International Briefs *for* Higher Education Leaders

International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders reflects a strategic collaboration between the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at Boston College.

Recognizing that higher education is an increasingly complex global enterprise, the Briefs series is designed to bring a comparative perspective to critical topics and emerging issues. Installments highlight experiences from a variety of national contexts, provide cross country analysis, and explore opportunities for international collaboration.

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ATTAINMENT AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: *International Perspectives*

INCLUSION IN ACTION

Introduction

W elcome to the 8th edition of *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*. This installment explores two extremely important and interconnected topics in higher education today— educational attainment and equity in educational outcomes. We live in an era when global conversations have moved from focusing primarily on access to also emphasizing student success in higher education. As such, it has become even more urgent to examine sustained efforts undertaken by a range of different countries to ensure equitable opportunities for degree attainment for all students, including underserved or traditionally marginalized student populations.

This newest *Brief* installment addresses these topics by highlighting view points and experiences from a variety of different national perspectives, as peer learning across national borders increasingly provides invaluable insights that can be adapted for use elsewhere. Selection of this *Brief's* topics was also facilitated by the ongoing work of ACE, with support from Lumina Foundation, to foster the Global Attainment & Inclusion Network (GAIN). Among other objectives, GAIN aims to identify exemplary policies and practices focused on increasing tertiary educational attainment and preparing students for lifelong success, particularly among underserved or underrepresented student populations. More information about the GAIN initiative is included in the article following this introduction.

In order to deeply engage with and explore the topics of this *Brief*, we asked each author to write an article focused on the current discussions, trends, specific programs, or policy initiatives related to tertiary degree attainment and inclusion in their country. More specifically, the articles follow a framework that includes defining core elements of the national context for postsecondary attainment and inclusion in each specific country; explaining the roles of government, business or industry, and individual postsecondary institutions in promoting attainment and inclusion in higher education; and providing examples of particularly unique and/or effective programs or initiatives that are addressing these issues. The availability of data on attainment and equity varies significantly across countries, however, the authors did an excellent job of marshalling existing research and resources and identifying meaningful examples and good practices within their national contexts. To conclude, the final synthesizing article, by Roberta Malee Bassett of the World Bank, provides a meta-analysis of the country specific information, identifying global trends and areas that require our collective focus going forward.

We hope this *Brief* will serve as a useful resource for institutional leaders—in the United States and around the world—who are seeking to improve attainment rates, as well as ensure equity and student success on their campuses. Ideally, insights into how other countries address these issues will help leaders identify shared issues and opportunities, and inform and amplify efforts to raise attainment and ensure equity at their home institutions.

Robin Matross Helms
Director, Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement
American Council on Education

Laura E. Rumbley
Associate Director, Knowledge Development & Research
European Association for International Education (EAIE)

Lucia Brajkovic
Senior Research Specialist, Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement
American Council on Education

The Global Attainment and Inclusion Network (GAIN): Leveraging Global Perspectives

Erin Baldwin and Heather H. Ward

The Need for Mutual Learning

The 8th edition of *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders* examines the urgent challenge shared worldwide of both increasing the total number of people with a college education and making sure marginalized and underserved populations can complete their education at an equitable rate. How to achieve this dual imperative—degree completion and equity—is also the animating question behind the Global Attainment and Inclusion Network, or GAIN, an initiative of the American Council on Education (ACE) and Lumina Foundation. GAIN brings together thought leaders and practitioners from around the world to exchange proven and promising ways of increasing attainment and equity. Thus, the initiative tests two important concepts. One, despite significant differences in governance, size, cost, and other factors, national postsecondary systems face similar challenges. And two, successful interventions in one national or regional context may be adapted for the benefit of students elsewhere. This edition of the *Brief* features essays by GAIN members and other global experts discussing specific challenges related to postsecondary attainment and equity in each of their countries, as well as how policymakers and practitioners are tackling those challenges.

The Completion Conundrum

As noted by Jamil Salmi and Andrée Sursock, who serve as members of GAIN's Expert Advisory Group, burgeoning access to opportunities in higher education across most of the world over the past several decades has not translated into higher completion rates. Moreover, attrition rates are pronounced among underserved and marginalized student populations. In the United States, for example, where degree attainment beyond secondary school hovers around 45%, access remains an important consideration for non-traditional student populations, but the disparity in admissions rates is far less severe than for completion rates (Lumina Foundation, 2016). For example, African American students constitute just over 36% of college enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), but only 22% of adults who hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Languishing attainment rates and disproportionately affected underserved student groups are not issues unique to the United States. For example, 52% of the population of traditional age students (aged 18-24) in Colombia is currently pursuing a tertiary degree. However, the percentage of adults aged 25 and over who have *completed* a tertiary degree is below 20% (ACE, 2018). In both Colombia and Mexico, post secondary institutions are growing to meet increasing demand, but there is considerable concern that simply pushing to widen access and increase attainment may adversely affect quality.

Seeking Insight Through GAIN

Lumina Foundation, an independent, US-based, private foundation committed to making high-quality opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all, has set a goal of increasing postsecondary attainment in the United States to

> *GAIN brings together thought leaders and practitioners from around the world to exchange proven and promising ways of increasing attainment and equity.*

60% by the year 2025, with a particular focus on leveling the playing field for African American, Hispanic, Native American, low-income, and adult students. Lumina and ACE have convened GAIN to facilitate learning and discourse among societies around the world testing innovative approaches to degree attainment and equity.

GAIN brings together academic, policy, and business leaders—each with a stake in moving qualified students of all backgrounds through the education system and into the workforce. The network is composed of three-member delegations from eight member countries or regions: Australia, Canada, Colombia, the European Union, Germany, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An Expert Advisory Group of global higher education thought leaders and practitioners from a variety of countries helps guide the initiative, which aims to further the knowledge sharing process through the production of working papers and case studies, and to continue the exchange of ideas and good practices across borders for the benefit of students and their communities around the globe.

The promise of the GAIN initiative lies in the multidirectional exchange of knowledge among the members of this learning community, and in distilling information and ideas gathered from around the world to raise awareness within the United States of effective policies and practices. Achieving equitable outcomes for underserved students through innovative modes of delivery, credentialing, credit recognition, and degree pathways is a central goal of the project. Five core themes have emerged as the focus areas of this work: Equity and Inclusion, Student Support, Financing Education, Teaching and Learning, and Employability.

The authors of this *Brief* outline key challenges and promising practices related to improving attainment rates and equity in nine countries. We invite readers to consider how these examples can reduce equity gaps and spur innovation within their own higher education institutions or systems to enhance student support and degree completion. The impact of these efforts extends far beyond higher education policy and practice to the very strength of our societies and to global economic growth and prosperity. Implicit in the GAIN initiative, and in the *Brief* essays, is the unshakeable reality that postsecondary education is one of the world's most powerful engines of social mobility.

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Colombian Perspectives on Attainment and Inclusion

Marta Losada

National Context

In recent decades, Colombia has endeavored to make significant improvements to its higher education system. Total student enrollment is now on the order of 2.4 million, distributed relatively evenly among a healthy mix of private and public higher education institutions. While only 20% of the population aged 25 and over has completed a tertiary degree, many efforts have been made to increase the enrollment rate—achieving 52% in 2018, up from 12% in the early 1990's (UNESCO, 2017). There is still much room for improvement, however; only 10% of students in the lowest socioeconomic population group transition directly into higher education, as well as only four out of ten students in the general population. Enrollment rates also vary greatly by geographic location (Colombian National Ministry of Education, 2017), and there are significant challenges in terms of the distribution of enrollment by level of program, with too few students enrolled in master's and doctoral degree programs.

Attainment is also a great challenge in the Colombian higher education system. The national retention rate is such that only one in two students will successfully complete their programs and graduate. Relevant data show that drop-out rates correlate with socioeconomic status, mother's level of education, geographic region, performance on high school examinations, etc. Perhaps a rather counterintuitive aspect is that drop-out rates are higher in short cycle programs (of 2-3 years) versus long cycle programs (of 4-5 years) (SPADIES, 2017).

Overall, the main barriers to access, inclusion, and success for Colombian students include poor academic readiness, financial struggles, and to a lesser degree, geographic location, vocational/professional orientation, and lack of proper student support services. The issue of academic readiness is clearly visible from the results of the high school examination in reading and math; only 12% of students taking the exam in the second semester of 2017 reached the fourth (i.e., the highest) level of performance in reading. In math, only 5% of students reached the highest level (ICFES, 2018).

Since 2002, there have been special programs in place to increase enrollment in short cycle technical and technological programs. Recently, there has been an effort to transition to a more comprehensive tertiary system, allowing for flexible pathways and in consideration of the fact that a significant percentage of the population will enter vocational training (VT), which offers possibilities both for those who have completed a full secondary degree and for those who have not. However, there are difficulties when it comes to recognizing academic credits, ensuring quality, and assessing the knowledge and skills acquired in these types of programs.

Government Priorities

The country's broad national priorities are established through the Colombian National Development Plan (NDP). The most

Inclusion in Action: Community Cousins (Su'luqw'a)
Vancouver Island University
Canada

In 2010, more than 2,000 students at Vancouver Island University (VIU) self-identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis, making up 11% of the total student population. While transitioning to postsecondary education, these students reported feeling disconnected and isolated from the broader campus and surrounding community, and that they would benefit from increased interactions with fellow indigenous students and community elders. The Community Cousins program employs a multigenerational mentorship model involving current indigenous students, alumni, and community elders, which promotes deeper connections between the university and local community.

Community Cousins began in May 2011 supported by a grant from the Counselling Foundation of Canada. On campus, student mentors receive approximately 30 hours of leadership, communication, and self-care training, both inside and outside the classroom, culminating in a course completion certificate. Mentors organize a variety of events on campus and conduct biweekly check-ins, providing one-on-one and group coaching focused on health and wellness. The program also relies on elders who conduct cultural activities and impart traditional knowledge alongside academic knowledge. Among indigenous students, they foster a "community away from community" that provides critical support and ongoing guidance.

Community Cousins also works in tandem with the Aboriginal University Bridging Program, which assists indigenous students, many of whom originate from rural or remote communities, when they first arrive at VIU. The Bridging Program serves as a pipeline for Community Cousins; students who were once mentored often in turn become mentors themselves for the cohorts entering university behind them. The program has expanded in recent years to send Community Cousins participants to work with indigenous youth in nearby school districts. In 2012, the entering cohort of VIU indigenous students saw a 43% attrition rate between the first and second years of study. The attrition rate during the same transitional period for the cohort entering in 2015 dropped to 34%.

Website: https://aboriginal.viu.ca/community-cousins

Contributor: Erin Baldwin, Senior Program Specialist, American Council on Education

recent plan (for the 2014-2018 period) includes specific goals related to higher education enrollment and retention, such as lowering the periodic drop-out rate (from one semester to the next) to 8% in 2018, and reaching an enrollment rate of 57% in the same year. However, a specific goal has not been defined for educational attainment by the entire population aged 25-64, as has been articulated in other countries and regions.

While bolstering enrollment and retention rates figures prominently as a priority, quality will likely take center stage in national policies in the coming years. In the Colombian Quality Assurance System (CQAS), there are two levels of quality recognition; the first level is compulsory for all programs that are offered by an institution, and the second level aims to highlight excellence (at the program and instutional levels).

Of the total number of higher education institutions (HEIs), only one-sixth are accredited at the institutional level, although for universities the ratio is 50%. Accredited institutions include both public and private institutions; geographically, however, they are heavily concentrated in just a few cities in the country. This means that large segments of the Colombian population do not have access to accredited institutions. There has not been an overwhelming difference in attainment levels between accredited and non-accredited institutions, but the quality of the education that students receive in non-accredited institutions cannot be guaranteed.

Although the current system has been essentially the same for close to 15 years, a variety of issues have led to a recent overhaul of the CQAS designed to address shortcomings of the system as a whole and to provide incentives for

institutions to undergo the quality assessment process. The planned modifications also bring a new focus on special accreditation requirements for online programs, which may result in more accredited programs in the future—and, potentially, access to accredited programs for a greater percentage of the student population.

