



*Two Case Studies:  
South Africa and  
Nigeria*

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**South Africa's National Framework**

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## South Africa's National Framework

### Major Provisions

In South Africa, a new national framework for higher education was approved and spelled out in the Education White Paper 3<sup>1</sup> and the Higher Education Act of 1997. Both have broad implications for strategic planning at institutions of higher education nation-wide. The provisions of the Higher Education Act fall into three broad categories:

- justice and equality;
- responsiveness to the needs of the society; and
- co-operative governance.

An elaboration on each of these provisions is found below.

#### *Justice and equality*

The new framework is designed to meet the educational needs of South Africa through significantly changed national economic, social and political structures.<sup>2</sup> It seeks to guide fundamental changes in higher education to correct, redress and overcome the legacies of apartheid, so that higher education becomes more socially equitable and promotes social justice more generally. The government makes a commitment to 'equity, justice, and a better life for all'.<sup>3</sup> The White Paper stipulates greater efficiency in terms of student throughput and output rates and in terms of the success rates of black students.

#### *Social responsiveness*

The national framework seeks responsiveness to address societal interests and needs by producing graduates who are equipped to participate in a globally competitive economy, enabling them to contribute to the reconstruction and development needs of society. Specifically, the White Paper calls for shifting enrolments towards science/technology and career-oriented fields and programmes, and urges the growth of basic and applied research within the framework of a national research plan.

#### *Co-operative governance*

The framework further seeks to encourage co-operative institutional governance, which recognises that no single stakeholder constituency can affect change in an institution, and enhances the role of the national government through the Ministry of Education and the Council on Higher Education (CHE).<sup>4</sup> The White Paper urges the recognition of complimentary and competing interests on campuses and, on this basis, the creation of internal institutional structures of

governance (such as institutional forums) that reflect and promote broad institutional participation, transparency, co-operation and a democratic ethos.

## Overview of the Framework

The new framework was a product of both the struggle to transform higher education, ridding it of the legacies of apartheid, and an effort to prepare South Africa to compete effectively in a highly competitive globalised economic and political environment. It was built on years of struggle, thoughtful study, extensive planning and consensus-building.

Higher education is expected to promote modernisation through internationally competitive research and high-quality programmes. There is an emphasis on the commitment to high academic standards throughout the system, both to increase international competitiveness and to ensure that the disadvantaged institutions of the past do not continue to have second-class status. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are to be protected.<sup>5</sup> Accountability is seen to require a much more active role for government than in the past, putting special responsibility on government and the new CHE.

These changes are to be implemented within a new single co-ordinated system.<sup>6</sup> The CHE is to play a central role in this new single system to replace 15 autonomous structures higher education's role in providing a better quality of life for the country and its citizens. It is also regarded as key to establishing effective democracy at the national and institutional levels.<sup>7</sup>

A new approach to planning is elaborated in the document: a programme-based approach is to be built into institutional strategic and budget plans.<sup>8</sup> The White Paper calls for the development of a national strategic plan, the creation of which would largely fall to the CHE. This master plan was intended to establish an 'integrated and co-ordinated' framework for the whole higher education system.<sup>9</sup>

The governance structure is to be fundamentally changed. The new framework calls for a co-operative arrangement of governance between government and the institutions. Government is to be 'proactive' to ensure that desired changes occur, but with no intention to 'micro-manage' institutions.<sup>10</sup> Part of the centralising function is to be provided by the CHE, which is to work closely with both government and the institutions. At the campus level, the functions of the senate are maintained while student, staff, and community participation is guaranteed through *institutional forums* designed to democratise higher education and give the public opportunities for input and co-operation on an 'advisory' basis in the context of the existing authority of the council, administration and senate.<sup>11</sup>

Institutional strategic plans would be expected to reflect the principles and context of the new higher education framework spelled out in the White Paper. This would require including:



- policies to promote equity in admissions;
- new opportunities for disadvantaged students and mechanisms to improve their chances of success;
- plans that encourage greater focus on science and technology;
- a means for greater participation in governance and transparency within the campus community, focus on improving the quality of academic programmes, research and service; and
- plans that reflect the need for economic and political development, both locally and regionally.

## Nigeria's National Framework

Nigeria's higher education system has been in a state of crisis since 1996, owing to a series of military coups, which resulted in the neglect of higher education. The return to democratic government has brought some degree of improvement for higher education and resulted in a number of changes, and proposed changes, for the system. These have implications for institutional strategic planning.

