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5. ADDING VALUE TO KNOWLEDGE OR ERODING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION? A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE MODULE II DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

INTRODUCTION

Faced with the complex challenge of meeting rising demand in the face of declining government funding since the late 1980s, public universities in Kenya have had to seek alternative income-generating activities, as well as innovative and flexible programming. Among the reforms implemented in Kenyan public universities, beginning in 1998, to address these challenges, were the Module II degree programs, popularly known as the parallel degree programs, which exist alongside the “regular” or Module I degree programs. Students choosing the parallel module II program are self-sponsored as opposed to students in the module I program who are either fully or partially supported through some form of government funding. Tuition fees for students in the two Modules differ considerably; with those in the parallel module II paying much higher fees which are comparable to those charged by private universities.

While these programs are increasingly popular and may actually be opening up access to higher education, and while they are undoubtedly profitable, their overall impact with regard to addressing the broader goals of social cohesion and redressing historical socio economic imbalances need to be interrogated. Also, despite the increasing student enrolments, the universities have neither provided modern teaching and learning resources nor upgraded facilities and infrastructure at the universities. Additionally, the high student numbers have resulted in heavy teaching loads while professional development opportunities for faculty have remained very limited. The desirability and sustainability of these programs within the overall project of university education in Kenya are issues that need to be critically interrogated.

In this chapter, we trace the development of module II programs in the Kenyan university education landscape and critically examine their rationale, strengths, and drawbacks. Ultimately, we engage a discussion on the suitability and sustainability of neoliberal approaches to the provision of public university education in Kenya.

DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN KENYA

The introduction of university education in Kenya began in 1961, when the then Royal College, Nairobi, was elevated to university college status under a

special arrangement with the University of London. During Kenya's attainment of independence, the country had only one public university college, which was upgraded to university (University of Nairobi) status in 1970.

Moi University was established as the second public university in Kenya by an Act of Parliament in 1984 (Moi University, 2009). Kenyatta University College, which had been a constituent College of the University of Nairobi, was established with university status on August 23, 1985 (Kenyatta University, 2009). Later, there was establishment of Egerton University, Maseno University in 2001 (Maseno University, 2009) and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in 1999 (Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, 2009). Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology is the newest public university in Kenya and became a full university in December 2006 through an Act of parliament (Western University College of Science and Technology, 2009).

Thus, over a period of 50 years, Kenya has moved from a single public university (University of Nairobi) to the current 7 universities, namely

- University of Nairobi,
- Moi University,
- Kenyatta University,
- Egerton University,
- Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology,
- Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, and
- Maseno University.

The number of campuses of the tertiary institutions has increased greatly also. For instance, the University of Nairobi has 10 campuses, Moi University has 5 university colleges and 7 campuses, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology has 4, Egerton University has 3, Kenyatta University and Maseno University have one each. Such rapid university expansion has been witnessed in the private sector too. Currently there are about 23 private universities in Kenya, namely

1. Adventist University of Africa
2. Africa International University
3. Africa Nazarene University
4. Catholic University of Eastern Africa(CUEA)
5. Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa
6. Daystar University
7. Great Lakes University of Kisumu
8. Greta University
9. Kabarak University
10. KCA University
11. Kenya Methodist University
12. Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology
13. Mount Kenya University