A Focus on Student Funding

In terms of student financial support, Colombians are particularly proud of having established the Instituto Colombiano de Crédito Educativo y Estudios Técnicos en el Exterior (ICETEX) —"the first government entity in the world to offer, at a national scale, financial aid through student loans" (World Bank, 2003, p. 55). Approximately 25-30% of Colombia's enrolled student population is expected to finance their education, to some degree, through ICETEX awards. Another 20-30% of the student population will acquire student loans from other organizations, banks, cooperatives, or in some cases, through higher education institutions that offer their own student loan programs. Recently, ICETEX has redesigned its financial tools, which now incorporate an income-contingent repayment model loosely based on that used in Australia, with certain beneficial interest rates and repayment terms. The evolution and impact of this recently implemented model is yet to be seen.

Other Selected Policies and Special Programs

Ser Pilo Paga (which, translated into English means "It Pays to be Hardworking") is a national program launched in 2014 that funds tuition at accredited higher education institutions for students from the lowest socio-economic tier who have achieved the highest scores on the national high school examination (Prueba Saber 11). The program was developed jointly by the Ministry of Education and ICETEX, with the latter responsible for its implementation. Around 40,000 students benefitted from the program over four years, however, a large majority of these students chose programs at private higher education institutions that charge higher tuition fees than their public counterparts. Thus, a primary criticism of the program was that for the same total amount of money, four or five times as many students could have been funded to enroll in public universities. In addition, critics assert that the limited geographical distribution of accredited institutions, noted previously, has led to brain drain from less developed regions. With the change of government in mid-2018, a complete overhaul of this program is envisioned.

The Model for Integral Support for Students (MAIE) is a project supported by ICETEX and APICE, the Asociación Panamericana de Instituciones de Crédito Educativo (whose name in English translates to Panamerican Association of Educational Credit Institutions). Through MAIE, several universities have developed an institutional model to provide integrated support for students. The model centers around four "axes" of support—academic, financial, socio-emotional and vocational—and includes activities and programs to address these axes during each stage of students' academic careers. A reduction in the cohort drop-out rate over the last decade from 60% to 50% reflects the overall impact of this model, but a more detailed measurement of impact at the institutional level is still needed.

Finally, both public and private universities in Colombia have developed a variety of strategies to increase student access via regionalization and distance education. Specific examples include three private institutions—Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, Universidad Antonio Nariño, and Institución Universitaria Minuto de Dios—which were established in small and medium sized cities that had low enrollment rates,

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and aimed to offer distance learning programs as well as traditional on-site programs. In the public sector, state universities in each of Colombia's 32 regional departments have focused on designing distance learning programs for students in small towns and villages in order to enable low-cost access to undergraduate coursework and degrees.

There are many differences in implementation strategies at these HEIs, due to varying institutional visions and goals, as well as approaches to deploying regional investments in infrastructure. On the whole, however, such initiatives have been successful, with a large student population benefiting from the opportunities these institutions and programs have provided.

Conclusion

To summarize, there have been significant regulatory modifications—such as changes to the CQAS and student loan schemes—in the recent year or two that will impact the higher education sector, particularly in terms of student access and attainment. Overall, there is clear motivation on the part of the government as well as institutions to continue to strengthen, consolidate, and develop the higher education sector in Colombia in order to adequately meet the needs of

the country, and provide novel solutions to the issues facing Colombian society.

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Inclusion and Attainment in Ethiopian Higher Education: Perspectives and Practices

Wondwosen Tamrat

When the current government of Ethiopia assumed power in 1991, higher education policy directions primarily sought to tackle what were considered to be the major deficiencies of the previous education systems—lack of access, equity, efficiency, quality, and relevance (Education and Training Policy, 1994). Higher education was identified as an instrument of poverty reduction and sustainable development that requires the participation of all sections of society. The need to broaden higher education opportunities for under-represented groups was argued from the points of social justice/fairness, economic efficiency, and equitable distribution of wealth.

Inclusion in Action: EARTH University
Costa Rica

EARTH University, a joint venture between the Kellogg Foundation, USAID, and the Costa Rican government, was established in 1990 to create an innovative experiential learning model focused on social entrepreneurship, sustainable agriculture, and community development. Located in a remote area of Costa Rica, EARTH employs 40 professors and enrolls 400 students from around the world in a highly personalized, student-centered, four-year undergraduate program.

EARTH enrolls disadvantaged students from mostly poor, rural areas of Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, and indigenous communities. As of 2016, more than 80% receive full or partial scholarship funding. The scholarships—supported by ongoing partnerships with Kellogg, the MasterCard Foundation, and others—have helped widen access to higher education for many students who may not otherwise have the means to attend.

The curriculum is centered on scientific and technological education with an emphasis on ethical entrepreneurship and a strong socio-environmental commitment. EARTH invests heavily in recruitment and admissions, sending faculty to dozens of disadvantaged communities around the world to personally interview applicants. EARTH provides both transitional and continuing support for students such as mentoring, career counseling, and service learning opportunities. The program includes a mandatory internship component, leveraging a global network of sponsor organizations to provide a 15-week internship experience to every third-year student.

EARTH University has an impressive 85% retention rate and near gender parity with 47% female students and 53% male students in 2016. EARTH has graduated more than 2,230 alumni from approximately 43 countries. Of those, 82% have returned to their countries of origin where they contribute to the sustainable development of their local communities.

Website: www.earth.ac.cr

Contributors: Nico Evers, Professor of Internships and the Director of the International Academic Relations Office, Earth University; Erin Baldwin, Senior Program Specialist, American Council on Education

The last two decades have indeed seen significant expansion of Ethiopia's higher education system; total enrollment rose from less than 40,000 at the end of the 1990s to more than 800,000 in 2017, and the number of universities ballooned from two at the end of the 1990s to 50 in 2018. This growth, combined with a variety of targeted policies, has been instrumental in addressing the challenges of inequity; however, results have been uneven. So far, the most successful efforts have been directed at improving gender representation, although female participation in higher education still remains unsatisfactory and far from meeting the targets articulated by the government. Moreover, issues in relation to students with disabilities and disparities of access among students from different economic backgrounds and regions continue to pose formidable challenges.

Progress—and Continued Challenges—for Women

Gender disparities in Ethiopian society have been addressed by numerous policies; some of these are far-reaching in scope while others home in more specifically on education, at the tertiary level or for the sector as a whole. Key examples include the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (1993), Education and Training Policy (1994), Health Policy (1993), and the revised Ethiopian Family Code (2000). In addition to recognizing women's rights, promoting their wellbeing, and elevating their overall status, these policy frameworks encourage the improved participation of women in various social spheres, including higher education.

These efforts have translated into some improvements in the higher education access rate of women students, but the gender gap remains large. While in 2003-2004 women represented just 20% of university students, as of 2017, this figure stood at 35.7%. Similarly, in 2003-2004, female students represented only 7% of the country's 2,560 postgraduate students, but this has increased to 17.8% of the total 72,345 postgraduate students as of 2017.

There are variations among the disciplines when it comes to the gender ratio. Currently, programs in medicine and health sciences are characterized by 42% female enrollment, an exemplary figure even compared with other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is followed by business and economics (where women account for 37% of enrollment), social sciences and humanities (32%), agriculture and life sciences (31%), and natural and computational sciences (31%). Engineering comes last, with women accounting for just 29% of enrollments. In order to address these deficiencies, the government set forth a goal in its 2015 Education Sector Development Program (ESDP V) to raise female participation in science and technology subjects to 45% by 2019-2020.

Looking beyond access rates, attainment is a considerable concern. Information obtained from the quality audit reports of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency indicate that dropout rates among women both at institutional and program levels range from 20% to more than 50% in some programs and subjects. In most institutions, the rate of attrition for female students across departments and universities is higher than that of male students—often more than double the overall attrition rate for male students and for departments in general. At a majority of older Ethiopian universities, the graduation rate of female students is barely at, or is lower than, 50% of an entering cohort.

High attrition rates among women are explained by a litany of factors, including poor academic background, misconceptions about girls' academic ability, poor infrastructure, difficulties in academic and social adjustment, inability to balance social and academic life, lack of female role models, sexual harassment and violence, and financial problems. In addition, institutional support has not been well organized, focused, or forthcoming, as reflected in the lack of training in language and study skills, absence of financial support for female students, lack of tutorials and academic support, limited protections, and ineffective guidance and counseling services provided.

Building on earlier policies, a number of recent initiatives aim to address these challenges and the persistent access and attainment disparities between men and women. The Gender Directorate of the Ministry of Education has established the National Higher Education Institutions' Gender Forum and the National Girls' Education Advisory Committee, with the vision of implementing gender mainstreaming and enhancing gender equality at all levels of the education sector. Most higher education institutions have gender offices and gender and anti-sexual harassment policies in order to promote equal participation among male and female students and to ensure equitable access to quality learning. The government has also implemented affirmative action programs that include lower university entry scores for female students and those from disadvantaged regions, initial orientation for female students, assertiveness training, tutorial support, and guidance and counseling services.

Barriers Facing the Disabled

Like gender disparities, concern with the issue of disability, too, has been reflected in a range of policy documents, plans, and commitments. The Ethiopian government has ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (CRBD, 2010), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), all of which recognize the rights of disabled people to equal treatment. While Ethiopia's Constitution (1995) gives due recognition to the issue, other specific policies and plans—like the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2012), the Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015-2016 to 2019-2020), and the Education Sector Development Program, ESDP V (2015-2016 to 2019-2020)—further highlight the need to enhance the participation of disabled people in political, economic, and social affairs, including through the creation of wider educational opportunities.

Specific to the education sector, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (2009) stipulates that institutions should make their facilities, programs, teaching, and assessment procedures accessible to the disabled and provide the necessary academic assistance, including tutorials, educational auxiliary aids, alternative assessment procedures, extra examination time, and deadline extensions. In addition to recognizing the rights of the disabled, the government has also set special admissions provisions for disabled students and students from disadvantaged regions.

Mirroring the situation for women, there has been progress toward greater higher education participation by students with disabilities in recent years. The number of disabled students attending public universities in 2009-2010 was just 398. This had risen to more than 1,000 in 2015 and is expected to grow to 3,000 by the end of 2019-2020. Given a total population of over 805,000 persons with disabilities in the country as a whole, however, numbers are still very low.

Even more worrying than numbers, however, is the range of barriers that hamper disabled students from meaningful participation in higher education once they arrive on campus. Despite the stipulations of the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation, local studies indicate that inaccessible physical environments, lack of adequate educational materials, minimal assistive devices and computers, absence of curricular or material adaptations, rigid assessment techniques and examination procedures, absence of support units, and poor awareness and preparation of staff, are all critical barriers that continue to affect the success of disabled students. Most institutions are ill-prepared to provide the necessary support to disabled students and even where such amenities exist, they are meager, fragmented, and still in nascent stages. In addition to restricting disabled students' choices, challenges frequently result in an understandable aversion to study and greater social isolation. This, in turn, has the effect of hampering the educational and professional aspirations of the disabled.

Regional and Socioeconomic Underrepresentation

The enhancement and promotion of inclusive and equitable human development underpins most of the policy directions set by the government. Among others, Ethiopia's successive national development policies—such as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP, 1995-2005), Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP, 2005-2010), First Growth and Transformation Plan (2010- 2015) and Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II, 2015-2020)—have focused on alleviating challenges related to regional and socioeconomic differences in different spheres, including education. Specific to the higher education sector, both the Education Sector Development Programs and the Higher Education Proclamation (2009) emphasize the need for addressing these goals.

Ethiopian universities exhibit a litany of challenges related to the regional and socioeconomic background of students. For example, the gross enrollment ratio (GER) of students

Addressing various dimensions of inequity begins with what is most often known as equity mindedness.

from less affluent regions stands at just 2.5%. The aim is for this GER to reach 5% by the end of 2019-2020, as per the government's ESDP V (2015), though clear directions have not been set as to how this can be achieved. The wealthiest households currently account for 87% of the student participation at the level of postsecondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and 82% in higher education, while the poorest represent just 1% of students in TVET, and 2% of the student population in higher education. Data further indicate that, in Ethiopia, the proportion of students from the highest income quintile over the proportion of students from the lowest quintile (usually known as the disparity ratio) is one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. The continuing disparity between the poor and the wealthy is explained in large part through irregular attendance, transition difficulties between secondary and postsecondary education, and low completion rates.