The higher education system in Nigeria 'attained its greatest distinction in the mid-1970s [when] the quality of staff and students, as well as of instruction at both undergraduate and graduate levels, compared with the top universities anywhere in the world. From that point, however, a combination of factors precipitated a decline which saw the universities deteriorate to such an extent that most barely functioned.'<sup>12</sup>

The decline in higher education coincided with the prolonged periods of military rule when the universities lost their autonomy and were, in terms of governance, often reduced to the status of political pawns. Authority was concentrated in the National Universities Commission (NUC),<sup>13</sup> but major decisions, including the appointment of vice-chancellors, were often dependent on approval of the military government or head of state. Many institutions acquired notoriety for corruption and poor administration, and were faced with the problems of deteriorating quality, diminishing student access, inadequate funding, and poor governance and management. As Professor Munzali Jibril, executive secretary of the NUC, noted in an address to the African Donors Education Association (ADEA) during the 1990s, enrolments grew faster than budgets, forcing expenditures per FTE down from \$700 in 1991 to \$362 in 1998. Frequent changes in government policies during the previous two decades resulted in instability and weakened management, deterioration of staff salaries, labour and student unrest, a brain drain and a deficit of over 24 000 staff.<sup>14</sup>

Nigerian universities were also affected by the deterioration and breakdown of the national infrastructure such as roads, telecommunications and the electrical

supply. For example, frequent power blackouts and lack of 'electric power back-up supply [has meant that] computing facilities, limited as they are, are periodically inoperable'.<sup>15</sup>

Under the new democratic dispensation following the elections, the government has set about revitalising the higher education system. The government restored some measure of university autonomy in 2000, and the funding system is being reconceptualised. The NUC has just completed its second series of audits of academic programmes and ranking of universities.<sup>16</sup> Among the most important changes are:

- the reconstitution of all university governing councils with more representative membership;
- the elimination of the former privilege that allowed vice-chancellors to select ten per cent of each year's student intake; and
- major increases in government funding of almost 200 per cent, bringing the per-student allocation up to \$970.

The new government's policy on autonomy for universities, announced in July 2000, creates opportunities for improving the management and quality of higher education for students. It is also intended to weaken the power of the NUC, strengthen university councils, give university senates power over curriculum matters, return the right of admission to universities, and provide block grants to individual universities. A government White Paper and legislative proposals are expected at the end of 2002.

The government faces the immediate task of re-engineering the system from the ground up, and to this end the government and the NUC have identified a set of priorities for individual universities that includes:

- rehabilitation of physical facilities;
- re-equipment of laboratories and libraries;
- re-establishment of good governance and management;
- staff development and training, particularly at institutions abroad; and
- recruitment of external funding.

These priorities, together with evolving policies, constitute the national educational framework for strategic planning for individual institutions in Nigeria and set the stage for rebuilding higher education and high-quality education opportunities for the population. Although the outlines of a new foundation have been set out for higher education by the Nigerian government, fundamental details affecting the powers of the NUC and decentralisation of power to the institutions remain ambiguous. While the goals of rebuilding the quality of Nigerian higher education are clear and can be reflected in institutional strategic



plans, there remains a great deal of ambiguity about overarching goals, funding opportunities, and the effects of the proposals to decentralise NUC authority. This makes effective institutional strategic planning very difficult. In the long run, success depends very much on the quality and effectiveness of individual institutional strategic plans and their ability to tie their visions and goals to the realities of funding and a new national framework. In the short run, contestation about the power to control the institutions remains a major stumbling block hindering the potential for success.

## Endnotes

- 1 Department of Education. 1997. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation*. Pretoria. All references to the White Paper hereafter refer to the Education White Paper 3.
- 2 Section 1.0, p. 1
- 3 Section 1.6, p. 3.
- 4 The CHE currently has 20 members. Thirteen (including the chairperson) are appointed by the Minister of Education from various constituencies with expertise on higher education; seven are ex-officio members appointed by the Minister. The CHE is seen as an independent expert statutory body rather than one that is representative of organisations, institutions or constituencies.
- 5 Sections 1.23, 1.24 and 3.33, pp. 7 and 35.
- 6 See section 1.2, p. 1.
- 7 Sections 1.19, 1.4–1.6, 1.18, pp. 2, 3, and 6.
- 8 Section 2.5, p. 10 and section 2.9, p. 12.
- 9 See section 2.23, p. 17.
- 10 The governance section is laid out in great detail. The Ministry is trying to clarify its authority to control the system in an overall policy sense, but also guarantee institutional autonomy within the vision and framework set out in the White Paper. See especially p. 17.
- 11 See sections 3.36 and 3.37, p. 36.
- 12 Hayward, F.M. and Gana, A.T. 1995. 'The Policy Framework: Management and Governance'. Unpublished report to the World Bank, April 22, 1995.
- 13 The National Universities Commission (NUC) was set up with an appointed Commission designed to be the governing body of the NUC. However, the Commission was disbanded in 1992 and has not been reappointed. The current lack of accountability of the NUC apparently suits some people. Commission members were appointed by the government and included representatives from the ministries of Education, Health, Finance and Establishment, plus representatives from the public and private sectors, and representatives of eight academic disciplines.
- 14 ADEA Working Group on Higher Education. 1999. 'WGHE Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria'. Report, December 1–3, 1999.

- 15 Moja, T. 2000. 'Education Sector Analysis. Nigeria'. Unpublished report to the World Bank, January 2000.
- 16 National Universities Commission. 'Ranking of Nigerian Universities according to Performance of their Academic Programmes in the 1999 and 2000 Accreditation Exercise'. Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities, volume 1, 2001.

