identified resource challenges of many African universities, and the advantages that could be achieved through a rational sharing of resources.
- An institutional realignment with broader continental commitments that are part of the national agenda for development. In the regional development areas of the Economic

Community of West African States, the East African Community and SADC, most national development initiatives are increasingly aligned and harmonised to regional objectives. This would, therefore, ensure that university programmes have a broader perspective, while still relevant to national development objectives. It may also lead to a more rational and effective use of resources.<sup>32</sup>

- The production of graduates with a broader international market potential in terms of their skills and knowledge. This is important for those universities that produce graduates unable to be absorbed by the national labour market, and would concurrently meet the needs of international regional organisations that are increasingly influential in the formulation and execution of policies.

Perhaps because information technology has made the delivery of education easier and cheaper, the possibility of mobilising this resource with the aim of improving higher education in general — and governance education in particular — is worth exploring, especially because territoriality can no longer protect national institutions from competition, even in their own traditional markets.

The use of ICT facilities would be another area of consideration. Virtual universities and long-distance modes of learning along the model of, for example, the increasingly successful UNISA continue to prove increasingly attractive and accessible to growing numbers beyond national boundaries. This has challenged traditional universities in terms of both the cost of delivery and the range of subjects and disciplines available. Therefore, the ‘traditional’ residential universities may be eclipsed by this form of higher-education institution. The degree to which these could be integrated into a holistic tertiary-education strategy, however, is difficult to judge.

The rise of private universities, many with a commercial attitude of selling knowledge as a commodity and producing functionaries for the business and industrial sectors, may not be a threat to traditional universities. Their foray into Africa indicates a need that has been identified, and they occupy a specific niche that perhaps not all universities have been able to fill. In this sense, therefore, they could be approached as partners rather than competitors. This way, research and innovation functions could remain with academic universities, whereas skill development could be a function of these ‘practical’ institutions. However, for this to succeed there need to be clear national higher-education policies, regulatory-standards bodies and absorptive market capacity for the research (knowledge) and skills that these institutions would produce. At present, few countries have these systems in place.

Most universities in this study are either the only or the principal institutions of higher education in the country. Consequently, they occupy a particularly ‘politicised’ position in terms of national priorities and relations with government. The overall pattern is that, on the one hand, governments have interfered in the running and vision of universities (in the name of the national interest), but have failed on the other to support the institutions (in the form of resources and consistent funding). Negotiating and harmonising this relationship appears to be one of the most difficult challenges for African universities to overcome, and the history of the recent integration and consolidation of universities in South Africa and the earlier disintegration of UBLS may not provide encouraging precedents for the types of proposals suggested here.

However, the momentum for all other social, political and economic dynamics in the direction of regional and continental integration and co-ordination may hold promise, and challenge African universities to move in tandem with the rest of society. Given the centrality that has been placed on governance, and good governance in particular, as a precondition for development (such as the freedom of the press, providing citizens with certain basic facilities and creating conditions for both international aid and investment), it appears only logical that this subject should be one of the front-line topics for universities to appropriate and develop — and to address specifically from a collaborative, cross-disciplinary and inter-institutional approach.

In order to meet this challenge, within the context of the difficulties identified in this study that face Africa's higher-education sector, universities need to deal with the following pressing issues by recognising the following:

- Firstly, that national development is no longer the prerogative of national actors and will not be achievable within the context of the national state; and that this agenda is increasingly approached from a regional and continental perspective, and, therefore, universities would need to devise strategies and initiatives to grow in tandem with this approach.
- Secondly, that governance relates to both the understanding of the dynamics of social systems and the practices thereof. As such, the rigid, often conservative, internal governance and regulation systems that exist in many institutions would need to be reformed. In short, universities need to practise good governance themselves.
- Thirdly, that, as centres of innovation, universal knowledge and leadership, universities cannot but join in the global knowledge community, exploring new modes of delivering their products and inquiring into current issues that affect their communities. In this connection, exploring, analysing and teaching about current African problems in the governance area is of primary importance.

Many academics have already begun to innovate in their approach to the problems they face at the practical level, including the introduction of current topics as 'emerging issues' in their courses; using personal and professional contacts to collaborate in research across the continent; and developing networks for subjects such as environmental management, election studies and conflict management. A systematic and integrated inquiry into the feasibility, appropriateness and sustainability of integrating some of the suggestions outlined here into university teaching on governance in Africa would go a long way towards strengthening the role that these institutions play in supporting national and continental initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of Africans.