Conclusion

There have been concerted policy efforts, and some progress, with respect to expanding access to higher education in Ethiopia for traditionally underrepresented groups. However, much remains to be done. Responding to the complex realities

behind equity challenges is an especially difficult task in the context of a young, rapidly massifying, and under-resourced system. As a start, the country requires more research on the subject to gain insights that will not only increase public understanding of the problems, but also inform policy directions and ways of overcoming the existing barriers at national and institutional levels.

Addressing various dimensions of inequity begins with what is most often known as *equity mindedness*. Policies and practices that facilitate better access and completion rates of disadvantaged groups from the lower levels of education upwards should be actively promoted and must be linked explicitly to one another; that is, national level planning and articulation of objectives (i.e., policy) must be supported and tightly connected to real practice at the institutional level.

This is vital to ensure that the country is not deprived of the most powerful instrument it has at its disposal to extricate itself from poverty and social inequity: an engaged, empowered, and educated society.

Note: Most of the statistical information for this report was drawn from the Education Statistics Annual Abstract (2016, 2017) and the fifth Education Sector Development Program (2015) issued by the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education.

Attainment and Inclusion in Higher Education: The Indian Experience

N.V. Varghese

Introduction

Investing in human capital has become an imperative for improving national competitiveness and promoting economic and social progress worldwide. However, India's development experience shows that the quality of its higher education has not always kept pace with the imperatives of its economic development and modernization.

The distribution of employment opportunities depends on the degrees individuals hold, and the achievements in higher education in the present determine equity and social inclusion in the future. Furthermore, developing an inclusive society demands that opportunities to pursue higher education are based on factors other than the personal and social circumstances of one's birth. The factors constraining access to and inclusion in higher education in India are complex and multifaceted, and require sustained attention from policymakers and educators.

Massification and Inequalities in Access

Higher education in India has traditionally been an exclusive domain of the elite. The system has been characterized by slow growth, limited expansion, and low gross enrollment ratios (GER). The 21st century has witnessed a dramatic transformation, with the sector experiencing an accelerated growth and a threefold increase in the GER. Per 2016-2017 figures, India has more than 900 universities, 41,000 colleges, 36 million students and a GER of 25.8%, making it the second largest system in the world in terms of enrollment. Despite favorable public policies, however, the expansion of the system has been accompanied by persistent inequalities in access to higher education in India.

Barriers to Entry and Inclusive Higher Education

The main bases of exclusion in access to higher education in India have to do with regional, economic, and social factors, as well as matters of gender and language. Public policies favoring a quota system in admissions (i.e., reservation of seats for students from disadvantaged groups), opening of institutions in rural locations, and student support systems—mostly in the forms of scholarships, fee concessions, and accommodation in student hostels—are examples of initiatives to overcome barriers to entry and to promote equality of opportunities.

Regional Inequalities

Regional inequalities in the distribution of higher education facilities and enrollment have widened in the recent past. In 2016-2017, the number of colleges per 100,000 inhabitants varied from seven in Bihar to 51 in states such as Karnataka and Telengana. The regional concentration of institutions results in a *distance discount*, in the form of reduced costs and improved affordability for those who live nearby. A related development has been the widening rural-urban disparities in the establishment of new higher education institutions. Regional disparities in enrollment have thus resulted. For example, between 2001-2002 and 2017-2018, the GER increased by three times in some states, two times in others, but has been much lower in some places.

Market forces in Indian higher education have likewise contributed to a widening of the regional disparities in terms of numbers of institutions and enrollment. The states with a high density of institutions also have a high share of private higher education institutions. Further, the private sector establishes institutions mostly in urban, suburban, and semi-urban areas.

These attract larger numbers of fee-paying students, further increasing the rural-urban divide in higher education development, despite public policies prioritizing the establishment of institutions in rural areas. Given the level of fees levied, a fast expansion of the private sector has increased barriers to entry for the under-privileged. An inclusive approach to access to higher education necessitates steps to level off these kinds of geographic inequalities.

Challenges Facing Particular Social Groups

Social inequalities continue to persist in the context of expansion and massification of higher education in India. Caste is a basis for exclusion, acting as a barrier to entry. The disadvantaged groups in India are broadly classified into Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), and the non-disadvantaged groups are classified as General Category.

> *The factors constraining access to and inclusion in higher education in India are complex and multifaceted, and require sustained attention from policymakers and educators.*

According to the National Sample Survey of 2014, the GER of the ST was 17.2%, while this figure stood at 22.3% for the SC, 29.4% for the OBC, and 41.6% for General Category students. This empirical evidence shows that those belonging to the disadvantaged caste groups have significantly lower chances of pursuing higher education in India.

Religion is also a factor. Muslims lag behind all other religious groups in terms of enrollment, with the GER for students adhering to this faith standing at 16.54%. The GERs for other religious minorities—such as Christians, Sikhs, and Jains—were more than 2.5 times that of Muslims, and the GER for Hindus was double that for Muslims.

As compared to other disadvantaged groups, the OBCs have made faster progress in recent years and have improved both their GER and their share of total enrollment. The reservation policies (i.e., quota system) have likewise helped all of the disadvantaged groups to advance in terms of access. The Indian experience clearly shows that affirmative actions targeting socially disadvantaged groups can become an integral part of the policies aimed at achieving inclusive growth.

Economic Disadvantages

Economic inequalities have been a salient variable in determining access to Indian higher education. There is a positive association between income levels and GER in higher education. For example, in 2007, the GER of students from families belonging to the poorest group in the lowest economic quintile was around 4%, while that among the privileged, belonging to the highest quintile, was 47.6%. The corresponding figures for the year 2014 were 9.9% and 73.8%, respectively. Despite the fast expansion of the system, the poor remain excluded from entry to institutions of higher education. Policies targeting the poor in the form of student support systems are a necessary condition to progress towards more inclusive participation in higher education in India.

Gender Inequity

The expansion of higher education has helped narrow the gender gaps in enrollment in higher education in India. At present, women account for 47.6% of total enrollment. The gender parity index (GPI)—which measures the relative access to education of males and females—is 0.97%. In fact, in some of the states where GER is more than 35%, the gender parity index favors women (i.e., the GPI is more than 1.0).

Unlike for school education, the prospects for achieving gender parity in enrollment in higher education in India at lower levels of GER are bright. The Education for All (EFA) programs and higher stage transition ratios (which reflect the transition of students from primary to secondary and from secondary to higher education) have helped increase the number of girls eligible to seek admission to higher education institutions. More often than not, girls perform better than boys in their higher secondary school examinations, which improves their chances to gain admission to higher education.

Language of Instruction

Another source of exclusion in India relates to the language of instruction. English is seen as the language of the elite and the most preferred language in universities. There is a discernible pathway to (particularly elite) higher education in India: Students from private English medium schools account for a disproportionately higher share in enrollment in Indian universities and elite institutions. Those with the means to do so tend to prefer sending their children to private schools and elite public higher education institutions.

According to the National Sample Survey of 2014, nearly 72% of the students in the unaided private sector (i.e., where students pay full fees) followed English as the medium of instruction, while the corresponding share in the government institutions is only 34%. More importantly, the share of stu-

dents following English as a medium of instruction has increased in the private unaided sector while it remained the same in government institutions. This pattern reinforces the elite nature and exclusionary tendencies of higher education development in India.

Inclusion and Higher Education Outcomes

The Indian experience shows that the country has made progress in bringing more young people belonging to disadvantaged groups into higher education. Public policies supporting the quota system, along with institutional and student support initiatives, have been helpful in achieving a reasonably inclusive admissions picture in higher education. However, a more formidable challenge that India faces is in terms of translating these achievements in access to improved learning outcomes and higher attainment rates.

Many students from disadvantaged groups do not perform well in their studies even in elite institutions. The limited cultural capital these students bring with them, a lack of English language proficiency, and poor college preparedness, are some of the factors affecting their academic integration in the classroom and their social inclusion on campus. In the absence of supportive policies for academic integration, the disadvantaged students face high dropout rates, lower levels of academic success, and poor learning outcomes. *Back paper syndrome* (which refers to the situation where students who fail in some courses in the first semester repeat the same courses in addition to their regular courses in the second year of study) is an indication of low learning outcomes, especially among the disadvantaged.

The composition of the student body on India's campuses has changed. However, the institutional mechanisms to address student diversity are poorly developed. Various forms of exclusionary behavior and discriminatory practices in the domains of student-teacher engagement, student-administration encounters, and student-student interactions are prevalent. These dynamics pose significant challenges for the development of inclusive higher education institutions in India.

The argument for more inclusive public policy interventions extends beyond the student experience on campus, to the realm of post-study employment opportunities. The graduate unemployment rate is disproportionately high for disadvantaged groups, i.e., 10.5% among SC followed by 8.9% among ST, and 8.2% among OBC, while this figure stands at 6.4% for the non-disadvantaged category. The non-inclusive nature of the employment market becomes clearer if one analyzes the pattern of allocation of higher salaried jobs, which again favors those from non-disadvantaged groups.

Concluding Observations

India has made serious efforts to develop an inclusive higher education sector. The affirmative policies have registered positive effects in terms of increasing the number of students from disadvantaged groups enrolled in institutions of higher education. The remaining challenge on this front is to adjust public policies targeting the disadvantaged to address the need for affordable higher education in a market mediated framework.

A more challenging task is to design institutional strategies that address student diversity with a focus on improving learning outcomes, developing inclusive campuses, and improving employment outcomes. The efforts of some institutions to provide compensatory classes (i.e., classes organized to reinforce what is taught in the classrooms), programs to support student performance on competitive examinations for the job market, and courses to improve English language proficiency, have proven very helpful for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Focusing support on these measures has the potential to create a supportive learning environment, to develop inclusive campuses, and to improve higher education outcomes for all.

Note: The empirical evidence presented in this article is taken from the data provided by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) different rounds, and research conducted in the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE/NIEPA), New Delhi.

Current Developments in Tertiary Education Inclusion and Attainment in Israel

Annette Bamberger

Israel, a small country located in the Middle East with a population of 8.5 million, has an impressive higher education (HE) system. Its three universities regularly place in the top 100 global university rankings, and it demonstrates strong performance in research, with high publication, citation, and patent rates. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 50.9% of Israel's population aged 25-64 has attained tertiary education, the second highest rate among OECD countries. Yet, while Israel defines itself as a Jewish nation, it is comprised of diverse ethnic, religious, and social groups and macro-level statistics hide inequalities in inclusion and attainment of HE. Although there have been significant initiatives to rectify this situation in recent years, marginalized populations are underrepresented in HE. More-

over, men are less likely to attain tertiary education: the share of men aged 25-34 years with tertiary education was 20 percentage points less than for women in 2017 and the dropout rate is higher for men, with rates reaching as high as 50% for Arab and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men.

Rationales for Increased Inclusion and Attainment

In Israel, an undergraduate degree is the minimum requirement for many professions and a key factor in successful integration in the labor market; thus, HE is a significant tool for social mobility as part of a just and democratic society. In light of demographic shifts, social justice arguments have been supplemented in recent years with arguments that the current trends in HE attainment must be addressed in order to sustain the national economy. Israel, with a lack of natural resources, relies heavily on its human capital and high technology sector to thrive. Demographic shifts are such that underrepresented groups in HE (and the labor market) are a growing proportion of the society. For example, the Ultra-Orthodox are projected to be a third of the Israeli population in 2065, and as a result of their low rates of attainment, consequently represent a threat to the prosperity of the country. Thus, HE inclusion and attainment has attracted widespread attention for reasons of social justice and economic prosperity.

Israel's Higher Education System

Israel has a stratified HE system, with 9 research intensive universities comprising an elite first tier and 53 colleges (including teacher training colleges) comprising a second tier. With one of the lowest vocational degree attainment levels in the OECD, tertiary education in Israel is almost exclusively at the level of higher education; a typical undergraduate degree is three years in length with some specialist degrees requiring further study (e.g., engineering and medicine). Admission to colleges and universities requires a matriculation certificate or successful completion of an academic preparatory course. Additionally, most universities and many colleges require a standardized examination (i.e., a psychometric exam).

