

Internationalising higher education in Southern Africa with South Africa as the major exporter

INTRODUCTION

A number of factors have propelled the rapid demand for foreign higher education services. These include the need for internationally recognised qualifications, the demand for highly skilled labour in both developed and developing countries, and the inclination by several countries towards promoting foreign collaborations to improve the quality of domestic higher education.

As a result of this increased demand, international trade in higher education services has grown rapidly in recent years. The supply of these services has taken various forms. The most common is the movement of students to study in foreign universities, which has been supplemented by the delivery of foreign higher education programmes and institutions to both emerging and developing countries.*

In 1997, Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states signed a protocol on Higher Education and Training. The objective is to provide a framework for regional co-operation in addressing education needs.

Signatories agreed to reserve 5% of all study places for students from other SADC countries. The protocol also committed member states to implement national treatment of SADC students within

See African Union (AU) (2007). *Harmonization of higher education programmes in Africa: Opportunities and challenges*, Third ordinary session of the conference of ministers of education of the African Union (comedaf iii) 6 to 10 August 2007 Johannesburg, South Africa; and Bashir, S. (2007). *Trends in international trade in higher education: Implications and options for developing countries*. World Bank, US.

10 years, with the same fees and accommodation as home students.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

South Africa has the highest number of institutions of higher learning at 23. Next is Zimbabwe with nine; Tanzania, eight; Madagascar, six; the DRC, five; Mauritius, four, and the rest of the SADC countries with one or two.

The top 10 universities in Africa are in South Africa with the exception of the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

South Africa is the major exporter of higher education services in the SADC region and has managed to position itself as the major destination for international students in the SADC region and in Africa as a whole. South African Universities have also adopted policies to internationalise the educational system, hence transferring South Africa into the educational hub of Southern Africa.

More students from the SADC region prefer to enrol with South African universities for three reasons. First, geographically South Africa is closer to their home countries.

The information in this brief is extracted from a report prepared under the SADRN programme: *Internationalising higher education in Southern Africa with South Africa as the major exporter*, by

Kwaramba Marko

Available on the TIPS/SADRN website
www.tips.org.za/programme/sadrn

For more information contact TIPS,
info@tips.org.za

Tel: +27 12 431 7900

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT
SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES 2002 AND 2006**

COUNTRY	2002	2006
ANGOLA	679	1041
BOTSWANA	6037	5878
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	296	887
LESOTHO	3383	3702
MALAWI	357	608
MAURITIUS	1627	1425
MOZAMBIQUE	581	929
NAMIBIA	5389	7059
SEYCHELLES	4	10
SWAZILAND	1621	2705
TANZANIA	206	522
ZAMBIA	2445	1463
ZIMBABWE	9099	9651
SADC TOTAL	31724	35880
Rest of Africa	6317	8609
Rest of world total	6156	7637
No information		1560
GRAND TOTAL	44197	53 686

Source: Department of Education, South Africa

Second, it is relatively cheaper than universities in Europe and North America. Third, the facilities and quality of education is in most cases leaps better than in their home countries. Since the ratification of the protocol, the number of students enrolling in South African universities has increased (see Table above).

Key factors contributing to South Africa's higher education exports are:

- The cost of education is relatively cheaper when compared to universities in Europe and North America.
- The academic qualifications offered by South African universities are internationally recognised.
- Most universities can appoint foreign students as tutors and assistant lecturers when they reach MSc level or above. This provides financial support and practical experience to the students.

January 2011

RECOMMENDATIONS

While South Africa will continue being a major exporter of educational services, this concentration has its pros and cons.

Among the positives it that it provides the country with easy access to skilled labour, which is a major constraint to economic growth. On the other hand, it creates a dangerous dependency by the other SADC member states in that instead of developing their domestic education sector they may rely on South Africa to provide quality education.

As a policy recommendation, therefore, while South Africa should be encouraged to continue investing in education, the other SADC countries need to take seriously investing in their own people. In this regard Botswana has already taken proactive measures.

The Southern African Development Research Network (SADRN) was launched in 2007 as a broad-based policy and research network. It aims to increase the supply of policy-relevant research in the SADC region and strengthen evidence-based policy-making. The project is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)



SADRN focuses on three themes: industrial policy, services sector development at the regional level and trade policy and its linkages to pro-poor growth. The Botswana Institute for Development and Policy Analysis is the host of the trade and pro-poor growth theme working group, Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies hosts the industrial policy theme and the University of Mauritius hosts the services sector