The workshop that convened at the end of the research identified a wide range of practical activities that African academics from several disciplines and universities could engage in to extend and deepen the innovations outlined here. To this end, SAIIA, together with a group of academics at the centre of this study, has developed a proposal for a pilot network project that would begin to explore the practical use of some of the strategies identified in the research, and share both the approaches and resources available to the membership of the network in order to overcome the challenges identified. The main components and activities of this network will include joint research in areas of governance and governance reform; the identification of course and programme weaknesses through

informal peer review of course materials and content; an electronic noticeboard to facilitate the exchange of current literature and research opportunities; network meetings to discuss research; the dissemination of results and exchange of experiences; and the opening up of possibilities for staff exchanges, joint student supervision and co-examinership.

It is expected that the proposed network will provide a demonstration of how peer learning and support can enable African academics in general, and governance educators in particular, to support each other and build systematic, innovative strategies to improve their effectiveness in delivering relevant, timely product with the limited resources available. This south-south co-operation and mutual support should help Africans engage with the challenges they face and contribute to the wider international community of knowledge.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 United Nations Information Service, 'Information Technology should be used to tap knowledge from greatest universities to bring learning to all, Kofi Annan says', Press Release No: UNIS/SG/2625, 2000 <<http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2000/sg2625.html>>, as quoted in Bloom D, Canning D & K Chan, 'Higher education and economic development in Africa', Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series, 102. Washington DC: The World Bank, 2006, p. 2.
- 2 Bloom D, Canning D & K Chan, 'Higher education and economic development in Africa', Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series, 102. Washington DC: The World Bank, 2006, p. 15.
- 3 See, for example, Association of African Universities, *Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, with Specific Reference to Universities*, Report of the Working Group on Higher Education. Accra: Association of African Universities, 2004.
- 4 See, for example, Bloom D, Canning D & K Chan, *op. cit.*; Tilak J, 'Higher education and development', University XXI international seminar paper. Brasilia: University XXI, 2003.
- 5 The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) comprises mostly developed countries in Western Europe and North America, together with Australia and New Zealand.
- 6 Tilak J, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Bloom D, Canning D & K Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- 9 Tilak J, 'Higher Education: A Public Good or a Commodity for Trade?' Keynote paper delivered at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nobel Laureates' Meeting, Barcelona, 2005, p. 3.
- 10 Governance in general refers to the relationship between state and citizen. In particular, good governance refers to the following elements: a political system that allows opportunities of participation for all citizens and that provides an effective, smooth and stable transfer of power and periodic renewals of the mandate of leadership through, among other things, regular elections; a strong, independent, stable public sector and legislative and administrative structures; transparency, predictability and accountability of public institutions and their agents; effective public-sector management; an economic framework that encourages surplus generation and equitable distribution to address the problems of poverty and overall development; adherence to the rule of law; and respect for human rights.

- 11 See, for example, Materu P, 'Higher education quality assurance in sub-Saharan Africa: Status, challenges, opportunities and promising practices', Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series, 124. Washington DC: World Bank, 2007.
- 12 This refers to the trend towards the production, packaging and distribution of knowledge as a commercial product. According to Lyotard (1979, pp. 4–5), 'Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value"', as quoted in Roberts P, 'Rereading Lyotard: Knowledge, Commodification and Higher Education', *Electronic Journal of Sociology*, 1998.
- 13 Bloom D, Canning D & K Chan, *op. cit.*
- 14 Recently, the government of Lesotho revised its university-student funding strategy to prioritise subjects of study to be supported by the state. The list includes political science (in particular) as a non-priority subject, and students studying this find it difficult to acquire government sponsorship. Development studies, economics and law are, however, funded. Universities in Ethiopia are also facing the same problem.
- 15 In many countries, these departments continue to carry the label of 'administrative studies', which was adopted in the immediate post-independence period to avoid antagonising government — and perhaps to reflect the capacity-building agenda of the new governments (to develop a cadre of locals who would manage the administrative system).
- 16 SAIIA (South African Institute of International Affairs), 'Integrating governance into university education: A workshop for African academic experts', workshop report, 2009, <<http://www.saiia.org.za/governance-and-aprm-events/integrating-governance-into-university-education-workshop-for-african-academics.html>>.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Sawyerr A, 'Challenges facing African universities: Selected issues'. *African Studies Review*, 47, 1, 2004. Accra: Association of African Universities.
- 19 The Association of African Universities has conducted a number of studies of the higher-education sector in Africa since 2000 and has established partnerships with the World Bank and other development partners, such as the Catherine T McArthur and Rockefeller Foundations, to establish initiatives such as the Working Group on Higher Education in 2002. An earlier initiative was the 1994 colloquium held in Lesotho, which sought to chart the way for the continental body in co-ordinating higher education on the continent in the new millennium. See [www.aau.org](http://www.aau.org) and [www.foundation-Partnership.org](http://www.foundation-Partnership.org).
- 20 In South Africa, for example, transformation in the post-democratic era (after the abolition of apartheid in 1994) has been driven by the national need to both remove discriminatory access to higher education (i.e. to improve access and inclusivity) and to distribute resources within this sector without sacrificing quality. In Lesotho and Ethiopia, the external 'push' has been from government's insistence that universities should be relevant to national development goals, in competition for resources with other tertiary-sector institutions (such as emerging vocational institutions), whereas the internal dynamic has revolved around concerns with the leakage ('brain drain') of personnel in the face of declining working conditions. The emergence of competitors (mainly in the form of private universities and technikons that offer degree-level vocational or market-relevant education) has also been a major prompt to change. In general, the patterns of transformation have ranged from changes that could be labelled 'internal' adjustments to various systems of university education, adaptation and the development of innovative strategies and structures, to whole-scale changes to the focus, resource mobilisation