Inclusion and Attainment Programs

HE inclusion and attainment for marginalized populations has been the focus of sustained efforts by the state in cooperation with philanthropies, government ministries, local authorities, businesses, and colleges and universities. Targeted groups include the Arab minority population, who are 21% of the population and have experienced an increase in undergraduate enrollment from 10.2% to 16.1% in the years 2010-2016; the Ultra-Orthodox, which have experienced a ten-fold increase

over the past decade; the Ethiopian immigrant population; and populations in the geographic periphery, among others. While each group has its educational, economic, social, and cultural barriers to inclusion and attainment, widespread issues are low matriculation rates; language barriers (either in Hebrew, English, or both); low (or non-existent) psychometric examination scores; students' caretaker responsibilities; the economic burdens of study; and the geographic dispersion of programs. The aim of *negishut* (access) or *hishtalvut* (integration) programs is to address these issues and expand HE to marginalized groups, thus facilitating social, economic, and political integration into Israeli society.

The role of the government is particularly important because many access and integration programs begin with governmental decisions to address the overall development of marginalized communities, highlighting the important role of political will to push forward such programs. National initiatives are developed primarily through the Council for Higher Education (CHE)—the body charged with coordinating the HE system—and its funding arm, the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC), which have made HE inclusion for marginalized populations a priority in recent years. While inclusion and attainment initiatives have focused on different groups over time, in the CHE's most recent five-year plan (2017-2022), national policies are targeted primarily at the various Arab, Ultra-Orthodox, and Ethiopian communities in Israel.

Spotlight on Ultra-Orthodox Inclusion and Attainment

Comprising 12% of the population, the Ultra-Orthodox are an insular community characterized by low academic attainment at the secondary level (only 5% of Ultra-Orthodox men between the ages of 19-35 have matriculation certificates); low post-secondary attainment (only 5.2% of Ultra-Orthodox men and 8% of women between the ages 25-35 have an academic degree); low participation in labor markets (51% compared with 89% in the overall Jewish population); and high birth rates (6.9 children per woman). Men are encouraged to devote substantial time to religious studies while women devote their time to household duties, child-rearing, and work outside of the home. Of those who are in HE, more than 40% of students in 2012 were in private Ultra-Orthodox institutions, studying a limited curriculum of predominantly law and business studies, and were admitted without matriculation, psychometry, or an academic preparation course.

Ultimately, low rates of inclusion and attainment in HE are attributed to:

- *Inadequate academic preparation*: Low rates of matriculation, psychometric scores, and academic preparation

courses coupled with an Ultra-Orthodox educational stream that exempts (particularly men) from many core courses, creates gaps in their knowledge relative to other populations in Israel.

- *Economic burdens*: 45.1% of Ultra-Orthodox families live in poverty and the average Ultra-Orthodox man will have 2-3 children during his studies;

- *Lack of institutions which cater to the group's social and cultural needs*: 70-80% of Ultra-Orthodox indicate that they would not study in a co-educational environment and consequently the mixed-gender environment of most HE institutions creates a barrier.

Due to the population boom of this community and their increasing proportion of the population, since the 1990s, government ministries, local authorities, and philanthropies acting with high-level leadership of the community, have pushed

> *While Israel defines itself as a Jewish nation, it is comprised of diverse ethnic, religious, and social groups and macro-level statistics hide inequalities in inclusion and attainment of HE.*

to integrate the community into academia. This culminated in the first national effort focused on such integration, the 2011-2016 plan of the CHE. The plan aimed to create Ultra-Orthodox campuses—with single-gender classes—that were closely tied to existing publicly funded and accredited universities and colleges. Widespread public debate has surrounded the plan, as Israel is committed to gender equality and gender separation in HE is deemed a threat to academic and civic values of equality. Nonetheless, with extensive research, careful planning, and a commitment to the minimum separation required for inclusion while ensuring basic values of equality and academic freedom, the plan was approved with significant national funding to grow the institutional base of Ultra-Orthodox programs and to supply scholarships and loans to students.

First, a definition for the target group based on the type of secondary school attended was adopted; this was most appropriate, as it reflected the educational gaps of Ultra-Orthodox students and would help institutions tailor educational programs to support these needs, particularly preparatory courses. Next, to address the lack of institutions supporting the community and the limited disciplines available, gov-

ernment calls for proposals encouraged public colleges and universities to create programs for the Ultra-Orthodox in a wide range of disciplines; successful bids comprised a broad package of services which addressed specific social and educational needs. Institutions were chosen that were located both within geographic proximity to Ultra-Orthodox communities and close to the main institutional campuses to ensure smooth coordination, quality, and parity between programs. Finally, the plan provided scholarships and differential loans based on area of study. Men were particularly targeted and given greater financial incentives.

From 2011 to 2016, the number of Ultra-Orthodox students grew from 5,500 to 11,500—a 110% increase—while the number of institutions with specialized programs for the Ultra-Orthodox grew from 5 to 19, including 3 universities. Certainly, the program has had some impressive success. However, many challenging issues remain: overall student numbers remain low, men are underrepresented as compared to women, issues of quality and parity between programs have arisen, disciplines are still limited, and issues of gender equality are a continual concern. After a thorough evaluation of the program and public debates, a renewed plan for the period 2017-2022 aims to address these issues and to integrate 19,000 Ultra-Orthodox into HE.

Looking Forward

Despite its impressive performance in international tertiary education attainment statistics, vast gaps in HE inclusion and attainment exist in Israeli society. Recognizing both the importance and complexity of the issue, the Israeli government, working with a wide range of partners, has taken significant action to correct the situation with some promising initial results. Still, challenges remain, and new issues of equality have surfaced. The case of Israel will be of interest to those concerned with national HE inclusion and attainment policies, particularly for diverse social, religious, and ethnic groups.

Note: Statistical information was retrieved from publicly available reports on the websites of CHE, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel Democracy Institute, Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, OECD, and the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies.

Attainment and Inclusion in Higher Education: Malaysian Perspectives

Norzaini Azman

Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia has focused considerable effort on developing and improving its national higher education system. This is reflected in a significant financial investment in higher education, comprehensive educational plans, and transformative policies to meet evolving national aspirations and global demands. Educational excellence, inclusion, equity, and attainment are some of the overarching principles that guide Malaysian higher education policies, plans, and practices.

Despite commendable progress made over the past two decades, however, further efforts are needed to minimize barriers to higher education access and to ensure that all learners in higher education settings experience a genuinely inclusive environment.

Definitions and Goals

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has set a goal of increasing access to and enrollment in higher education from its current level of 48% of the traditional age cohort to 70% by 2025. Widening access and enhancing equity are key aims of the current National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2020), and various other national policies, such as the Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 and the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB 2013-2025), which include specific programs and initiatives designed to increase access for particular populations (described in more detail further along in this article).

Inclusion in Action: The Akilah Institute for Women
Rwanda

As the first college in East Africa singularly dedicated to educating women, Rwanda's Akilah Institute is uniquely positioned to propel female learners through higher education toward successful workforce entry and employment. By prioritizing accessibility, workforce alignment, and adaptable learning environments, Akilah offers high quality competency-based education (CBE) to a diverse and widely dispersed population of female students.

Akilah focuses on low-income communities and women who do not have the resources to pursue higher education within the traditional university system. More than half of Akilah's students come from rural areas, 78% are the first in their family to attend college, and 90% support at least one individual financially. The institution has been particularly instrumental in providing opportunities for young women in areas fraught with political instability, systemic conflict, and multidimensional poverty. For example, in recent years, the Rwanda campus has absorbed students from neighboring Burundi, which has a proliferation of refugees and asylum-seekers on the heels of political unrest and escalating violence.

Tuition is highly subsidized through donor support, covering about 85% of the total cost. In terms of course delivery, students can choose either a blended learning model, which includes instruction both at the physical campus and online, or the online-only program. Akilah's CBE model uses core competency indicators to measure holistic learning across relevant skill sets, which allows students to work toward measurable academic proficiencies and market-relevant skills. Rather than traditional assessments that rely heavily on the accumulation of credit hours and grade-point averages, the CBE approach allows Akilah's students to progress at their own pace and supports deep learning, skill mastery, and career readiness without fear of failure or comparison to the progression of their peers.

Akilah's programs have a 93% retention rate and 88% of students secure employment within 6 months, often earning incomes well above Rwanda's median income per-capita.

Contributors: Shelby Kruczek, master's candidate in higher education, George Mason University; Erin Baldwin, Senior Program Specialist, American Council on Education

As a concept, inclusive education was introduced in the Education Act 1996 as part of the continuum of services available for children with special needs. In MEB 2013-2025, the MoE on defined inclusion as providing the opportunity to those with specific needs—such as students with special needs, indigenous and other minority students, gifted students, and students in rural areas—to access a high quality education that is relevant to their circumstances. Thus, inclusion refers to the practice of seeking not only to equalize access to education but also to providing pedagogy and curricula that respond to the diverse needs of students. The term has not been clearly defined in the higher education context, however, and in contrast to specific policies around increasing access, there is little in the way of national level guidance and support for inclusion efforts.

When it comes to attainment, Malaysia has adopted the categories specified by UNESCO's 1997 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97). Attainment at higher education levels refers to Level 5 (i.e., the first stage of tertiary education) and Level 6, which is the second stage of tertiary education.

> *Overall, there has been a profound increase in the tertiary education attainment of Malaysian youth (15-24 years old) and adults (25-64 years) in the period 1990-2016.*

Overall, there has been a profound increase in the tertiary education attainment of Malaysian youth (15-24 years old) and adults (25-64 years) in the period 1990-2016. The proportion of youth with tertiary education increased 2.8 times, from 7.2% in 1990 to 20.8 % in 2016, while the adult tertiary education rate rose three times, to 29.2% from 9.5%, over the same period (Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis, 2018). Research on generational differences in Malaysia in terms of educational attainment has found that 62% of children have attained a higher education level compared to their parents, 36% had the same education level, and 2% had a lower education level (Khazanah Research Institute, 2016).

The overall picture is promising, but given that current attainment rates are still quite low, it is clear that equity of opportunity remains elusive. While a number of the access-oriented policies implemented in recent years have helped improve attainment as well as inclusion, there is little in the way of national initiatives specifically aimed at attainment per se.

Structural Supports

Student Funding

There are two main higher education student support mechanisms in Malaysia, namely student loans and scholarships, both of which are funded by the government. In the case of the former, the government in 1997 created the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (more popularly known as PTPTN), a semi-autonomous body under the authority of the MoE for the purpose of offering subsidized loans to help students finance their higher education. The PTPTN is arguably one of the most important interventions in Malaysian higher education in addressing inclusion, equity, and attainment. The provision of loans is intended to subsidize part of students' tuition fees and living costs, particularly for the less advantaged socio-economic groups, to ensure that no students are denied the opportunity to pursue higher education due to financial barriers.

To ensure efficient loan financing, the PTPTN is tasked with administering, supervising, and collecting loans. The main subsidy lies in the concessional annual interest rate of 3% for the repayment of these loans. Moreover, students who obtain first class honors are exempted from their loan repayment. In 2013 alone, around RM5.5 billion (US$1.2 billion) was approved and the total number of loans amounted to RM222,349 (Wan, Ahmed, & Ismail, 2015).

Private Higher Education

In the late 1990s, as spaces in public higher education institutions (HEIs) became limited due to demand, widening access for some segments of the student population has been achieved through the establishment of private higher education institutions. The Malaysian government has provided considerable financial support for the development of private HEIs, through the provision of incentives, subsidized loans, and scholarships. Quality assurance efforts further enhance the development of private provision, as student loans and scholarships are only provided to students in accredited programs. Despite some success in broadening access and equity, however, Malaysia's model of relying on private provision for enhanced inclusion and attainment may be unsustainable, due to the poor repayment record of student loans and the need to reduce the fiscal deficit of the government.

