



Standardization of Higher Education Sector in Somalia

Summary

Higher learning in Somalia has suffered a great deal, due to decades of civil war. Thus, at the present time there is a need to reconstruct higher learning institutions designed to meet well-defined objectives that are consistent with international standards, to produce qualified human resources. To date, several attempts have been made to develop effective standards and measurable outcomes. However, there are at present no countrywide standardized curricular, assessments, data formats or interoperability options at universities in Somalia. This policy brief discusses several of the consequences arising from the absence of standardization within Somalia's higher education sector. It also makes actionable policy recommendations to enable Somalia to establish a viable higher education system that will be responsive to the development needs of the country.

Key Message

- Current higher education industry players have perfected the art of developing profit-making schemes.
- Establish a Commission for Higher Education which would be an important step towards establishment of a supervisory model, to oversee regulation and standardization, policy and the diverse educational programmes offered.
- Explore the option of setting up and strengthening the capacity of the Somalia National Curriculum and Examination body.
- Consider increasing the budgetary allocation to the education sector to support the development of appropriate infrastructure and encourage the hiring of qualified human resources.
- Encourage higher learning institutions to establish a ranking system, to allow students and parents to measure and compare higher education institutions.

Introduction

Every country specifies the aims of its higher education sector and the institutional characteristics which inform the basic qualities demanded in its higher education graduates. In 2005, UNESCO developed guidelines for “Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education”¹. These guidelines accept that quality varies between countries but call for basic and universal benchmarks to establish quality in education. Somalia has yet to implement national practices and principles to guide higher education provision. Former Minister of Education, Abdirahman Dahir Osman, during an interview with Somali Cable on 25 July 2018 stated that his ministry does not recognize the universities in the country, because there are no national standards to measure their academic output.² The Minister was dismissed the following day.

After the civil war in Somalia, a number of privately owned higher education institutions experienced exponential growth. However, “in the absence of an effective national government, one can argue that much remains at stake in terms of evaluation and quality assurance. Moreover, key elements necessary for institutional accreditation and acceptance of credentials by other educational establishments issuing the same level of certificates are still lacking.”³ As a result, there are no standard expectations concerning what graduates should know and be able to achieve to enter the public sector. This paper first details the consequences that result from the absence of standardization procedures within the higher education sector, before offering recommendations to develop a feasible means to develop some to fit the requirements of the Somali context.

Commercialization of Education

Currently functioning as a largely privatized sector with minimal governmental control, current higher education industry players have perfected the art of developing profit-making schemes. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies’ research describing ‘The State of Higher Education in Somalia’⁴ highlights the lack of government oversight and quality control. The higher education sector is a dynamic one, drawing major players from the private sector, diaspora, local and international NGOs, local communities and religious organizations, with limited oversight from national or local authorities. This has created a laissez-faire trajectory which has contributed to the weak regulatory framework witnessed at present. As the number of universities in the country increases, the need to set out guiding quality standards and guidelines becomes more pressing. However, standardization has not been possible due to the absence of applicable regulatory frameworks at higher learning institutions, directly impacting the quality of higher education delivered across Somalia and presenting multiple barriers to the achievement of universal education for all.

Poor service delivery

The commercialization of the higher education by the private sector in Somalia, has led to many students graduating without the basic skills and knowledge required by the market. The absence of quality measurement standards, investment in learning evaluation, or benchmarking, has created an environment of zero competition, which allows education providers to take a relaxed approach to service provision. The result is ill-equipped graduates who become employed within critical

areas of the Government but are unable to deliver sufficiently to fulfil their job descriptions.

Failure to attract and retain qualified personnel

Higher education entrepreneurs are also unwilling to make substantial investments and so fail to attract and retain highly qualified faculty members capable of designing and delivering quality higher educational programmes. Typically, they also make limited investments in research, infrastructure, or curriculum development, among other critical areas. This results in a notable proportion of Somalia's brightest young minds leaving the country to avail themselves of study opportunities abroad. Many never return to work in Somalia. Among those who do remain and study within the country, very few of the brightest and most successful choose to pursue teaching courses, because of the poor pay and absence of a dependable educational infrastructure. This creates a never-ending cycle of poor quality of education within Somalia, as the ablest graduate's work in different sectors or abroad.

Inability to compare

The collapse of central government systems has led individual communities to take different approaches to establishing locally run higher education institutions. While encouraging progress has been made in the sector in the face of the collapse, the resulting systems have fundamental weaknesses, including the aforementioned lack of standardization and regulation. Currently, there are no generally accepted monitoring and evaluation systems, preventing parents and students from effectively evaluating one higher institution's track record compared with that of other institutions locally, nationally, and internationally.

Recommendations

There is a pressing need to urgently standardize and harmonize courses in the higher education sector. To achieve this, the following options have been adopted by different countries worldwide, to be explored and implemented either independently or jointly, to complement each other's functions.

I. Establishment of a Commission for Higher Education (CHE)

The current priority is to develop a higher education sector in Somalia that has an identifiable and consistent structure that complements the entire education system. Therefore, to develop an appropriate configuration for Somali higher education, key questions must be answered, and outstanding barriers resolved by the national government. A foundational issue to resolve concerns who should have the authority to design the basic higher education structure, comprising institutions with distinctive profiles.

The establishment of a Commission for Higher Education would be an important step towards establishment of a supervisory model, to oversee regulation and standardization, policy and the diverse educational programmes offered.

Further, the Ministry of Higher Education needs to decide upon institutional accreditation requirements, based on a set of criteria detailing what higher education is expected to deliver. These must be designed to ensure clarity, consistency, and uniformity. The creation of criteria is important, not only for providing equality of opportunity, transparency and accountability for students, but also so that accredited institutions are not undercut by amateur establishments. The decided upon

criteria also needed to align Somalia's higher education system with its counterparts in other countries.

II. Establishment of a National Curriculum and Examination body

In addition to a supervisory body in CHE, the Somalia Federal Government is advised to explore the option of setting up and strengthening the capacity of the Somalia National Curriculum and Examination body, to take responsibility for detailing the requirements for:

- Knowledge and assessment methods,
- Development of a skills and competence-based curriculum,
- Effective communication skills,
- Setting, issuing, assessing and managing the exams systems for specific courses for institutions of higher learning, and
- Instituting bench marking guidelines procedure and frameworks.

The Curriculum and Examinations body would work best in tandem with the CHE to ensure specific standards are set within the curriculum and that its implementation aspects are adhered to by higher education institutions.

III. More Investment in Education

As a country emerges from the rubble and struggles to realign its structures and systems, there is a significant and strategic need to investment more in education. The Somali government should consider increasing the budgetary allocation to the education sector to support the development of appropriate infrastructure and encourage the hiring of qualified human resources.

IV. Introduce a Ranking System

Encourage higher learning institutions to establish a ranking system, to allow students and parents to measure and compare higher education institutions. As demand for higher education has increased internationally, higher education ranking systems that measure higher education systems and institutions according to their relative standing on a global scale have been widely implemented. These rankings are widely viewed as relatively objective measures of institutional quality and legitimacy, and have the potential to attract the attention of investors and policymakers, because of perceived wisdom about reputation and excellence. Higher learning institutions in Somalia must endeavour to put in place suitable accountability and governance measures to conform to internationally prescribed standards. This would potentially enhance competitiveness and drive improved standards within local institutions.

SIPAM is a non-partisan, independent, not-for-profit organisation focusing on public governance, policies and implementation to develop the capabilities of public officials to competently deal with major governance challenges.

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