and institutional structures of these institutions (such as the merging of several universities in South Africa).

- 21 This is defined as the practice whereby the best students are absorbed into the teaching/academic stream in universities upon their graduation. This is an accepted practice globally, but may become problematic if little planning is involved, standards are not maintained (taking the top students even when performance is low) and there is no injection of outside capacity (academics and/or students from outside the institution). It continues to be the practice, however, that locally trained staff are often supplemented and complemented by training externally.
- 22 According to one academic from the University of Zambia, the library there is often referred to as 'the archive'.
- 23 Interview, economics lecturer, University of Nairobi, November 2008.
- 24 Reported by lecturers from the National University of Lesotho, the University of Malawi, the University of Zambia and the University of Swaziland.
- 25 Development studies lecturer, National University of Lesotho, 2008.
- 26 Development studies lecturer, University of Zambia (SAIIA workshop, May 2009). The notable exception to this pattern appears to be South Africa, where university libraries are adequately supplied and there is a thriving academic publishing industry, making material readily available and accessible.
- 27 At the National University of Lesotho, which is traditionally a residential university (with students living on campus), the past five years have seen a great rise in off-residence numbers as the university has sought to grow its student population from about 5 000 in 2002 to a target of 10 000 by 2007.  
The consequences of large-scale change dictated by government in Ethiopia in 2004 were challenges identified as detrimental to the standard of education at the Addis Ababa University. These have included the reduction of the study period (for Bachelor's degrees) from four-year programmes to three years on the insistence of government. This has affected the quality of education, which has declined as reform has somehow weakened the core content of material delivered by the department. At the insistence of government, all minor courses were to be removed and students to take only major programmes. At the same time, the student population has grown exponentially since the reforms.
- 28 Participants in the study have reported strategically introducing current topics within the outdated course outlines and descriptions under, for example, 'emerging issues', whereby subjects like gender equality, globalisation and land management have been taught. On the other hand, this individual innovation/flexibility has been reported to be the source of self-censorship, whereby topics like ethnicity — while current and possibly appropriate for integration into public administration, political science and sociology courses — are not taught for fear that they are 'very controversial' (political science lecturer, University of Nairobi, 2009).
- 29 It should be noted that the scheme proposed here refers to Southern Africa only as an example of the possible type of relationship and systematic inter-institutional arrangements that may be developed. Countries in other regions of the continent where similar asymmetries in higher-education systems exist may also adopt the same, or similar, models. Additionally, the South African university system may benefit internally, as there continue to be disparities of resources and personnel capacities within the national context.
- 30 The University of the West Indies, founded in 1948, serves 16 English-speaking countries in the Caribbean: Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; the Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; the British

Virgin Islands; the Cayman Islands; Dominica; Grenada; Jamaica; Montserrat; St Kitts and Nevis; St Lucia; St Vincent and the Grenadines; Trinidad and Tobago; and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

- 31 For both the South African universities and the Association of African Universities, government intervention in the name of seeking to meet the needs for transformation (including relevance, nation-building and inclusiveness) has been a major influence for change. At the National University of Lesotho the challenge also came from internal difficulties and the emergence of commercial universities that were seen as a threat to the status of the university as the single institution of higher learning in the country.
- 32 For example, through the development of niche, regionally distributed campuses that could specialise in certain disciplines (perhaps in the same way that SADC sectoral leadership has been divided and distributed among the member states), as opposed to trying to house the complete range of university disciplines within each of the various national universities. This way, economies of scale could also be realised.

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

**The African Peer Review Mechanism: Lessons from the Pioneers** is the first in-depth study of the APRM, examining its practical, theoretical and diplomatic challenges. Case studies of Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius and South Africa illustrate difficulties faced by civil society in making their voices heard. It offers 80 recommendations to strengthen the APRM.

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