Policies and Programs for Key Populations

Economically Disadvantaged Students

In Malaysia, in the past several decades, the economically disadvantaged have been among the groups most actively targeted for greater inclusion in higher education. Under the

Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020), the B40 (bottom 40% household income group—about 2.7 million households with a mean monthly household income of RM2,537 (or approximately USD $600)—are given priority in terms of access and success in higher education. Accessibility to higher education and skills training among students from B40 households is being enhanced through special programs, while institutions of higher learning and skills training institutes are encouraged to provide more places for these students through preferential entry qualification criteria and enrollment quotas. These efforts are complemented with the provision of financial aid. To ensure success, most HEIs have intervention programs in place to support students from disadvantaged background to acquire academic and literacy skills necessary for success in higher education. While there are no available data on the attainment rates of students from disadvantaged groups, the interventions (such as foundation program and summer school) are claimed to have addressed the dropout rates among first year students in general, who were academically underprepared.

Likewise, though there are no published data on the socioeconomic profile of students in HEIs, various indicators suggest that participation by economically disadvantaged students has grown over time. For many members of this group, however, accessing higher education is still impossible due to a lack of financial supports and/or poor quality schooling at primary and secondary levels. Research shows that inequity based on socioeconomic status, parental education, and other related factors, continues to prevail in Malaysian higher education (Khazanah Research Institute, 2016).

Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Malaysia is highly ethnically diverse, with the 28.3 million population consisting of 50.1% Malays (Bumiputera), 22.6% Chinese, 11.8% non-Malay Bumiputeras, 6.7% Indians, and 8.8% of other groups. However, the country has low rates of participation and graduation among racial and ethnic minorities. The remoteness of some settlements and the traditional lifestyles of some indigenous groups from remote rural areas across the Malaysian Peninsula and East Malaysia—such as the Orang Asli—still affect school attendance and graduation rates in those communities. Thus, increasing racial/ethnic minorities' access to higher education has continuously been considered a crucial step in moving Malaysian society toward greater educational equality.

Since independence, a host of initiatives aimed at increasing the entrance of racial/ethnic minority students into higher education was implemented for the Bumiputeras, that is, Malays, ethnic minority and indigenous people. For example, in order to address economic, educational, and occupational imbalances between the larger and primarily rural Malays and the urban Chinese minority, the New Economic Policy was instituted in 1971, after race riots in 1969 (Lee, 2012). As a result, in 1983, the ethnic proportion in Malaysian public universities changed dramatically: 63% of the students were Bumiputeras, almost 30% were Chinese, while 7% were Indian or belonged to other identity categories.

The preferential treatment arguably brought about a discernible increase in the number of Bumiputera students enrolled in tertiary institutions and, in the longer term, has been very effective in increasing the number of Bumiputera engineers, accountants, architects, lawyers, doctors, administrators, and educators in the wider Malaysian society (Selvaratnam, 1988). Moreover, the number of Orang Asli receiving skills training increased from 435 in 2011 to 3,750 in 2014, while 2,100 Bumiputeras in the states of Sabah and Sarawak have also benefited from various skills training programs. (Lee, 2012). Evidently, the quota system has successfully increased the proportion of Bumiputeras in HEIs, reflecting the ethnic distribution in the general population. However, the quota system was eliminated in 2002 with access to universities based on merit instead.

Residents in Rural Areas

Assisting children from rural areas is perceived as vital and has been the focus of the government efforts, as urban children are more likely than rural children to experience social mobility as a result of education. In addition to those policies and initiatives targeting indigenous populations living predominantly in rural areas, efforts have been made to address the broader rural population. For example, admissions policies for prestigious boarding schools have taken into account the urban-rural divide, and made special provisions for students from rural areas. The 60 government secondary residential/boarding schools established under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971) aim to offer educational opportunities, especially to poor students with good academic results. In 2019, the government has increased the admission quotas of students from rural schools into the fully sponsored residential schools. It is expected that the commitment to help disadvantaged students from rural areas access elite schools will inevitably have a knock-on effect at the tertiary education level. MARA University of Technology (UiTM), which today is Malaysia's largest HEI in terms of size and population, has a specific equity focus, offering educational opportunities to Malay students from rural areas. In addition, it offers scholarships to students whose family income is less than RM 3,000 (US$717).

Conclusion

Generally, Malaysia has achieved considerable improvement in providing equitable access and assuring student success in higher education. However, persons with disabilities (be these physical disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, or learning difficulties) are underrepresented in higher education, as only about 0.4% of this population had access to the public universities as of 2017. There remains an absence of specific regulation or policy to promote equitable access and to protect the rights of students with disabilities within the higher education system.

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Mexico on the Verge of an Urgent Transition

Arturo Cherbowski Lask and Salomón Amkie Cheirif

Mexico is a very diverse country, with deep social, economic, and ethnic inequalities that are reflected in its higher education access and attainment landscape.

The Mexican education system is vast and complex, serving 4,210,250 students. Public higher education includes nine federally funded institutions. Among these are the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), two of the biggest tertiary education institutions in the country, with over 300,000 and 100,000 students, respectively. There are also 57 state-funded universities and two technical education subsystems, which together consist of 411 schools nationwide. Alongside the public system, a large and growing private higher education sector accounts for 30% of total enrollments.

All told, Mexico has 3,186 institutions that are recognized by the Ministry of Education as "universities," including both private and public institutions. However, this number is misleading. An outdated legal framework created in 1978 and a lack of enforcement of regulations dictating what constitutes a "university" have led to a preponderance of small, private, for-profit institutions that lack minimum quality standards. In reality, 25% of institutions account for 85% of overall student enrollment; and with student places limited in these institutions, access is in fact more constrained than what might be expected based on a raw count of "universities."

The issue of inclusion has been on the government's agenda for at least two decades, and many efforts have been directed toward this challenge. Official numbers estimate an increase from 20% to 37% in "coverage" (i.e., percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled) nationwide between 2000 and 2017. However, the percentage of this age cohort enrolled in tertiary education is still one of the lowest in both Latin America and among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states; indeed, in 2018, the low rate of coverage translated into more than 7 million people of traditional university age who were deprived of the opportunities that higher education has to offer. As is the case in many countries, the poorest sectors of Mexico's population and the poorest regions of the country are the ones most often left out; while some areas, like Mexico City, have a higher education coverage rate that surpasses 90%, comparatively poorer states, like Oaxaca, Chiapas or Guerrero, barely reach 20%.

Compounding the issue of inclusion are the huge disparities in quality among Mexican institutions. These, too, largely correlate to wealth and geography; thus, residents of the country's poorer states and regions, who are already less likely to enroll in higher education, often receive a poorer quality education than their peers who live and attend college in wealthier areas. Overall, Mexico's challenges when it comes to both inclusion and quality can be attributed, at least in part, to low levels of government financial support; Mexico's per-student annual expenditure of approximately US$8,170 is one of the lowest among OECD countries.

Looking beyond access to attainment, the numbers are discouraging, as well: according to the OECD, only 17% of Mexicans hold a tertiary education degree, and Mexico has one of the lowest percentages of young people expected to graduate from tertiary education during their lifetime. For many students, current incentives for remaining in school do not outweigh urgent economic necessities of the household, or the attraction of the informal job market.

In general, however, the Mexican labor market still rewards qualifications over skills; indeed, a majority of companies are most likely to hire someone with an academic title, even if she or he lacks some of the skills that the job demands. The OECD has found, for example, that in Mexico attaining a higher level of education has a stronger positive impact on earnings than higher literacy proficiency. When students leave higher education—by choice or necessity—in the interest of immediate economic gain, their longer-term economic future is undermined, thus reinforcing broader societal inequalities.

Public Sector Programs

Of the many initiatives that the federal government has implemented to help decrease the inclusion barrier, two have been particularly effective in moving the needle on "coverage": continued growth and strengthening of the country's public technical school systems, and a robust scholarship program.

Regarding the former, as noted previously, Mexico has two technical education systems, both of which depend directly on the Education Ministry for funding. These institutions offer programs developed in alliance with local industry, in order to produce graduates with in-demand, workforce-ready skills which, in turn, should bolster attainment and labor market

> *Compounding the issue of inclusion are the huge disparities in quality among Mexican institutions.*

inclusion upon graduation. With support from federal and state government, the two systems have grown exponentially in the last 18 years; enrollment has increased from 279,000 students in 2000 to 934,000 in 2018, and now constitutes 25% of the total number of higher education students in the country. While impressive from an access perspective, however, more data are needed to determine whether such programs are successful in terms of employment outcomes, (i.e., whether graduates do indeed attain well-paid positions in the industries for which they have trained, or if there is a mismatch between the demands of the job market and students' skills and experience).

On the scholarship front, the Ministry of Education distributes over MXN 5 billion per year to support Mexican students' pursuit of higher education. Different scholarships have different strategies and objectives. In 2017, for example, one program aimed at serving the poorest sector of the population provided 389,317 students with enough financial aid to allow them to pursue their studies without the need for a job to support themselves.

The Ministry also administers an attainment-focused funding program, which provides resources to students who have completed their required courses, but for some reason have not earned their academic credentials. Official numbers affirm that in 2017, 30,000 students received funding as part of this initiative so that they could finish their studies and attain their degrees. Again, however, more research is needed on outcomes, and in this case, causality; it is difficult to say whether these students' successful completion of their degrees is attributable to the financial support they received, or to other factors, or even if they actually attained their credentials, since that information is not made public.

Private Sector Efforts

Mexican companies offer student scholarships of various types, and some provide technical training or internships for students in relevant fields. However, given the size of the country and the number of students in need, these programs have not been widespread or robust enough to make a large-scale impact.

Often, corporations claim that there are no true incentives for them to support higher education attainment. Indeed, due to the lack of an integrated national development plan that ties together academia and industry, most graduates of the higher education system lack the competencies that companies seek in their employees; thus, supporting higher education would appear to show little return on investment for corporations, particularly when they also must expend resources on remedial training for unprepared graduates who become their employees. Those private sector actors that *do* offer scholarships and other student support typically do so with narrow objectives in mind, or as part of social responsibility programs. It is in the interest of the corporate sector to ensure that a large and diverse supply of well-qualified graduates enter the labor force every year; certainly, greater financial investment is warranted on their part to help ensure that students stay in school, attain a relevant degree and skills, and are well-prepared as future employees. Coordination and collaboration among private sector entities to support this agenda would amplify efforts; a nationwide professional internship program that truly orients graduates and students to the needs of their local job market, for example, would be a useful step. The challenge, at this point, is how to make the case to corporations, and help them see the long-term value of supporting higher education.

Looking Forward

Mexico's 2018 presidential election was won by Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, who garnered an overwhelming ma-

jority of votes, and has insisted on the necessity of increasing higher education inclusion and attainment. He and his team have raised huge expectations for progress in this area, promising to increase coverage while maintaining or even increasing quality.

While campaigning, López Obrador proposed opening 100 new public universities, which has led to questions about how these institutions will be financed, where they will be located, and what populations they will serve. Adding additional seats in existing public universities has also been suggested—however, neither of these proposals have been outlined in any detail, and a concrete route to expansion has yet to be defined.

In any case, a significant increase in inclusion and quality will require expansion of both public and private expenditures presently dedicated to higher education. And, even though the new government has mentioned that an increase in quality and inclusion is precisely its main goal for the higher education agenda, an ample and coherent plan that considers additional resources and integrates the roles and responsibilities of its main possible actors – federal and state governments, universities, and the private sector – has not been discussed yet.

Thus, expectation is joined by uncertainty when it comes what lies ahead for Mexican higher education and the inclusion agenda. What is clear, however, is that López Obrador—who began his term on December 1, 2018—faces considerable challenges, which will require a full set of public policies that are yet to be defined, negotiated and financed. We can only hope that he succeeds, for the country urgently needs it.

Note: Statistical information was retrieved from publicly available reports on the websites of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES), SEP Programa Nacional de Becas S243, and Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA).

Consolidating Higher Education in Russia: Highly Available, Less Accessible

Sergey Malinovskiy and Ekaterina Shibanova

Russia's tertiary education participation rate has traditionally been among the highest in the world. While the value of a higher education (HE) degree has long been recognized, demand intensified during the post-Soviet transformation as wage premiums for HE graduates increased rapidly and now amount to 50% (Gimpelson & Kapeliushnikov, 2017). The aspiration to attain a HE degree has become a social norm, with 63% of families indicating they would like their children to enroll in HE institutions (Galitskiy, 2017).

