

Botswana International University of Science and Technology, Botswana

Higher education policy in the context of the political economy and national human capital development strategies in a developing country – A Botswana perspective (0114)

Abstract:

Governments determine national agendas for higher education and institutions articulate the value of higher education through the generic qualities and skills their graduates purportedly possess, and the value proposition graduates bring to the communities the governments serve. Ironically, graduate “supply chain” management focuses on institutional imperatives rather than human capital development or economic. This paper considers three important caveats that expose how Higher Education Policy and the Political Economy in Botswana have influenced higher education outcomes and graduate employment over the last decade, and reviews issues that have influenced and affected higher education human capital development outcomes by making comparisons to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, China and countries in the European Union. In a developing nation criticised in 2011 by the IMF for spending too much on tertiary education, and permeated by HIV/Aids and large scale unemployment, the paper contextualises higher education policy issues within a regional and sub-Saharan African framework.

This paper has three primary intentions: in the first it refreshes and updates earlier research by the author which demonstrates how the supply chain management of suitably qualified human capital with the perceived capacity to deliver the skills and expertise required to advance a knowledge economy has fallen largely to higher education institutions who articulate the nature of the education they offer through descriptions of the generic attributes and skills their graduates possess rather than addressing the economic value proposition of socio-political investment and labour market ‘uptake’. This analysis of the political economy is accomplished using statistical data, a variety of government papers, and commentaries relating to the Botswana and Southern African economic context.

The author then applies national education policy in the region over the last decade to human capital development strategies to demonstrate how highly expensive and tertiary qualified human capital which lacks economic value and sustainable professional credibility has no value in the political economy of a nation if graduates remain unemployed. This “no-correlation” theory between human capital development and economic deployment is subsequently identified and dissected as the paper exposes how the emerging economic dichotomy between anticipated employability (i.e. work-place-readiness) and actual employment (i.e. work-place availability) increasingly dominates the dilemmas between tertiary graduates, labour market stimuli, and the relevance of higher education to both a post colonial and Afro-centric milieu.

Thirdly, the paper explores current strategies to address the national dilemma and create a pathway to the future by analysing government initiatives for change at macro-level and for importing revised forms of human capital development while

strengthening control and curtailing the autonomy of tertiary education institutions through funding re-structuring and policy review. The paper extends the theme of this third intention by couching an analysis of the proposed expansion of tertiary education in the former British Protectorate in the creation of additional higher education infrastructure by increasing the range and availability of science, technology and engineering education which was identified as a critical national priority in the early part of the millennium, but which has been frozen as a result of economic and social factors as both a global recession and internal politics overtook a national strategy.

The overall objective of the paper is to demonstrate that as small country in sub Saharan Africa, Botswana provides an excellent case study of the relationship between higher education policy, employment, and the political economy, both at national and regional level. As a case study, unique and global trends present themselves for comparison and higher education research: A republic of less than 2,5million persons, Botswana is geographically about the size of Texas. Mining provides over 80% of foreign earnings, and over 50% of government revenue. Less than 15% of the population are in formal employment, and 25% of the nation is HIV/AIDs positive. It is classed as a middle income nation by the IMF even though unemployment is extremely high, with over 50% of persons between 18-24 unemployed. Recent developments in social policy have seen access to all levels of education increase rapidly, and investment in education soar with the founding of a national science and technology university geared at migrating the economy from a primarily agrarian and mining based economy, to a knowledge economy in the regional context.

These changes draw the attention of higher research policy makers and researchers to the evaluate and postulate on the requirements a developing country's higher education system must embrace when developing the nation's human resource capacity, including establishing a relationship between the tertiary education supply of graduates, the current stock of tertiary level graduates in the workforce and the demands and/or expectation of employers. It also requires, as the paper will demonstrate, a realistic match between supply and demand in quantitative and qualitative terms, and enhancing the delivery and relevance of tertiary education.

The paper balances theory with reality by exposing that while the Botswana economy appears to be booming, labour market indices demonstrate that the national economy is not operating at or near a level of full employment nor is it creating sufficient high level jobs the match the growing level of educational attainment. In this context, the paper will demonstrate, there are significant overlaps with higher education policy outcomes in the European Union, China, Australia and New Zealand, even though some are by definition, developed and other developing countries. What the paper aspires to achieve and to contribute to new knowledge, is demonstrable evidence that when graduate competencies and qualifications lead to large scale unemployment, or the export and exodus of graduates from a jurisdiction that is paying a high price for skilled and qualified human capital, it is not merely higher education policy that needs to be re-assessed.