Despite the positive perceptions surrounding HE, the enrollment rate of the 17-25 age cohort decreased from 33.7% to 31% in 2013-2018, while the absolute number of students in Russia also declined from 6.1 million in 2012 to 4.4 million in 2017. However, the relative figures are still high compared to global averages, and are in fact two times higher than what they were at the sunset of the Soviet era in 1990. Overall, the HE attainment landscape in Russia is complex and has been evolving notably in recent years.

Government Policies: Quality, Consolidation, and Unintended Consequences

The state is the key regulator of the Russian higher education sector, which it governs through a range of mechanisms. A commitment to maintain a certain level of access through public funding for higher education is a principal point of political consensus for the country, and underpins government policies and initiatives. Russia's constitution guarantees students' right to enroll for free in a public higher education institution on a competitive basis; consistent with this policy, the Federal Education Act ensures annual federal funding for no fewer than 800 students for every 10,000 citizens aged 17 to 30. Only very few of these publicly funded places are granted to private institutions.

In response to increased demand for higher education in the post-Soviet era, new institutional and programmatic models emerged to complement traditional degree offerings by public institutions. Private higher education institutions (HEIs) proliferated and are subject to government regulation of enrollment numbers based on student/teacher ratios and infrastructure, and other aspects of their operation. The general rule is that tuition fees must not be less than the standard cost of publicly funded places at a given institution. This price regulation significantly restrained both supply and demand for HE on a fee basis.

In addition, regional branches of both public and private universities began developing low-cost, part-time programs to serve widening student populations. As the number of new institutions and programs increased, concerns about quality and effectiveness arose, the validity of which are reinforced by declining attainment. Recent government policies have focused on these concerns, which have been addressed via a strategy of consolidation.

Consolidation has been carried out in a variety of ways. One example can be seen in the way the HE network was changed,

including the creation of a set of leading universities to serve as the anchors of the HE system. The 21 universities participating in the excellence initiative known as "Project 5-100" (launched in 2013) enjoy additional financial resources and considerable shares of student enrollments, especially at the master's level.

Between 2016 and 2018, 33 regional universities were granted funding to promote a stronger role for the HE sector in the socioeconomic development of their respective regions. Along with improving institutional management and ensuring quality of instruction, research, and third mission activities (i.e., social, innovation, and industry-related activities), the participating HEIs had to include increasing enrollment, especially in master's programs, as a strategic goal.

As resources were channeled to key universities, a parallel initiative was undertaken to weed out alleged low-performing institutions and programs—both public and private. This included widespread rescinding of accreditation, prohibition from enrolling new students, and suspension of operating licenses. These measures were legitimized through the "Monitoring of Performance of HEIs" initiative. Launched in 2012, this initiative outlined a unified set of performance metrics set by the government, including academic outcomes, infrastructure, finances, job relevance, etc. After audits by the federal accreditation agency, most of the HEIs that did not meet minimal requirements were reorganized or merged with other universities, including flagship institutions. During the period between 2015 and 2018, the system lost roughly 1,000 institutions and branches.

While designed to improve quality and attainment, as well as expand access at top-quality institutions, consolidation efforts have had some perhaps unintended consequences when it comes to overall access. In particular, there has been a decrease in access to higher education for students in specific regions and locations that previously were home to university branch campuses, many of which were closed in the consolidation process.

Part-time programs, too, were largely affected by the reorganization policy and the withdrawal of accreditation; as a result, the share of Russian students enrolled in part-time HE dropped from 54% to 40.7% in the last five years. Although notorious for low quality instruction, these programs play a crucial role for students from lower-income groups. Low admission and academic requirements, along with affordable tuition, make this a cost-efficient admission ticket to HE. An opportunity to combine a job with part-time study makes these programs a viable option for older student cohorts, as well.

As a result of described policy changes, the 45 leading universities (out of a total of 766 public HEIs) increased their share of enrollment over the past 3 years from 13% to 16%, while other HEIs reduced their intake. In total, these leading universities together with the 33 regional flagship universities host one quarter of the student body in Russia. A growth in attainment was also realized through a concentration of master's programs in the leading HEIs; one-third of all master's students study there.

Persistent Challenges for Key Populations

Socioeconomic Inequality. Despite the government goal of increasing access to education for low-income groups, inequality effects remain strong, especially during the transition to postsecondary education. At the secondary level, 40% of students leave school after completing their ninth year (middle school) in order to pursue vocational education; a majority of these student come from families with low socioeconomic status and have parents with limited educational attainment. Many economically disadvantaged students, even those with comparatively good academic performance who could potentially continue on to university, often opt for vocational training instead. As a result, the disparity in higher education enrollment rates between students from high-income families and their less privileged counterparts is considerable; enrollees from less privileged income groups are two times less likely to enter an elite university compared to enrollees from high-income families (Khavenson & Chirkina, 2018).

Thus far, no targeted government policy has been implemented to widen access to higher education for lower income students. However—although modest—there are two universal government scholarships, one merit-based and one need-based; respectively, 27% and 6% of all HE enrollees receive these scholarships. An institutional student loan system to support disadvantaged students also exists, but these loans remain virtually unclaimed and thus do not contribute to diminishing the inequality effects. Only 0.1% of bachelor's students and 0.2% of privately-financed master's students use these institutional loans.

Ethnic Minorities. Russia is a multiethnic country and unites more than 180 nationalities; yet, overall, little is known about ethnic inclusion in HE. There are 22 regions in Russia that are inhabited by a significant proportion of non-Russian ethnic groups, and in eight of them the enrollment rate of the relevant age cohort is less than 20%. The right to study a minority language or to be educated in that language is guaranteed by the state in primary and secondary education, but there is no such regulation with regard to HE. The only official lan-

guage of the unified state exam (the school leaving and higher education entrance exam) is Russian, which, in practice, is also the language of instruction in schools and universities. Still, the greatest obstacle for most ethnic minorities is the lack of institutions in the regions and territories where these populations are located.

Gender Issues. Women constitute 54% of the student body in Russia, and it might seem that additional government intervention in support of women is not needed. However, there is a striking asymmetry in women's participation in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields; for example, only 34% of math students and 20% of metallurgy and machine building students are women (Rosstat, 2014). Although HE wage premiums for women are high-

> *A commitment to maintain a certain level of access through public funding for higher education is a principal point of political consensus for the country, and underpins government policies and initiatives.*

er than for men, the paradox is that women's average earnings are still considerably lower because most women work in the public sector (Gimpelson & Kapeliushnikov, 2017). Again, no specific government policy has been implemented to address this issue.

Persons with Disabilities. Students with disabilities are probably the only population group targeted by specific attainment and inclusion policies in higher education. In 2010, an inter-agency program called "Accessible Environment" was launched in order to provide barrier-free access to all public facilities, including higher education institutions. For example, all of the flagship universities were required to develop at least one project to enable the inclusion of handicapped persons, and all universities had to prioritize the needs of disabled persons during the enrollment process. Although the participation rate of persons with disabilities remains small—only 4% of the relevant age cohort—the participation rate increased by 1% in the last two years. The overall share of persons with disabilities increased by 0.06 percentage points in the last 6 years.

Conclusion

Russia represents an interesting case of using consolidation in

the higher education system to affect attainment, which also seems to produce quite ambiguous results when it comes to issues of equal access and broad inclusion. On the one hand, the state delegates duties for inclusion to the leading HEIs that amass resources, students, and postgraduate places. On the other hand, this approach leads to higher selectivity of these favored institutions, which is coupled with institutional and geographic consolidation, additionally restricting accessibility for disadvantaged groups.

In this context, the key challenge for Russia is how to guarantee inclusion in an increasingly stratifying system with already high attainment levels. More affirmative action by the state is needed to convert the availability of higher education into equal accessibility of high-quality education. Moreover, approximately 40% of Russian graduates do not use the knowledge and skills obtained through HE in their professional lives, pointing to a considerable mismatch between the current educational offer and labor market needs. The population under 35 in Russia will decrease by a quarter by 2035; therefore, the country needs everyone contributing to the country's economic development and well-being—not simply enrolled, but also well-educated.

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Attainment and Inclusion in Higher Education: A View from South Africa

Nasima Badsha

Access to and success in higher education has been an abiding theme in the policy discourse in South Africa over the past 25 years. A key policy goal for the post-apartheid higher education system, as articulated in 1997 by the Department of Education, was to "promote equity of access and fair chance of success to all who are seeking to realize

Inclusion in Action: Integrating Refugee Students
University of Gothenburg
Sweden

In the wake of ongoing conflicts in Syria and across other regions, Sweden experienced a sharp influx of refugees and displaced immigrants, welcoming more migrants per capita than any other European country during the 2015 refugee crisis. With a population of more than 550,000, Gothenburg is Sweden's second most populated city, and has consistently hosted a large number of asylum-seeking migrants primarily from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia.

In recent years, the University of Gothenburg has collaborated with government agencies, civil society organizations, and other higher education institutions to provide transitional resources to refugees, and to emphasize access to education as a pathway toward economic livelihood and societal contributions. Initiatives include:

- Offered in collaboration with the Swedish Public Employment Agency, a week-long summer school program familiarizes refugee students with both the university itself and Sweden's postsecondary system in general. This program enables participants with limited or interrupted higher education to make well-informed decisions regarding their educational and/or professional pursuits in Sweden.

- The "University Friend" mentorship program facilitates interaction and community-building between current undergraduate and graduate students, and newcomers who have completed high school and may be interested in beginning or resuming higher education studies. The program is led by an on-campus student union organization and the Refugee Guide Project, operated by the city of Gothenburg.

While there has not been a formal evaluation of the university's refugee integration programs, Gothenburg notes steadily high turnout rates for all three initiatives. One University Friend participant said of the experience: "I have learned more about how the university works with the help of people who have the same goals in life as I do. Now I want to work hard in order to begin studying as soon as possible."

Website: https://www.gu.se/english

Contributors: Shelby Kruczek, master's candidate in higher education, George Mason University; Erin Baldwin, Senior Program Specialist, American Council on Education.

their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities." Considerable progress has been made towards the realization of this goal but, not surprisingly, many challenges remain.

Post-apartheid Transformation

In 1993, on the eve of the new democratic dispensation, South Africa had a small, elite, and racially skewed higher education system. Total university enrollment stood at under 500,000 students, of whom 57% were male. Just over 50% of all students were black[1] in a country with a majority black population. Furthermore, many black students were registered in poorly resourced historically black institutions with limited access to a comprehensive range of academic programs, especially in professional areas and postgraduate studies.

By 2016, enrollment in the university system had almost doubled to just under one million students, with 84% being black and 58% female. Over this period, the profile of students became increasingly representative of the country's demographics in terms of race, gender, and geographic origin. The proportion of students from poor families rose steeply.

The transformation from an elite to a more inclusive system was informed by the policy priorities of the new government along with a commitment on the part of universities to contribute to the needs of the new democracy. A key lever for promoting more equitable access was the early introduction of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), a state funded, income contingent loan scheme to support the studies of talented students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, despite the annual injection of significant funding into the initiative and loan repayment lev-

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1   The term black is used to include African, colored and Indian people, all of whom were disenfranchised under apartheid legislation.

els comparable to similar schemes elsewhere in the world, NSFAS was not able to keep up with the demand for financial aid, driven by growth in the number of eligible students and hefty, unregulated annual increases in tuition fees.

A System Under Pressure

Mounting pressure from students led to widespread protests in 2015-2016, under the banner of the #FeesMustFall movement. Initial student demands for no increases in tuition fees grew into calls for fee-free higher education. The government did not accede to demands for free higher education for all, a step which would have had the regressive effect of subsidizing students from middle and high-income families, in addition to being unsustainable in a country with pressing needs in other areas of education, health, housing, and social services.

Instead of a blanket concession, the government agreed to cover the costs of students from families whose annual income is below ZAR 350,000 (around US$25,000). While this was a welcome and long overdue step, the task remains to improve administrative efficiency and loan repayment rates, and to expand the NSFAS to include private sector loan funding so that it can better and more sustainably meet the needs of the increasing number of students requiring financial assistance. Those in need include students referred to as the 'missing-middle,' who are currently ineligible for NSFAS support, even though they are unable to fully fund their studies.

Better Access, Yet Lagging Success

Notwithstanding the financial aid challenges, student access has increased and broadened but this has not been matched by concomitant student success. The system is characterized by poor throughput, low completion rates, and a wastefully high number of dropouts. One of the main reasons for this is the discontinuity, or articulation gap, between secondary schooling and higher education.

The quality of basic and secondary schooling for the majority of learners in South Africa remains poor. The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found, for example, that 78% of South African children in grade 4 could not read for meaning in any language. The majority of students lack the subject knowledge and academic skills necessary for traditional entry-level university courses. This means that only a small minority of students complete their undergraduate studies in regulation time (3 years for most undergraduate degrees), and recent cohort studies undertaken by South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training found that only about 50% of students in three- and four-year programs manage to graduate within five years.

Structural Interventions

There is a plethora of efforts to improve attainment, some more successful than others. Extended curriculum programs —introduced in various forms over the past three decades, first primarily in historically white universities and in the past decade or so, in all universities—have come closest to a systemic intervention to address the articulation gap between secondary school and university, in particular targeting students who do not fully meet the requirements for direct entry into regular first-year courses. Extended programs make provision for an additional year of study to accommodate introductory courses in key subjects alongside, or infused with, opportunities for students to develop academic learning skills, including advanced language (especially important for the majority of students who are studying in a second or even third language), numeracy, and information literacy skills. Unfortunately, in most instances, these introductory and academic skills courses are not purposefully integrated into the overall curriculum structure.

Despite this and other shortcomings, data suggest that the extended programs have improved first-year success, and overall success rates are comparable with those of the relevant mainstream programs.

Drawing on the experience of the extended curriculum programs as well as an extensive analysis of the systemic obstacles to student success, the Council on Higher Education, which is the statutory advisory body on higher education policy in South Africa, proposed a fundamental reform of the undergraduate curriculum structure, extending it by one year as the norm and introducing flexibility in curriculum pathways to accommodate the highly diverse student intake. The proposal was not accepted by the government, perhaps because of the daunting nature of large-scale curriculum reforms. Instead, the government proposed to expand the reach of the extended curriculum programs to cover 30% of first-time entering students in the coming years.

Promising Programs and Practices

Meanwhile, there is also acknowledgement that no single intervention can solve the challenges of improving success and attainment levels for all students, so different options are being explored. For example, five universities, supported by the Kresge Foundation, have come together in the Siyaphumelela initiative, which is designed to improve institutional ca-

pacity to collect and analyze student data and to use these data to inform broader academic development and support systems and processes. While drawing on US experience in this area, the intention is to develop homegrown models for using data analytics to improve student outcomes. The Siyaphumelela website has examples of promising interventions in the five participating universities.

Improving the quality of teaching, particularly through the professional development of academics as educators, is another area receiving attention. Although some academics continue to hold the view that it is not the task of universities to teach underprepared students and that the 'problem' should be fixed at the lower levels of schooling, an increasing number are open to changing their practice to better meet

> *A key lever for promoting more equitable access was the early introduction of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).*

the needs of diverse groups of students. Induction of new staff is commonplace and, increasingly, academics are enrolling for formal qualifications in higher education teaching and learning, as well as engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Interventions such as these are supported by the state-funded University Capacity Development Program, which in 2018, provided ZAR 934 million (US$64 million) to the country's 26 universities to fund approved initiatives designed to promote student success, curriculum and staff development, etc.

Recent student protests have also been the catalyst for renewed attention to institutional culture. Black students, particularly those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, find the dominant culture of universities, especially the historically white institutions, socially alienating, which in turn negatively impacts their academic performance. This has led to growing recognition that institutions have to adapt to the changing nature of the student body in all aspects of their operation, and become more adept in facilitating academic and social integration.

Balancing Demands and Resources

The impact of these and other interventions on the quality of undergraduate education and training and, ultimately, on student attainment levels will, to a considerable extent, depend on whether the resourcing of the system will keep up with

growth in student numbers.

Especially given South Africa's very high levels of inequality, the pressure for expansion of higher education is considerable. It has been estimated that there are over 3.2 million people between the ages of 15 and 24 years who are currently not in education, employment, or training. However, the education and training needs of large numbers of young people and adults cannot be met by higher education alone. This challenge requires the large-scale provision of a diverse range of affordable and easily accessible post-school opportunities, particularly in the country's technical and vocational colleges. Recent government policies and plans have prioritized the revitalization and expansion of these colleges.

Future Prospects

There is policy and funding support from the government for an array of initiatives designed to improve student attainment levels. Equally, most universities have taken up the challenge of improving student outcomes. While early indications point to some improvement in attainment levels, the impact of the range of interventions on student achievement will need to be closely monitored. It is yet to be seen if significant improvement is achievable without fundamental changes to the degree structure, which arguably may be necessary if the gap between poor secondary schooling and university studies is to be bridged for the majority of students.

Note: Supporting information for this brief was obtained from reports available on the websites of the following South African entities: Department of Higher Education and Training, Council on Higher Education, Siyaphumelela, and Inyathelo.

Postsecondary Attainment and Inclusion in the United States

Lorelle L. Espinosa and Jinann S. Bitar

Challenges and Opportunities: Key Starting Points

The United States' system of postsecondary education is as diverse as the students it serves. In just the last 50 years, the sector has grown rapidly: there are now nearly 4,600 degree-granting, accredited higher education institutions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), today's American college student body—20 million strong (NCES, 2018)—has also experienced growth and change in terms of demographics and other characteristics. More and

more, colleges and universities serve students of color, low-income students, those first in their family to attend college, students entering college later in life, and those who balance work, family, and school.

We can say with certainty that American higher education works to provide access, foster social mobility, carry out research, and improve our understanding of the world (Baum, Harris, Kelly, & Mitchell, 2017). American colleges and universities have great breadth and depth of offerings and feature a diverse market of institution types, size, and missions. A postsecondary education is a path to economic security, given the workforce demand for these credentials (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013), and a force for social good (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor & Chessman, 2019).

But we must also recognize what we can do better at improving postsecondary attainment and inclusion. Education statistics in the United States track race, ethnicity, and other demographic data, offering us information on the current state of access and attainment, as well as a foundation upon which to build the case for why inclusion matters. Such information, including at the state, regional, and institutional levels, furthers how we think about those innovations that can (and do) show the most gains and potential for improving attainment and inclusion.

> *Much of the conversation around access and attainment in American higher education focuses on who goes to and finishes college, and who is left behind.*

The Access and Attainment Imperative

Much of the conversation around access and attainment in American higher education focuses on who goes to and finishes college, and who is left behind. The groups discussed in the opening of this essay—students of color, low-income and first-generation-to-college students, and post-traditional learners—despite great progress, face some of the most salient access and attainment challenges.

As outlined in the American Council on Education's (ACE) publication, *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report* (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). despite noteworthy gains, the educational trajectories of Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Latinx students illustrate the very equity gaps many educators are working hard to close. Consider the following:

- Despite steadily rising attainment, in 2017 Hispanic men and women and American Indian or Alaska Native men had the lowest levels of educational attainment in the country, with most holding a high-school credential or less.

- High school graduates of American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander descent enrolled in college at less than half the average national rate. In 2016, only 18.8% and 20.4%, respectively, were enrolled in college, as compared with 40.9 percent of all high school completers ages 18 to 24.

- Also in 2016, Black students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs exhibited lower rates of first-year persistence and higher dropout rates than any other racial or ethnic group. Moreover, regardless of income quartile, Black undergraduates were less likely than other groups to attend a very selective institution.

- Larger shares of Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students—at both undergraduate and graduate levels —enrolled in, and completed degrees at, for-profit institutions, where debt levels far surpass those at nonprofit colleges.

Such examination of racial and ethnic equity gaps is paramount, given the changing face of the US population. Today, there are more non-White than White children at every age from infant to nine years (Frey, 2018); these will be the country's college students in less than a decade. If we do not make access and attainment more equitable for communities of color, the United States faces economic and societal risks.

The Inclusion Imperative

Inclusion is another important area of focus in American higher education. While there are many definitions of inclusion, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.) defines it as "the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions."

The recognition of the inclusion imperative by higher education leaders is longstanding but has seen greater urgency in recent years, in part given changing social norms and an awareness that inequities—racial, economic, and otherwise— are structural in nature and are seeded deep in American history. The 2015-2016 academic year is seen by many

as a turning point. In that year, catalyzed by a racial crisis and student protests at the University of Missouri's Columbia campus, students across the country submitted formal demands to administrative leadership on at least 75 American college campuses.

An ACE analysis of these demands (Chessman & Wayt, 2016) found prevailing themes, such as calls for revised institutional policies (including around college affordability), increased diversity and diversity training, and changes to the curriculum, among others. What is more, campus leadership is responding. A 2016 survey of college presidents (Espinosa, Chessman, & Wayt) found that 44% of respondents at two-year institutions and 55% of leaders at four-year institutions expressed campus racial climate as a higher priority than it was just three years prior. At the University of Missouri, change is also underway. As outlined in a 2018 ACE report, *Speaking Truth and Acting with Integrity: Confronting Challenges of Campus Racial Climate* (Kezar & Fries-Britt), university leadership is building diversity, equity, and inclusion capacity through a variety of activities and with visible support from the top down.

Closing Gaps

Closing racial, income, and other equity gaps is hard work, most often requiring systemic and holistic approaches. There are too many interventions to name here, but it is worth noting some that have seen success. Inclusive Excellence Frameworks are at work at countless higher education institutions around the country, integrating "diversity into recruiting, admissions, and hiring; into the curriculum and co-curriculum; and into administrative structures and practices" (Williams, Berger & McClendon, 2005, p. iii). These frameworks guide institutions of all types as they infuse diversity into their missions and operations.

The means to increase diversity and inclusion are not just originating from campuses—the US federal government has long supported minority-serving institutions and a variety of college access programs. TRIO and Gear Up, for example, identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide services and financial aid for these learners, increasing college access and success for underrepresented groups. Other programs support specific student populations based on particular characteristics or regional location in innovative and evidence-informed ways.

The Texas Consortium for Male Students of Color, for example, is a strong cross-sector collaboration between school districts, community colleges, and four-year universities that addresses the persistent achievement gap for male students

of color, recognizing that "for African American males, 40.9% had enrolled in higher education, but only 7.7% had earned a credential. Compared to their male peers and female counterparts, these male students had significantly lower completion rates that are also significantly lower than the state average" (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2016, p. 6). Identifying this gap allowed Texas, and other states with similar achievement gaps, to create programs to support this specific population.

Still other programs focus on multiple regions, such as Promise Programs. These programs increase higher education attainment through additional financial aid and have a "place-based" eligibility requirement, such as living in a designated city or attending a specified school, to maximize the impact on the community (PennAHEAD, n.d.). The most well-known Promise Program is the Kalamazoo Promise, which has awarded over US$54 million to close to 3,300 graduates in the Kalamazoo-Portage Metropolitan Area in the state of Michigan. Research from the Upjohn Institute indicates that the Kalamazoo program increased the local school district's enrollment, improved student performance in secondary school, and is expected to be catalyst for economic growth and development for the Kalamazoo region. Finally, regionally and statewide nonprofit college access organizations, like College Possible, operate in specific regions in the United States, with a focus on college-admission support and strategies for low-income students. Independent research has shown that 98% of students in the College Possible program are admitted to college (College Possible, n.d).

As the diversity of the US population increases, so does the urgency of postsecondary access and attainment for all students. And as we endeavor to increase the number of students that attend and graduate from college, we also must widen our understanding of and focus on inclusion. Without attention to both we sell ourselves short on the value of higher education to individuals, communities, and our broader society.

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The Global Challenge of Ensuring Equitable Access to Tertiary Education

Roberta Malee Bassett

> Equity is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Target 4.5 specifically aiming to "eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations."
>
> UNESCO, 2018

In 2014, Jamil Salmi and I published a paper called "The Equity Imperative in Tertiary Education: Promoting Fairness and Efficiency," in which we sought to:

> ...(i) propose a conceptual framework to analyse equity issues in tertiary education, (ii) document the scope, significance and consequences of disparities in tertiary education opportunities, (iii) throw some light on the main determinants of these inequalities, and (iv) offer suggestions about effective equity promotion policies directed towards widening participation and improving the chances of success of underprivileged youths in order to create societies that uphold humanistic values. (p. 363)

This piece was the culmination of over four years of analytical work undertaken by the World Bank, to call attention to some fundamental disparities in access and success in tertiary education around the world. It is, therefore, a privilege to read the works of the authors of the preceding chapters, who have presented a series of globally aware but locally relevant pieces on inclusion and equity, highlighting how pervasive so many issues related to access and success in achieving a tertiary education degree are, regardless, or in spite of national, economic, and social development. This work, exposing the scope, underlying causes, and potential avenues of redress of inequitable opportunity in tertiary education, is as relevant and important as ever.

The chapters of this excellent work, *Attainment and Inclusion in Higher Education: International Perspectives*, seek to examine the intricate relationship between indicators of progression and barriers to achievement in tertiary education—the parameters of equity. Though the histories, cultures, levels of development, and similar national characteristics differ greatly among the countries included in this work, fundamental conditions of inequality and equity promotion in tertiary education are shared across them all. Rich and poor, these countries share the experience of mass expanded access with exacerbated issues of inequity across certain groups, which face barriers to access and persistence in achieving the benefits of tertiary education. Indeed, regardless of the wealth or development level of the nation being examined, the shared experience of exclusion—purposeful or circumstantial—exists all over the world. For this reason, analysis of key barriers, resulting policy interventions, and innovative thinking shared across borders and cultures are imperative. Issues of inequality will not resolve without purposeful examination of why they exist and what works in overcoming them.

Key Barriers Affecting Access to Global Tertiary Education

As noted above, these nine case studies expose some commonalities in terms of barriers to entry to tertiary education. These shared findings include: socio-economic status, the quality of the education pipeline, belonging to a marginalized population (including ethnic, religious, or language minorities; disabled students; and rural students), gender, and systems that have experienced broad expansion without bridging in-

terventions. Experience from the World Bank's work with its client countries reinforces these key equity challenge areas. To understand inequity in tertiary education, one must understand the implications of these particular barriers to entry.

Socioeconomic Status

According to the 2010 UN Global Education Digest, household wealth is the most powerful determinant of school attendance and completion. Indeed, globally, one's place in the socio-economic strata nearly predetermines one's likelihood of attending post secondary education. These nine case studies further illustrate this point. As noted by the World Bank 2016 report, in Ethiopia "the wealthiest households currently account for 87% of student participation at the level of postsecondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and 82% in higher education, while the poorest represent just 1% of students in TVET, and 2% of the student population in higher education." Similar findings were noted in the cases from Russia, India, Mexico, Colombia, and Malaysia.

> *Globally, one's place in the socio-economic strata nearly predetermines one's likelihood of attending post-secondary education.*

The policy recourse for this fundamental disparity includes student loan initiatives, lowering of tuition fees or implementation of fee-free higher education, and greater information outreach programs to target aid to lower income students.

The Quality of the Pipeline

As in the case of the challenge of being born poor, and much related to the subsequent financial instability of poorer communities, the pipeline that feeds tertiary education heavily influences who is admitted and who is omitted. In the Russia, Israel, and South Africa chapters, issues of pipeline quality are specifically recognized as creating a hurdle students often cannot cross. Weak primary and secondary schools simply cannot prepare students for competitive tertiary education. And, poorer students are more likely to be enrolled in weaker education systems.

Policy interventions often include implementation of forward thinking/looking curricula, with attention paid to post-secondary preparation, focused streaming in late secondary school that allows students to choose traditional or vocational tracks, and investments in teacher training and the teaching profession.

Marginalized Populations

This grouping is clearly a kind of "bucket" into which the disenfranchised are recognized as being outside the mainstream. Be it as a result of ethnic or class distinctions (India, Malaysia, South Africa), regional isolation (India, Ethiopia, Russia, Mexico, Colombia), lack of access due to disabilities (Ethiopia, Russia), religion (Israel), or language of instruction (India, South Africa), whole groups of students are excluded from the opportunities and/or information that allow for mobility via tertiary education.

Obvious policy interventions include information campaigns, affirmative action policies (or the removal of similar policies, such as in the case of Malaysia), political pressure to expand access, and/or offering expanded opportunities in regions and languages accessible to students as needed.

Gender

Every case in this work makes some mention of gender considerations, particularly in expanding access to girls—which has been improving for decades—and, even more specifically, to girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. This is not just the reality for the countries profiled in this publication; it is the reality the world over. Girls' access is expanding rapidly on a global scale, but not at a pace nearing equity even now, and certainly not at a pace to build the STEM cohort of women who will lead into the future. Countries have sought to expand scholarship and educational opportunities for women and girls through targeted, specific programs. In many cases, as noted in Ethiopia, for instance, education and hostel facilities have been renovated specifically with the needs of women in mind. Fewer and fewer countries can afford to lose half of their talent pool from their labor market. Gender interventions are now seen as not just a humanitarian issues but as a fundamental investment in competing in the global knowledge economy.

Expansion Without Bridging Interventions

Finally, and this may be the least obvious of the issues raised but is an exquisitely important one, global expansion in access has, in countries around the world, increased the number of students enrolling in universities. But, expansion without a focus on persistence and completion is potentially even more damaging than lack of access. The case studies in this publication from Mexico, India, South Africa, Israel, and Colombia specifically note the problems with tertiary drop out rates that disproportionately affect students from marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

This is the newest area of focus around the world—where the outcomes of education are valued even more than inputs. Programs are being developed to begin preparing students for tertiary education in secondary school and the summer before enrolling in post secondary education (bridge periods), to acclimate students to the changes in learning and expectations from secondary to tertiary education. Likewise, advising centers, student activities and residential life programs, counseling centers, remedial and tutorial services, and learning labs are increasingly available on university campuses and via online support portals, to track and intervene with students in need of academic, financial, social, and economic support. This *whole student* approach benefits not just the student but improves the quality of graduates as they prepare to be effective citizens and contributors to the economy and society.

Recharging the Equity Debate

The case studies in this Brief illustrate what is known to be a global challenge—how can tertiary education promote equitable access and persistence via institutional and systematic interventions? As these pieces—the latest in an important chain of analysis on equity—highlight, one must first understand the equity imperative on the ground locally and seek

resolutions that target the specific issues at that level. The global populism that has shaken the foundations of the modern geopolitical discourse has some connection—still to be examined and measured—to a global sense of inequitable opportunity and disenfranchisement.

The equity imperative, instead of coming closer to resolution, is, in fact, becoming ever more acute. Tertiary education can be a powerful tool for closing the gaps between the top and bottom quintiles as well as the resentments and distances between the majority and the marginalized. But, this must happen purposefully and with commitment by all actors. These pieces from Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, and the United States provide examples from which we can extract both commonalities and hope for equity to remain a key concern for making tertiary education better and better for everyone.

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Contributors

Nurzain Azman is a professor of higher education at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She is currently the 2017-2021 Chair/President of the Malaysian Society for Research and Higher Education Policy Development (PenDaPaT). Email: norzai12@ukm.edu.my

Nasima Badsha works with the Institutional Planning Office at the University of the Western Cape, having recently retired as the chief executive officer of the Cape Higher Education Consortium. She has held teaching, research, and management positions in various South African universities and has played a leadership role in higher education policy development and implementation in post-apartheid South Africa. Email: Nasimacoovadia@gmail.com

Erin Baldwin is a senior program specialist at the American Council on Education. She previously served in various roles focused on international education and partnership development at the Australian Embassy and the University of Queensland. She is also a board member of the Young Professionals in International Education network in Washington, DC. Email: ebaldwin@acenet.edu.

Annette Bamberger is a PhD candidate at University College London Institute of Education where her dissertation focuses on an historical study of internationalization in Israeli higher education (1918-2018). She also holds an Israel Higher Education Planning and Budgeting Committee (VATAT) Fellowship as a visiting doctoral researcher at Tel Aviv University. Email: a.bamberger.14@ucl.ac.uk

Roberta Malee Bassett is Global Lead for Tertiary Education and Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank, providing technical expertise for projects related to post-secondary education reform initiatives around the world. She has been team lead for a variety of higher education projects, spanning topics such as finance and quality assurance reform, internationalization of higher education, equity and access, research and competitiveness, and skills development. Email: rbassett@worldbank.org

Jinann S. Bitar is currently a graduate research associate at the American Council on Education's Center for Policy Research and Strategy. She served previously as a research analyst for the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Bitar is currently a PhD candidate in higher education at UCLA. Email: jsbitar@ucla.edu
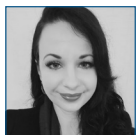
Lucia Brajkovic is a senior research specialist at the American Council on Education (ACE). She also serves as the education consultant for the Education Global Practice unit at the World Bank, and as the executive director of the Higher Education Initiative for Southeastern Europe (HEISEE). Brajkovic holds a doctoral degree from the Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia. Email: lbrajkovic@acenet.edu

Salomón Amkie Cheirif is director of institutional relations at Santander Universities and Universia México, where he is focused on supporting higher education through high impact collaborative programs and projects that support networking, international mobility, inclusion, innovation and entrepreneurship. Email: salomon.amkie@universia.net

Lorelle L. Espinosa is vice president for research at the American Council on Education (ACE) and is responsible for developing the organization's thought leadership and research agenda. She is a national voice on issues pertaining to college access and success for diverse populations and on the role of equity-minded leadership in postsecondary settings. Email: lespinosa@acenet.edu

Robin Matross Helms is director for research at the American Council on Education, focusing on internationalization of US institutions and global higher education issues.Previously, she has worked for the Institute of International Education and the University of Minnesota, and served as a consultant to the World Bank and the Institute for Higher Education Policy. Email: rhelms@acenet.edu

Arturo Cherbowski Lask is executive director of Santander Universities and general director of Universia in Mexico, where he leads projects that support the institutional development of universities and their communities through initiatives that include the promotion of entrepreneurship, the adoption of best practices in educational innovation and digitalization of universities, scholarship programs, collaborative projects, as well as financial services for the education sector. Email: arturo.cherbowski@universia.net

Marta Losada is president of the Universidad Antonio Nariño. She has also served as vice-president of the Colombian Association of Universities, a member of the Administration Board of the International Association of Universities, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Physical Society, and a member of the Board of Directors of Connect Bogota Region. Email: malosada@uan.edu.co

Sergey Malinovskiy is deputy director of the Institute of Education at the National Research University - Higher School of Economics (HSE) and the executive director of the Russian Educational Research Association. He also works in consultancy projects to promote evidence-based education policy and universities advancement. Email: smalinovskiy@hse.ru

Laura E. Rumbley is associate director, knowledge development & research at the European Association for International Education (EAIE). Laura serves as a co-editor of the *Journal of Studies in International-al Education* and is on the editorial advisory board for the journal *Studies in Higher Education.* Email: rumbley@eaie.org
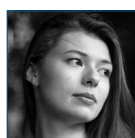
Ekaterina Shibanova is an Intern researcher at the Laboratory for University Development within the Institute of Education of the National Research University - Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Email: eshibanova@hse.ru

Wondwosen Tamrat is an associate professor and founding president of St Mary's University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He is an affiliate scholar of the Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE) headquartered at the State University of New York at Albany and coordinator of the private higher education sub-cluster under the Africa Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA). Email: wondwosentamrat@gmail.com

N.V. Varghese N.V. Varghese is vice chancellor of India's National University of Educational Plannning and Administration and the director of the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), based in New Delhi. Previously, he served in Paris as head of governance and management in education at the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP/UNESCO) and head of its training and education programs. Email: nv.varghese@niepa.ac.in

Heather H. Ward is associate dean for study abroad and international exchanges at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2014-2019, she served as associate director for internationalization and global engagement at the American Council on Education (ACE), where she oversaw the GAIN initiative. Ward also led ACE's efforts to promote the use of virtual exchange in higher education. Email: heatherward817@gmail.com

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